WHK 30TH ANNIVERSARY

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MISA PROMOTING FREE EXPRESSION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

- The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.

By an independent press, we mean a press independent from governmental, political or economic control or from control of materials and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.

By a pluralistic press, we mean the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community.

Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press – 3 May 1991

Windhoek@30: Time to reflect, opportunity to reverse regressions

by Commissioner Jamesina Essie Leonora King

This year's World Press Freedom Day commemorations come at a time when the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which asserts that a free, diverse and pluralistic media is essential to democracy and enjoyment of human rights, turns 30 years old.

This is indeed a momentous, proud and joyous occasion for the African continent and the rest of the world.

It is therefore significant that this year's World Press Freedom Day celebrations are being hosted by Namibia, the birthplace and cradle of the Windhoek Declaration, the foundational pillar of World Press Freedom Day which we now commemorate every year on May 3.

This year's theme is: Information as a Public Good, comes at a time when an increasing number of African countries are enacting access to information laws in line with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Model Law on Access to Information in Africa.

While this is commendable, more still needs to be done, particularly on the African continent.

Over the past few years, the legislative environment for the media was seemingly on a progressive path. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen new restrictions on media freedom in Africa and throughout the world.

A number of countries have introduced new regulations that impinge on media freedom, while we have also seen a propensity to stifle expression, access to information and right to privacy online.

In addition, there has been a spike in the number of media freedom violations during the past few years, particularly in 2020.

This is a serious indictment on us as the citizens of Africa, that 30 years after the Windhoek Declaration, we still have journalists being disappeared, killed, detained, harassed and intimidated for simply doing their jobs.

In this regard, this year's World Press Freedom Day Celebrations offer governments, civil society and the media an opportunity to step back and take stock of the gains that have been made over the years.
It offers all stakeholders a chance to build on the gains and also a chance to reflect on these regressions and reversals from the principles and values of the Declaration in the past few years.

To this end, this year's World Press Freedom Day Celebrations offer us a platform to build on the gains and significant milestones we have made and achieved through our own regional and continental instruments, arising or founded upon the Windhoek Declaration.

These epic instruments include among others, the Model Law on Access to Information in Africa, the Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa, and the revised Declaration on the Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Thus, this year's World Press Freedom Day gives us an opportunity to introspect and build on the charters and instruments that we have in building sustainable democratic media policy frameworks that foster and entrench citizens' right to freedom of expression and access to information on the African continent.

The Windhoek Declaration has thus been an enduring and inspirational document in that regard. This is an opportune time for us to develop it further and expand its scope in meeting and embracing the contemporary developments and challenges as they emerged and evolved over the years.

Commissioner Jamesina Essie Leonora King is a member of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights & Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.

Dear Readers

The 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press came from the hearts of African journalists.

Those who assembled in Windhoek in 1991, exactly 30 years ago, could not have foreseen the impact of this seminal document on African media history and policy in general. It was, after all the launchpad for similar declarations around the world, among them the Alma Alta (Kazakstan), Santiago (Chile), Sana'a (Yemen) and Sofia (Bulgaria).

Importantly, the successful adoption of the Windhoek Declaration by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, and by UNESCO's own General Assembly in 1995 secured – for the world – the annual commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

This is a day for reflection, celebration and sadly also a moment to pay tribute to journalists who work under threat, who continue to languish in jails and who have paid the ultimate price for their service to the public.

In this publication, we've assembled a selection of articles by researchers, journalists, artists and media users who have explored the progress made over the 30 years. They write with compelling insight on such issues as media viability, media literacy, regulation, representation, ethics, digital rights and some envisaged game-changing developments for the media. They reflect on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, not only on media viability but on broader and more insidious restrictions that have affected the safety and free expression rights of both journalists and citizens.

There's much to ponder and our contributors have tried to sow the seeds for deeper reflection and hopefully acknowledgement that the struggle for the right to freedom of expression is our collective struggle, not only that of journalists. They pose critical questions, among others:

- **how does the Windhoek Declaration embrace contemporary developments and challenges that have emerged and evolved over the years?**
- **what do young people want from their media?**
- **how effective is fact-checking and whose responsibility is it?**

Our most sincere gratitude to DW Akademie for its support that has enabled the collaboration between the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Namibia Media Trust (NMT) to produce this publication. Such collaborations are central to our efforts to strengthen the free expression and media development movement in our region and continent.

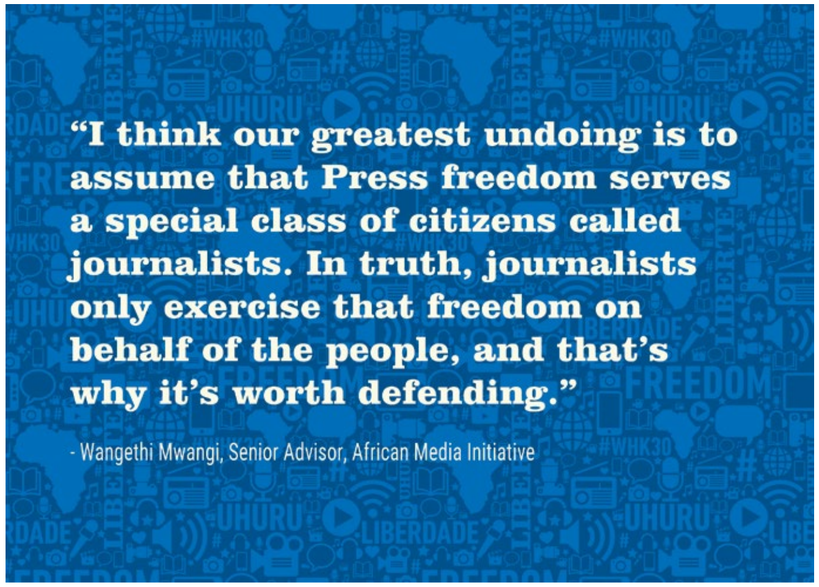
Happy reading!

Tabani Moyo, Executive Director: MISA Zimbabwe
Zoé Titus, Director: Namibia Media Trust

Windhoek@30: A call to action

by Nhlanhla Ngwenya

African media and press freedom advocates have every reason to celebrate this year, as the world returns to the continent to commemorate the adoption of a landmark covenant - the Windhoek Declaration on promoting Press freedom. The declaration, adopted by African newspaper journalists 30 years ago, on May 3 1991, at a UNESCO seminar on promoting an independent and Pluralistic African Press and subsequently endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference, now forms the foundation on which World Press Freedom Day is celebrated globally today. What an achievement stemming from just a gathering that was organised to discuss various crises African media faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s!



Thirty years later, the world will again turn its attention to Windhoek on May 3 2021, to celebrate press freedom and take stock of the road travelled so far in promoting that right. Undoubtedly there have been successes since 1991, but also a lot is still to be achieved as the media landscape changes and communications ecosystems evolve, accelerated by digital technologies. Thus, a revisit and review of the declaration to assess its relevance and responsiveness to the challenges of the day, is not only necessary but long overdue.

...the world needs to seriously introspect what needs to be done to ensure that principles and values espoused in such documents as the Windhoek Declaration are a living reality.

This is precisely because when the declaration was adopted, those sitting around the table were largely drawn from the print media. This has been acknowledged by African media, hence the adoption of other complimentary charters such as the African Charter on Broadcasting in 2001. It is however important to have a comprehensive document that incorporates and reflects the currency of media developments.

But most importantly it is critical that such an exercise is not seen as an end in itself but an anchor for a rigorous push for meaningful protection of media freedoms, the right to free speech on and offline as well other online liberties due to global citizens. Otherwise, the revision of the declaration will suffer the fate of preceding similar exercises and become a symbolic gesture whose effect will only be a mere historic record.

For example, despite the many instruments promoting freedom of expression and the media, governments across the globe have gone on to erode the very same liberties and abdicate their obligations under their own constitutions and international conventions with impunity. Southern Africa typifies this brazen disregard for duty to protect citizens.

Windhoek Declaration: Neglected in its place of birth

According to Reporters Without Borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index, only three (3) Southern African countries are in the top 50 of countries considered to have a free press, with Namibia ranked 24, South Africa 32 and Botswana 38. This has been a trend, in a region famed for birthing the Windhoek Declaration.

This poor ranking is a reflection of reality on the ground. As often said, figures only tell half the story. In the recent past, Southern Africa has witnessed alarming erosion of media freedom accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The repeated arrest and pre-trial detention of independent journalist Hopewell Chin'ono by Zimbabwean authorities illustrates the deteriorating conditions for journalists in the region, especially those seeking to spotlight authoritarian and corrupt rule taking root in several countries in Southern Africa. In Tanzania journalists were routinely arrested and media banned under the government of the late President John Magufuli.

Similar cases of assault on independent journalism have been recorded in Zambia and Swaziland.

But nothing frighteningly captures the dangers journalists have to contend with just to do their job like in Mozambique. The country has recorded abductions, beatings and enforced disappearances of journalists as well as bombing of independent media, all in a bid to stop the free flow of information on authorities' uncomplimentary governance record. For instance, journalist Ibrahimo Abu Mbaruco remains unaccounted for almost a year after he disappeared on April 7 2020 in the volatile region of Cabo-Delgado. He was last seen in detention of suspected security details.

While in many of the instances, media freedom advocates and journalists' bodies have loudly called out authorities, reminding them of their human rights obligations, there is no significant change in attitude. Instead, the situation appears to be worsening with the elite capture of private media predicated on both political and socio-economic crises engulfing the region as well as moves to control, throttle or shut down the digital spaces.

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All the while responsible state oversight bodies have remained largely mute and indecisive despite the fact that some are custodians of human rights instruments against which they can hold to account those implicated in the violation of press freedom.

A call to action

It is against this evidence that; the world needs to seriously introspect what needs to be done to ensure that principles and values espoused in such documents as the Windhoek Declaration are a living reality. The 30th anniversary of the Declaration provides an opportunity for robust conversations and practical action plans on how best to increase the cost of tyrannical media policies and practices for positive change.

Failure to do so, the aspirations of the planned 30th anniversary as espoused in the theme "Information as a Public Good" will be partially achieved. It is thus instructive that there be space reserved for practically safeguarding journalism safety under the three key topics for the 2021 event:

- Steps to ensure the economic viability of news media;
- Mechanisms for ensuring transparency of Internet companies;
- Enhanced Media and Information Literacy (MIL) capacities that enable people to recognize and value, as well as defend and demand journalism, as a vital part of information as a public good.

Otherwise, the event will pass for yet another symbolic recognition of the place of birth of the Windhoek Declaration without effective antidote for increasing media repression plaguing the region.

Nhlanhla Ngwenya is a media and freedom of expression advocate.

Rethinking policy interventions on communications surveillance in Africa

by Tomiwa Ilori

Communications surveillance has become more insidious. African governments continue to invest in intrusive surveillance equipment that not only violates human rights, but also contributes to closing the civic space. This essay argues that in correcting policy on communications surveillance especially in Africa, stakeholders must turn to rights-respecting laws with directions from within the African context in this regard.

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 won't be forgotten in a hurry. It set off repercussions that were not immediately obvious even two decades after – the trade-off between human rights and public security. In particular, it renewed the conversations on policy setting for communications surveillance across the world.

More than a decade later, Edward Snowden – a former subcontractor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) revealed that the National Security Agency (NSA), together with telecommunication companies, spies on US citizens and other countries' leaders and people through various intrusive surveillance technologies on grounds of national security.

Privacy International defines communications surveillance as the "monitoring, interception, collection, preservation and retention of information that has been communicated, relayed or generated over communications networks to a group of recipients by a third party."

Today, more governments are emboldened in their deployment of indiscriminate communications surveillance, arguing that such are fine, in so far as they guarantee public safety.

In 2021, Citizen Lab released a report on 25 countries conducting cyber-espionage across the world. Seven of those are African countries which include Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Equatorial Guinea, Morocco, Botswana, Kenya and Zambia, and they feature prominently in the report as having ties with an Israeli telecoms company called Circles.

The report by Citizen Lab points to three alarming facts on communication surveillance:

- spyware deployment is carried out by governments, especially those with troubling records of human rights abuses,
- intrusive technologies have become more insidious; and
- telecommunications companies are complicit in indiscriminate deployment of communications surveillance.

These confirm that governments, together with telecommunication companies do not engage in surveillance only to ensure public safety, but also use these new technologies to track government opposition, journalists and human rights defenders. What this does is throw up the policy gaps on communications surveillance in most systems, including those in African countries.

So knowing this, what can those who are not part of that government decision do?

First we have to understand that the primary standard of international human rights law, is explicit on how surveillance technologies can be deployed.

The major principles under international law as they have been discussed by experts include legality, legitimate aim, necessity, judicial oversight and due process, among others

While these principles seek to protect the right to privacy, they also acknowledge the need for surveillance in public interest but with the necessary checks and balances in place.
In many African countries, these principles are not complied with. This is because where there are laws on communications surveillance they are mostly inadequate.

African countries which carry out surveillance do not usually have the requisite law in place and where they do,,these are either inadequate or abused or both.

This has posed serious challenges with respect to the right to privacy and the increasing need to conduct legally permissible surveillance.

In Nigeria, not only is the legal regime on interception governed by a secondary law, but the manner in which they are carried out are opaque and unaccountable. Likewise, in Uganda, both the Regulation of Interception of Communications (RICA) and the Anti-Terrorism Act which touch on communications surveillance, do not have clear oversight mechanisms.

In a case decided on 4 February 2021, the South African Constitutional Court ruled that the mass surveillance by the South African Communications Centre was unlawful and invalid. It called for the review of the Regulation of Interception of Communications (RICA) to be brought in line with the country's constitution.

Despite the Constitutional Court judgment, and its possibility for positive reforms in the surveillance sector in South Africa, one journalist had her house broken into and laptops stolen, another was said to be under surveillance after investigating corruption allegations within the Crime Intelligence (CI) division of the South African Police

Beyond terror attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic has renewed tensions between the right to privacy and public health in many countries. While there is the need to protect against the pandemic there is also the need to protect the right to privacy. It is obvious that the right to privacy should not be sacrificed on the altar of the right to public health and vice versa.

The question is how communications surveillance, given its insidious nature, can be regulated. Combining the political power of states with the economic power of the communications surveillance sector already put at US$12 billion, regulation seems far-fetched. With this powerful dynamic, human rights are being sacrificed to accommodate the whims of powerful actors. But there is hope, the type however, that requires more work.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the African Commission) recently revised the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, which provides specifically against indiscriminate use of communication surveillance. Principle 41 provides for policy solutions which require member states not to engage in indiscriminate communications surveillance except provided for by law and in compliance with international human rights law principles.

Individuals and organisations who work in the social justice sector are not left without the power to push back. This, among others, can serve as a basis for asking the difficult questions from governments and demanding answers.

One of the major principles of ensuring rights-respecting communications surveillance practice is legality. Most African countries do not have specific laws on communications surveillance. Where these exist, they are secondary laws that do not allow for enough direct public participation through a primary law enacted by parliaments. There is a need for laws which must be in compliance with international human rights law and the provisions of the Declaration.

Civil society actors should continue working hard to open up the surveillance sector. One way to do this is to approach the courts for judicial review, as in the case of South Africa

Communications surveillance is not mutually exclusive of human rights protection. The strong narrative woven by governments that in protecting public safety, surveillance needs to be conducted without oversight is a recipe for disaster. These policies can be designed in such a way that they respect privacy and protect human rights by paying attention to suggestions described above.

In resolving the major tension that often arises in the use of communications surveillance, major stakeholders like governments, private sector and civil society must work together to design effective policy solutions to communications.

This will assist in no small measure in placing intrusive technologies under the purview of rights-respecting laws while deploying these technologies to more lawful uses.

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Africa's citizens fight back

Unpacking the ECOWAS court ruling on Togo's internet shutdown

by Victor Mabutho

In an attempt to tighten their grip on dwindling power during moments of political crisis, some African governments revert to their default setting of shutting down the internet. In 2020 alone there were a total of 18 internet blackouts in 10 countries on the African continent. Three months into 2021, there have already been four shutdowns. In Togo a woman journalist and seven rights organisations put up a regional legal challenge. Victor Mabutho spoke to the applicants and legal and digital rights experts to get an understanding of the impact of the historical challenge and subsequent judgement.

When on 25 June 2020, the Economic Community of West African States Community Court of Justice (ECOWAS CCJ) handed down its historic ruling that Togo's 2017 internet shutdowns were illegal and violated citizens' rights, the news reverberated around the world.

"The shutting down of internet access by the Respondent state of Togo violated the rights of the Applicants to freedom of expression," read the court's binding decision. It pointed out that Togo had failed to prove that it had a law in place to justify switching off the internet.

The Togo government had shut down the internet twice during September 2017, claiming that it's Law on the Information Society and the Law of 2011.27 were in place to justify the shutdowns.

The court directed the government to formulate laws respecting citizens' right to freedom of expression and access to information in line with international human rights standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR).

The CCJ went on to award financial compensation to each applicant. The legal challenge against the government was brought to the West African regional court by woman journalist, Fabbi Kouassi and seven Togolese organisations, Amnesty International Togo, *L'institut Des Medias Pour La Democratie Et Les Droit De L'homme, La Lantere, Action Des Crechretiens Pour L'abolition De La Torture, Association Des Victim De Tortur Au Togo, Ligue Des Consommateurs De Togo* and *L'association Togolaise Pour L'education Aux Droits De L'homme Et La Democratie.*

The historical judgement placed the right to freedom of expression at centre stage and as the first court challenge on internet shutdowns at international level, it set a precedent, not just on the African continent but globally too.

The media and digital rights lawyer who represented the applicants, Mojirayo Ogunlana-Nkanga, while happy with the decision, said the court could have expanded its judgment to say everyone has the right to access the internet.

Digital authoritarianism has become the worrying and defining trait of many African governments' responses to growing digital civic mobilisation and online activism across the continent.

Electronic communications law consultant Justine Limpitlaw, welcomed the ruling but said: "it's not the finish line". She said it was an importantstarting point as it set a precedent for the ECOWAS CCJ. It would also be of persuasive value across the continent. "People will look at its very careful articulation of why access to the internet is a corollary right of freedom of expression," she added.

Limpitlaw sees governments being pressed into creating laws which justify the curtailing of freedom of expression. She predicts that in the future, the internet shutdown cases that are brought before the courts will focus on whether the law used to implement shutdowns is in line with international protocols.

The political crisis that led to Togo's internet shutdown in September 2017, was sparked by a stand-off between the opposition and government on constitutional amendments. The government-enforced internet blackout occurred against the backdrop of deadly violence unleashed by security forces who assaulted and teargassed opposition demonstrators.

Kouassi, who had been covering these protests, was incensed by the State's heavy-handed response to citizens demanding presidential term limits and so she decided to take action.

The frustration which she and many Togolese citizens experienced, was underpinned by the submission made by the former United Nation's Special Rapporteur to the Right of Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Professor David Kaye, in his application as a friend of the court.

Outlining the detrimental effect of shutdowns, Kaye pointed out, among others, that shutdowns damage people's access to information and also their access to basic services. Vulnerable groups, he added, such as those with disabilities, women and racial minorities often depended on critical online resources. Businesses reliant on electronic transactions were particularly affected, he added.

Deprived of her right to work as a journalist, Kouassi joined forces with Amnesty International Togo (AIT). 'We decided to challenge the government, but instead of using local courts, we decided to approach the ECOWAS CCJ based in Abuja, Nigeria'.

The case was filed with the regional court in Abuja in December 2018 which had its first sitting in February 2019. An attempt to get it dismissed on the grounds that the seven organisations, save for Kouassi, were not individuals, failed. The Togo government had interpreted the rules as only allowing persons who are victims to stand before the court and not organisations. The court in turn allowed the seven organisations to represent those violated by the internet shutdown, after they proved their interests in protecting freedom of expression. Along with Kaye, expert submissions were also made by several civic and digital rights groups such as Access Now and Article 19 in their capacity as 'friends of the court', in support of the applicants' suit.

Executive director of Media Rights Agenda, Edetean Ojo, drew a link between this court ruling and decades of lobbying which has created the current legal framework that protects media rights and freedom of expression.

"One can confidently say that the judgment … is evidence of the continually evolving long-term vision of the Windhoek Declaration (adopted in 1991) on the need for the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free media environment in Africa, that is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy and for economic development," said Ojo.

The then African Commission Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Lawrence Mute, pointed out that the internet had empowered African people with a voice, and urged government not to take that voice from them.

A year since the judgment has been passed, the Togo government is yet to fulfil requirements of the ECOWAS CCJ's ruling.

"There is the issue of enforcement of judgments. ECOWAS (regional bloc) is not sanctioning countries such as Togo which have not complied with regional court decisions," points out Ogunlana-Nkanga who says punitive regional consequences could stop governments from shutting down the internet.

Limpitlaw points out that if African governments want to attract investment, the pragmatic approach would be to adopt a softer stance on human rights and freedoms. "Investors really take a very hard look at human rights issues, particularly on freedom of expression, because it impacts their own ability to do business."

Victor Mabutho is a freelance journalist and social media consultant based in Harare, Zimbabwe. He has a keen interest in Africa and has researched and published on a broad spectrum of issues affecting the continent, including politics, freedom of expression, elections and tech. He can be found on Twitter at @Victor_Mabutho

AfCFTA: A game-changer for African media

by Justine Limpitlaw

Exciting times are ahead for the continent – particularly in the media policy and regulatory space. It's being brought about by the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement (AfCFTA), signed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) in 2018 and which established the African Continental Free Trade Area. The AfCFTA came into force in 2019 and actual trading started on 1 January 2021 - delayed by six months due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

So how does trade impact media policy and regulation?

Essentially it comes down to convergence – the coming together of telecommunications infrastructure and content provision due to technological convergence, in particular the internet.

The importance of electronic communications for trade is internationally recognised. Right from the start, the AU identified trade in communications services as one of the five key priority areas for the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Importantly, it is not possible, due to convergence, to separate out communications services that are useful for business development generally eg telecommunications infrastructure services and business to business electronic communications services from communications services that are useful for the media – as these all run off the same networks and require the same basic types of policy and regulation, particularly with regard to access, affordability, reliability and resilience.

The globe is coming to terms with the realities and challenges of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) – where services are dependent on digital technologies. This is, of course, recognised in Africa too - the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy 2030 calls for the harnessing of digital technologies to transform African societies and break the digital divide.

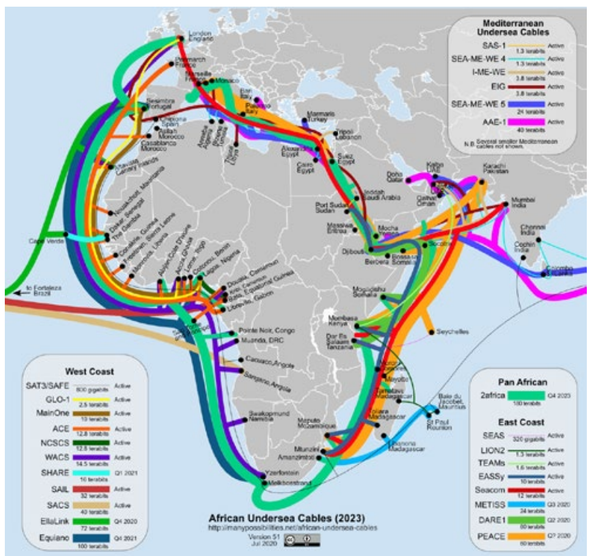
The 4IR is not only looking at industrial applications – it is also a feature of newsrooms and the media more generally – no media house relies only on its print or broadcast outlets. Every media house uses its webpages, streaming services, podcasts, video-on-demand, and social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook etc) to great effect – providing a seamless service to media consumers whether they are watching TV, listening on the radio, or accessing services via their mobile phones. Consumers use all or some of the available platforms to access content interchangeably.

This is good news for those who want to see media freedom become more entrenched on the continent.

Why? How?

All governments want the upside of 4IR ie the industrial development, the growth of manufacturing and services sectors, the reduction in unemployment and poverty – the general upside of economic growth and a thriving economy. The bottom line is that this simply cannot happen without access to electronic communications infrastructure and services – as this is how global trade is facilitated. The days of business being conducted by post are so last century.

Much of electronic communications in Africa is based on spectrum use – that is the use of radio frequency spectrum for example, whether for mobile phones/hotspots (to access content and services online), terrestrial or satellite broadcasting. This is particularly slow in areas with poor road or rail infrastructure and where implementation of fixed line communications infrastructure is not possible. And spectrum use requires formal regulation.



And it is here that a window of opportunity for improved media regulation has opened-up.

Electronic communications are used, not only, for example, in mining and manufacturing, but also in the media, and so they, perhaps inadvertently, also positively impact the media policy environment.

As governments recognise the importance of electronic communications to drive economic growth, so the global norms and standards for regulating this sector are forcing adoption. Indeed, many of these standards are already recognised by the AU in various conventions, statements of principle and other international instruments, but have yet to be widely incorporated in national laws.

This is about to change…

In order to drive industry growth, communications infrastructure and services have to be reliable, affordable and resilient: if internet prices are unaffordable to the ordinary person, trade in online businesses/services is impossible to implement. Similarly, if governments shut down or "throttle" the internet for fear of negative publicity during elections or domestic protests, businesses, industries, indeed all economic activity based on electronic communications grind to a halt with devastating developmental and economic impacts.
This presents all those concerned about media freedom, access to information, freedom of expression and freedom of the internet with a huge opportunity to use the economic shift to 4IR to garner important national gains in media policy and regulation.

The bottom line is that the AfCFTA's prioritisation of trade in communications services means that attention will be on how best to facilitate seamless, borderless trade and investment in these services whether at an infrastructure level or a services level. This is simply not possible without ensuring that national regulatory frameworks are harmonised to secure adherence with the basic tenets of successful communications infrastructure and services roll out:

- An independent regulator, with the power to act in the public interest, when licensing services and spectrum
- A recognition of the importance of a competitive environment: with numerous providers of communications infrastructure which has the knock-on effect of requiring diversity and pluralism in the audio-visual sector too ie in respect of broadcasting and so-called OTT (over-the-top) or internet-based audio-visual content services.
- A recognition of the importance of universal access and service, particularly to the internet. And it is here that the growth potential in Africa is staggering – As Europe and North America reach saturation levels, Africa is only just beginning - with less than 50% of the African population having access to the internet (Internet World Stats 2021)
- Trade administration, including in respect of trade in, or facilitated by, communications must be reasonable, objective and impartial.

Interestingly, in many international jurisdictions, these principles were fought for and won in the non-online space first and then the principles were applied online. However, Africa will be unique, in my view, in that the economic force of the communications sector will force through policy and regulatory change which will start with an online focus but, in turn, be applied in the off-line world too. As governments scramble to take advantage of the trade possibilities of the AfCFTA, they will be forced to turn away from censorious, decrepit media policy and laws (many of which are a hold-over of the colonial era anyway) and will harness the modernising force of the internet, including the traditional media in its embrace.

Justine Limpitlaw - BA LLB (Wits) LLM (Yale) - is an independent communications law consultant and a Visiting Adjunct Professor with the LINK Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand. She specialises in media, electronic communications and space and satellite law. Justine recently published the three-volume second edition of the Media Law Handbook for Southern Africa and is also the author of the two-volume Media Law Handbook for Eastern Africa which include extensive analysis of broadcasting and online regulatory environments.

New frontiers…

Malawian courts set precedent for electoral transparency

by Golden Matonga

Last year, Malawi punched above its weight to take up an envied position on the global stage, when judges of its Constitutional Court nullified the presidential election of the previous year, 2019, that had seen the re-election of President Peter Mutharika.

It was only the third time on the continent that a presidential election had been overturned by the courts – with the first instance recorded in Ivory Coast in 2010 and in 2017 in Kenya.

The added support by the Supreme Court in upholding the Constitutional Court's decision to nullify the country's presidential elections, paved the way for a fresh poll which was then scheduled for 23 June, 2020.

Following this historic ruling in Malawi, President Mutharika would find himself voted out of office and his nemesis Lazarus Chakwera from the main opposition Malawi Congress Party (MCP), then leading an opposition alliance, being declared the winner.

The majority of Malawians would rejoice at the change of guard that for them promised a different and more hopeful future.

The desire for change had been many years in the making.

Frustrations over crippling poverty, high unemployment and corruption had crystallised into resentment against Mutharika who would be declared winner of the 2019 elections, dubbed 'Tippexgate' because of alleged widespread use of the white correctional fluid used to alter results sheets.

When the country held the fresh elections ordered by the court, villagers channelled their energies into 'protecting' their votes, sleeping at polling centers to monitor vote counting, to avoid a repeat of the 'Tippex elections'.

The court ruling and the ordering of a new election was not just a victory for sensible politics – it was the story of Malawi's triumph against the abuse of power in one of the most blatant cases of electoral fraud. It was also the story of harnessing of citizen voices by civil society into action. Regular protests over a six month period, with citizens braving threats, beatings, arrests and teargas characterised this period. It was victory for media, both old and new, which had reported on the impasse incessantly and professionally

It is a story that brings together the various elements that contributed to the change – the independence of institutions – in this case both the judiciary and the military, the collaborative pulling together of civil society, the courage of the opposition to oppose the results, the pressure to form a coalition, the harnessing of citizen voices and most importantly the role of the Fourth Estate in telling the story.

The economic force of the communications sector will force through policy and regulatory change which will start with an online focus …

The pressure that was being exerted on the judiciary— particularly the five judges presiding over the case by President Mutharika and other players – was high. On a regular basis, Mutharika questioned the validity of the court trial and threatened not to comply with a negative judgement. Shortly before they delivered the landmark ruling, the judges announced they had lodged a complaint with anti-corruption authorities that they had been approached by a rich businessman with the offer of bribes.

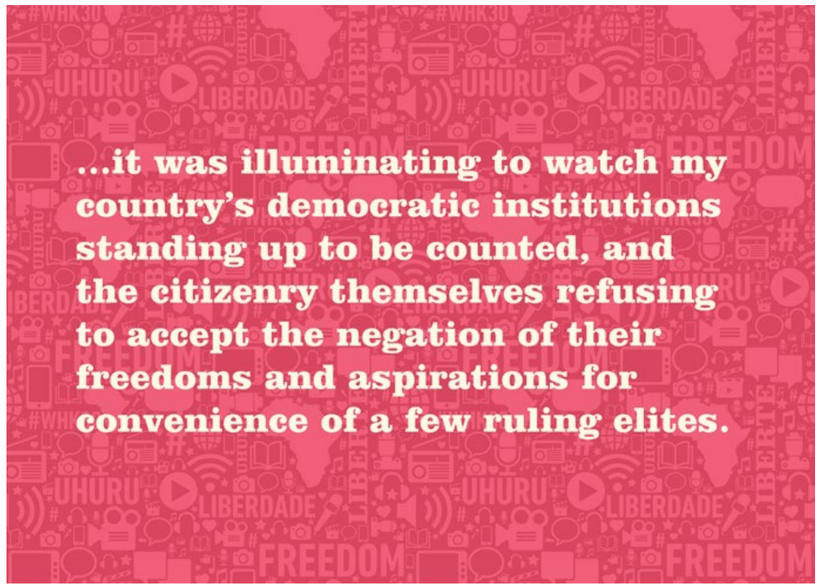
But the judges found comfort in the security provided by the army which safeguarded them as they travelled to various locations with armed escorts to ensure their safety. They also coerced them to wear bullet proof vests.

In the end, their courage and determination was a culmination of painstaking work of building strong institutions, many years in the making. Above all, it was a product of a citizenry both active and ready to defend their rights and freedoms and their cherished democracy.

As a consequence for standing up for their rights, those involved paid a hefty price.

The police were biased and antagonistic towards the people, but the army generals firmly stood by the constitution. After the court verdict, Mutharika fired both the military chief and Chief Justice, hoping to instill fear in the army and among judges. But he failed in both attempts.

Shortly afterwards Supreme Court affirmed the decision of the Constitutional Court, after lawyers at home and further afield came together to defend the Chief Justice and a senior judge from forced



One town in particular bears the scars of its involvement in the struggle for good governance and election justice. Nsundwe Trading Centre, just outside the capital, Lilongwe, despite being a then opposition MCP stronghold, had no previous history of being a hotbed for political activity which it became in 2019.

"Some of the survivors were raped right in the presence of their children, some of whom are able to recount the incidents and describe the police officer's penis in great details," the Malawi Human Rights Commission, a state funded constitutional body, reported after investigations.

A town — not far from the birthplace of President Lazarus Chakwera — became a no-go zone for the ruling party and police, but the town's notoriety would be enhanced by the bussing of its youths into the capital city for every protest. Scores of buses and pick-up trucks would arrive just before each protest with youths that would confront the trigger-happy police but who would also loot innocent shops, earning the nickname, the Nsundwe garrison.

In the pre and post-election period independent media was under immense duress. But it, too, stood up to be counted when it mattered.

In that period of turmoil, I was one of those arrested, spending hours in police custody alongside two other journalists after being arrested at the airport while covering the arrival of election observer mission from the European Union. It turned out to be a challenging period for journalists and media houses. Regularly, journalists were assaulted and harassed for doing their job.

retirement by, among others, holding street protests and obtaining a court injunction.

The dismissal of the popular head of Malawi Defense Forces, General Vincent Nundwe was not followed by a change in the military's non-partisan stance. (Nundwe was later re-appointed as Commander when the opposition swept to power).

For a journalist like me, covering the impasse, it was illuminating to watch my country's democratic institutions standing up to be counted, and the citizenry themselves refusing to accept the negation of their freedoms and aspirations for convenience of a few ruling elites.

I saw the determination of the people to ensure the country's destiny was not mortgaged, not only among the rich and educated in cities, but in the countryside, where for the first time in the country's history, spontaneous protests had erupted in villages and small towns without a previous history of political activism.

Golden Matonga is a Malawian journalist working for Malawi's Nation Publications Limited and writes for a string of international outlets including Mail&Guardian and Financial Times.

Media reform and the Arab Spring: a tale of struggle and hope

by Fatima el Issawi

The struggle between autocratic structures and democratic change took place in the media landscape as much as it developed in the political arena in post Arab uprisings. The nascent agency developed by journalists transformed them into full political actors, in a hybrid media scene coloured by a continuous wrestle between continuity and change, exacerbating the uncertainty about the future.

The lessons from the so-called Arab Spring revolutions raised questions about the media's ability to support democratic change and renewed questions about journalisms' ambiguous role, undermining the inherited structures of autocracy and supporting them at times. This ambiguity of the role of the media in bringing about change in North Africa is that, the expected democractic reforms and "gains" of the Arab Spring revolutions are being easily undone by the recent renewal of autocracy and the survival of repressive regulation in dealing with expressing dissent via the old press codes or the penal codes and the newly introduced anti-terrorism regulation.

Charges such as belonging to illegal or terrorist groups or aiding terrorist activities are becoming a trend in quelling dissent through unlawful detention of journalists and activists. What follows are flawed trials based on vaguely worded charges. Egypt leads in the crackdown on critical reporting as part of a larger repression of rights and freedoms unseen in the modern history of the country. In their report on Egypt for 2019, Amnesty International denounced "a range of repressive measures against protesters and perceived dissidents, including enforced disappearance, mass arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, excessive use of force and severe probation measures" citing arrests and detention of at least 20 journalists solely for peacefully expressing their opinions.

Unlike experiences of transitions to democracy around the world, the media landscape in the North Africa region manifests a continuous confrontation between structural constraints and a nascent autonomous journalistic agency supported by a dynamic civil society active in counter balancing attempts of political co-optation and the return of the traditions of the past. This struggle seems to signal a victory of the former autocratic cultures over a genuine change as elites continue to consider the media as a positive messenger of their activities. However, the resilience of the claims for freedom and dignity, including independent and professional media, means the struggle is not yet settled. Low performance in terms of freedom of the press paints a bleak picture all over North Africa. Tunisia continues to lead as the best-performing North African country in the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders with most of North African countries showing negative performance: Algeria is at 146th and Egypt at 166th.

Media Structures: continuity or change?

Tunisia continues to present a leading example in media regulatory reform although this reform is fragile and subjected to continuous shifts in political alliances and unstable governments. The adoption of decree-Laws 115 on print media and 116 on audiovisual media, were crucial in dismantling the old system as they replaced restrictive legislation that used to limit journalists' activities to reporting on the ruling clan. The establishment of an independent broadcast regulator (the High Independent Authority of the Audiovisual Commission, HACA) in 2013 presents a genuine achievement in view of the political co-optation of similar bodies in the North Africa region. For instance, the newly formed state institutions in Egypt in 2017 are nothing other than a new censorship tool controlled by the military regime. The three new authorities (the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, the National Press Authority, and the National Media Authority) are under the control of the regime who has the final say on the nomination of their members.

The introduction of private media ownership has helped challenge the entrenched state control over media in the region. However, a chaotic marketisation accompanied by instrumentalisation of these new media projects by businessmen with political ambitions or links to regimes, transformed the nascent pluralism in the media landscape into a facade, limiting it again to the representation of the powerful. In Tunisia, despite a noticeable diversity in the media content, media barons have waged a war against the new broadcast regulator, using their investments in media to buy a say in the political arena.

Lacking political support, HAICA is not able to effectively implement sanction against media outlets owned or supported by politicians, including suspending the broadcast of those channels and radios operating illegally without a license. In Egypt, most of private media were recently bought, willingly or forcefully, by a new entity representing a monopoly: the Egyptian Media Group recently became the largest media conglomerate in the country, owned by Eagle Capital, a state-owned investment owned by the General Intelligence, in unprecedented direct control of media by the security institution. In Morocco, the financial viability of independent media, which is not owned by businessmen linked to the regime, is proving impossible. Through manipulation and control of the advertising market, the regime applies a carrot and stick approach to suppress critical reporting and encourage compliant coverage.

Frequent legal prosecution against critical journalists amounts to judicial harassment. This pressure leads to the closure of media projects due to bankruptcy and/or to legal harassment In Libya, the civil conflict has turned journalists and their media into a new platform for propaganda, pushing most of the new media projects to close doors or to move operations to neighbouring countries. As per a report of RSF, the media "are now embroiled in an unprecedented crisis, with several media outlets being press-ganged into serving the various warring factions."

The digital space: activism versus policing

The cyber space became a contested arena between activists and autocratic regimes increasingly investing in surveillance to police the public sphere and to create fake public opinion, disputing its initial function during the uprisings and their aftermath as an engine of liberation. The use of the "fake news" as an excuse to quell dissenting narratives and jail activists and journalists has been further exacerbated with the global pandemic of COVID-19. According to a report by Freedom House, forms of widespread repression include removing content, blocking access to websites, arrests and unlimited detention, widespread surveillance, and new laws that further restrict internet freedom, in the name of protecting the public health and fighting misinformation in the coverage of the pandemic. New restrictive laws have been proposed or implemented in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia with overly broad and vaguely written provisions limiting online speech and activism, according to the same report.

However, policing cyberspace by autocratic regimes precedes the pandemic. Recently, journalists and activists were subjected to surveillance from malicious spyware programmes granting regimes the ability to monitor their activities in real time. According to a large study by the Citizen Lab, Pegasus spyware developed by the Israeli firm NSO Group communicating has been used in an abusive manner to target civil society in Morocco among other countries. It is believed that this programme used in digital espionage, was employed by the Saudi regime to spy on the critical journalist Jamal Khashoggi facilitating his killing.

Agency and professionalism

My research with Arab journalists on how they perceive their role as reporters on the political change and inherent conflicts has demonstrated rejection among them to embrace universal values in the model of neutral reporting on opponents. While representation of diverse views is acknowledged as indication of quality in their reporting, most journalists interviewed see their professional identity as solidly linked to their political loyalties, personal background and where they locate themselves within the political struggle.

This rejection of neutrality or impartiality by a majority of journalists, considering their work as contributing to shaping the public opinion and not only reporting facts, questions the efficiency of training schemes modelled on the western values of good journalism. While these schemes provided journalists with important knowledge and exposure to different experiences, they failed to help journalists embed these new practices in their working environment that remain not impacted by this new culture. Suffering weak job security and subjected to multiple pressure, this nascent journalistic agency continues to fight the entrenched model of the journalist obedient to power. While domesticating western values of good journalism has led in some cases to the transformation of local media norms, the culture of production in newsrooms is hybrid, bringing together the local and the global in search for an answer on how best to report on complex and often irreconcilable conflicts.

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North Africa: regulating social media in a contested online civic space

by Naseem Tarawnah

From Morocco to Egypt, authorities in North Africa have increasingly cracked down on legitimate criticism on social media platforms in recent years. Wielding vaguely-worded laws, governments have suppressed free expression under various pretexts, including most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the ten years since Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution sparked a wave of uprisings across the region, the state of online free expression has eroded as governments exercise increased dominance over the online civic space.

Yes, the majority of the region is online, engaging in critical discussions, sharing vital information, and utilising social media platforms that are shaping social movements. Yet, authorities throughout North Africa continue to actively undermine this progress by employing a myriad of pretexts - most recently of which has been the global pandemic - to strangle online free expression by introducing vague laws governing online free speech and fuelling a toxic online environment.

For voicing criticisms or simply publishing content, netizens face a climate prone to networks of trolls, bots, and sockpuppets that smear them and subvert their movements, and authorities that monitor content and engage in surveillance of critics. Women are particularly targeted by smear campaigns, as are members of the LGBTQ community who face real-life threats after being 'outed' online.

The years following the emergence of the Arab Uprisings, which apart from Morocco, managed to topple regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria - the online civic space has become the primary arena for free expression in the region, and subsequently a battleground for control by authorities unable to tame the public discourse using conventional means.

While the pandemic has drawn attention to the need to address the growing vacuum of disinformation in the interest of public safety, activists and rights groups have argued that it is under this guise that authorities in the region have most recently wielded emergency powers to crack down on a wide range of dissent or online content that challenges authorities and societal norms. Indeed, the pandemic has seen long-running attempts to stifle free expression intensifying, with governments capitalizing on the crisis to introduce oppressive laws governing the online civic space.

In Morocco, students, artists, citizen journalists, and social media users have been prosecuted under the country's stricter penal code, antiterrorism law, and press code, as opposed to the publishing code that banned imprisonment in a 2016 amendment. They have faced charges like "defaming state institutions" or "offending public officials" simply for expressing critical opinions in posts, videos, and even rap songs published on social media platforms. Moroccan civil society recently fought back against the government's introduction of draft law number 22.20 that sought to incorporate articles on the use of social networks, punishing the spread of "fake news" with prison sentences of up to five years.

Meanwhile, in neighboring **Algeria** where the Hirak movement has held anti-government protests for over two years, parliament amended the country's penal code to include an article punishing the spreading of "lies" aimed at "harming state security" with steep prison sentences and fines.

Throughout the protest movement, Algeria's online space has been steeped in disinformation campaigns led by mostly pro-government Twitter bots and trolls bent on undermining public discourse. In this environment, authorities have weaponized the penal code to punish dissent under the pretense of safeguarding the public sphere from 'fake news'.

Researchers like Yasmine Kacha have documented dozens of human rights activists and journalists that have been summoned, prosecuted and detained for their online posts as a result.

Despite making democratic gains in the years since its revolution, civil society in Tunisia have faced unceasing attempts to prosecute them for their online speech. A proposed controversial draft law championed as an effort to combat disinformation and "fake news" during the pandemic drew outrage from civil society online. The vaguely worded bill sought to amend articles of the country's penal code to "prevent attacks on reputation and the spoiling of the democratic environment," with Access Now describing the law's provisions as "dedicated to muzzling journalists and activists" through intimidation, and limiting access to information critical to "document any rights violations that may take place under these circumstances."

Photo: ymphotos / Shutterstock.com

While the proposal was rescinded, activists in Tunisia continued to fight back during the pandemic, against the introduction of such laws designed to target their online speech, and that have resulted in police summons and arbitrary detentions. Anti-government protests that have taken hold of the country throughout the crisis saw rights groups documenting the arrest of hundreds of protesters for either participating in or supporting the protests in online posts, including bloggers, activists, and dissidents.

Many of Egypt's estimated 65,000 prisoners of conscience are serving sentences for their online posts as President Sisi's regime has sought to actively eliminate all forms of dissent. During the pandemic alone, authorities have arrested countless journalists, human rights workers, researchers, and even medical professionals critical of official government pandemic narratives and statistics. Authorities have also increased their blocking of hundreds of websites, using the country's notorious Press and Media Regulation law and Cybercrime law to censor independent media, block access to information, as well as block social media user accounts for their online criticism.

Throughout the political conflict of post-revolution Libya, the online space has been flooded with disinformation campaigns launched by competing political actors seeking to mislead the public and inflame tensions. The country's largely unregulated digital space has helped fuel a polarized online media environment, with disinformation spreading predominantly on platforms like Facebook. Netizens and journalists have experienced increasing hostility for content they post online,contributing to a more self-censorship, or the creation of fake social accounts to avoid reprisals from authorities.

As independent social media researcher Khadeja Ramali notes: "This climate of polarization and the fact that most Libyans live in digital echo chambers has hampered the work of initiatives to fact-check and invigorate traditional media." Ramali also noted the need for an independent, locally-led credible research institution that can effectively document and engage social media companies on how the spread of disinformation on their platforms are a source of instability in Libya.

Indeed, the role of social media companies in censoring critical voices and shaping public discourse throughout the region has not gone unnoticed. Social media companies have increasingly censored content on behalf of governments, banned activists from their platforms, and are slow to take down antagonistic networks targeting users. Dozens of Tunisian activists, journalists, and artists have seen their Facebook accounts disabled with no justification, while Twitter suspended dozens of accounts of Egyptian dissidents.

Rights groups and activists penned an open letter to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube during the pandemic to voice their frustrations about platform policies and content moderation procedures they say have "all too often led to the silencing and erasure of critical voices from marginalized and oppressed communities" across the region.

So what can be done about social media regulation in a region where free expression is underpinned with such entrenched oppression?

Reversing laws that facilitate censorship, including those governing free speech, as well as the bans on hundreds of websites are certainly necessary first steps in lifting the long shadow of repression that looms over the online civic space, as well as helping to cultivate an engaged, informed civil society that can hold institutions accountable and spark creativity and innovation.

Here, the tireless work of civil society, including rights groups, activists, journalists, and researchers in the region are at the helm of pushing for change. In addition to providing critical insight into emerging issues on the digital front, collective advocacy efforts happening across borders are helping civil society better deal with common threats to the online civic space, including notorious press and cyber laws that infringe on the right to freedom of expression.

On the private sector front, activists in the region have pointed to the need for increased transparency on platform policies as well as pressure on tech giants to integrate civil society voices in their work. With much of the current activism centered on challenging new policies and tools after their introduction, activists have pointed to the need for civil society to play a more integral role from the onset. Dia Kayyali, Advocacy Director of human rights organization Mnemonic, has expertly pointed to the need for social media companies to engage civil society at the very ground level so that they are active participants in the "co-design" of new tools and policies, instead of having to react after-the-fact.

Naseem Tarawnah is a writer and editor who is passionate about digital media and content for the Middle East. He is a blogger at black-iris.com and a co-founder of online media outlets like Akhbarek.com and 7iber.com. Follow him on @tarawnah

Media Policy and Reform in a Political Transition: The Case of Ethiopia

by Henock Fente

Ethiopia's media reform process could serve as a replicable model for other African countries, writes Henok Fente, an Ethiopian journalist and media educator who was involved in the drafting of three major media related laws. However, the author cautions, a successful implementation of the legislative reform requires a close monitoring and engagement of key media actors in the Horn of African nation.

In 2018, Ethiopia's new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, ushered in an era of reform with a promise of institutionalising democratic governance. The reform agenda, however, has been difficult to achieve and the impact thereof yet to be fully realised. The reform process is one to aspire for and could serve as a replicable model for other African countries, albeit with the notable challenges faced in a country in transition.

For starters, in the summer of 2018, the government of Ethiopia established an independent secretariat under the Attorney General's office with a mandate to overhaul the country's legal and regulatory mechanisms. Led by respected legal experts and professors; the Legal and Justice Affairs Advisory Council (LJAAC) began reviewing and improving more than 30 legislations effecting institutional reform processes by establishing independent volunteer groups composed of human rights, media, government and civil society leaders. One of these volunteer groups is the Media Law Working Group that was mandated to draft the media, access to information and computer crime proclamations.

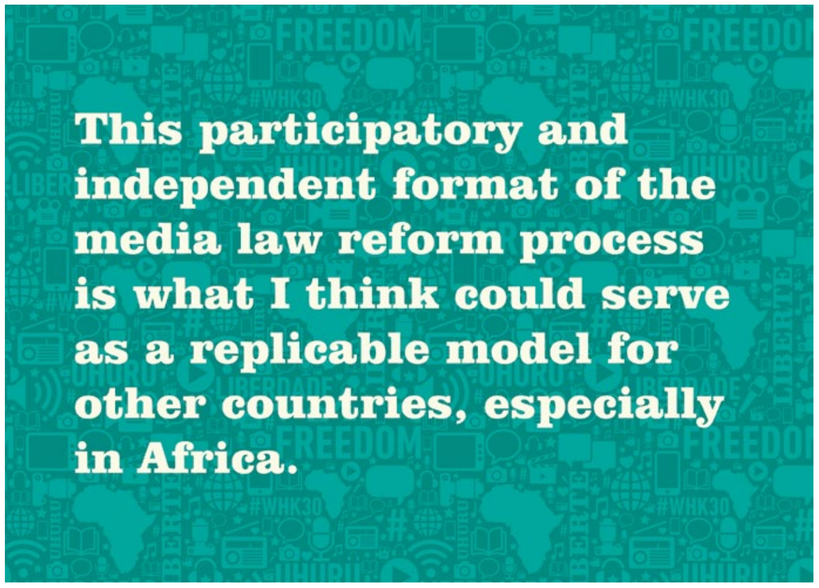
The Media Law Working Group was composed of 15 volunteer legal experts, media sector leaders, journalists, civil society leaders and gender specialists. The first task the group undertook was to identify gaps associated with media laws and make a research-based analysis and set of recommendations for the drafting of the three (3) laws. The final report that came to be known as "a diagnostic study" presented its findings evaluating gaps in existing media related laws and challenges faced in implementing such provisions.

The drafting process started following a series of consultations with key media stakeholders based on the diagnostic analysis conducted by the independent volunteer group. Inputs from media actors and a comparative study of the experiences of media legislation in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Australia, Canada and the UK served as guiding principles.

Photo: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Photo: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com

The working group then developed a zero-draft that led into conducting scores of stakeholder consultations with the aim of soliciting feedback from key media actors in the capital Addis Ababa and major regional towns. This participatory and independent format of the media law reform process is what I think could serve as a replicable model for other countries, especially in Africa.

The drafting of the media and freedom of information proclamations included redrafting and substantive alterations to existing legal frameworks and most importantly incorporating new provisions that were deemed critical for the establishment of independent media regulatory framework and institutions in the country. For instance, government media regulatory mechanisms are to be established with clear mandates and structures with clearly articulated division of powers.



Eventually, the media law was passed by parliament in February, 2021, providing a pathway for the establishment of a non-statutory co-regulation of the media sector providing legal backing to put in place a self-regulatory mechanism. The two media related legislations, namely, freedom of information and computer crime proclamation, are expected to undergo public consultations in the months to come before being tabled before parliament for approval. It is also important to mention that a newly drafted government media policy was adopted by the country's principal decision making executive body –the council of ministers in late 2020.

Next steps and concerns

Policy and regulatory reform processes in the context of a political transition are characterized by a brief window of opportunity before consolidation of democracy or otherwise. It is critical that major media policy, legal and regulatory reforms in Ethiopia take advantage of the opportunities presented during this transitional period.

It is also of paramount importance that key media stakeholders remain engaged in the implementation of the media law and the consultation process of other remaining media related reform processes. Media stakeholder engagement in the formulation of media related directives and codes is critical to success.

The establishment of a functional self-regulatory media body in Ethiopia is another important milestone to ensure the consolidation of an independent regulatory system. The presence of strong journalists associations and media civil society could help shore up self-regulation and ethical journalistic practices.

Ethiopia has also passed a new anti-hate speech proclamation with the aim of ensuring peace and security in the country. Media and human rights defenders have expressed concern at some provisions of the Hate Speech law and dialogue with the government continues on this matter. While it is important for governments, especially in the context of a political transition with deep political and social fractures, to maintain peace and stability, it is also important to ensure that the implementation of such laws does not infringe upon the rights of citizens to free expression.

Henok Fente is an Ethiopian journalist and media educator. For the past 17 years, he has worked as a reporter, editor, media developer and creator and manager of broadcasts for VOA and BBC. He is the founder and executive director of MERSA Media Institute—a non-profit think tank that works to create vibrant, responsible and independent media and education centers through research, capacity building and institutional support in Africa. Follow him on @HenokFente

Elusive press freedom: The Gambia, lessons on transition from dictatorship

by Saikou Jammeh

"There was dictatorship, yes, but at least at some point we had some good writers. Now, everyone is talking about press freedom. There is progress, much progress and commendable so, but what is the essence of press freedom if there is no good journalism?"

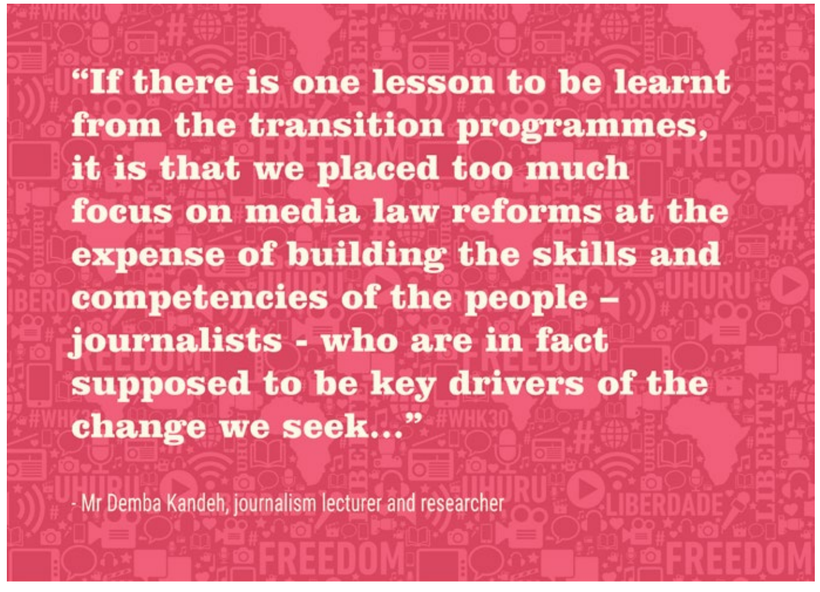
Abdul Hamdi Adiamoh is a journalist and publisher and knows better than most how it was like working as a journalist in a dictatorship. He was detained and put on trial four times in less than five years. At his fourth court saga, he was ordered to pay a fine of 100,000 Dalasis (approx. USD3100 at the time) for contempt of court. He announced temporary closure of his newspaper, Today, a leading national daily at the time and left into exile.

This was in 2012. Three years later, President Jammeh suffered a shocking election defeat. To Adiamoh, the change of government offered an opportunity to return home and re-launch.

"Sometimes I wonder if this [my addiction to journalism] is sorcery," he said. "But I am stuck with this trade."

President Yahya Jammeh was designated a press predator. Under his 22 years of rule (1994-2016), three journalists – Deyda Hydara, Chief Ebrima Manneh and Omar Barrow - died in killings linked to his government. Several dozens were subjected to torture. Some were maimed. One of them, Dodou Sanneh, never recovered fully and died a few years later.

When the media space became constricted, exile offered a way out and for some was the only option left to avoid either jail or serious harm, hence an exodus followed. By 2010, at least 20 % of practicing journalists had fled for their lives. Others were forced to change careers. Among these were the best educated and most experienced of media workers.



A new government, a ray of hope for the media

Following the change of government, the media groups and government led by Gambia Press Union (GPU) and Ministry of Information, respectively, developed a comprehensive strategic framework for media sector reforms. In line with the national democratic transition and transitional justice agenda, the process was supported by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), International Media Support (IMS) and Gambia Media Support (GAMES). The strategy focused on three main thematic areas – policy and legal reforms, institutional strengthening and capacity development.

There is so much to write home about. With support from its international partners and local allies, the GPU is now better placed to effectively advocate for press freedom and welfare of media workers. There is a Media Council of The Gambia - the first ever self-regulatory body. Media law reforms have been underway. Bills aimed at getting rid of claw-back clauses and a plethora of statutes that undermine press freedom standards are before the National Assembly consideration. An Access to Information Bill is under consideration.

Court rulings made against perpetrators of press freedom and related rights abuses in the previous administration have been executed, bringing hope that impunity will not be tolerated. The Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), an ongoing public inquiry into human rights violations that occurred between 1994 and 2016, has lifted the veil of secrecy on the press freedom violations, providing closure for family and colleagues. As the Commission looks set to wrap up in three months' time – June 2021, hopes are that that the recommendations will include reparations for victims, prosecution of perpetrators who 'bear the greatest responsibility' and reform of institutions and policies.

There is a proliferation of media houses. Newsrooms seem to have significantly shaken off political and editorial controls. Where there was only one television station - state-owned and state-controlled, now there are an additional five – all privately owned. Where broadcast of national news was the prerogative of the national radio, now there are dozens of radio stations broadcasting news and interpreting newspaper content in local languages. The transformation in the online sphere has been more impressive. Where almost all operators were operating from abroad, a significant number now have identifiable offices and reporters and are able to produce verifiable content.

However, the reforms are not as far-reaching as may be desired in some quarters. Mr Demba Kandeh, a journalism lecturer and researcher, said frustrations like the one Adiamoh is experiencing in getting suitably qualified candidates for his newspaper perhaps lies in the approach to the transition from dictatorship.

Photo: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Photo: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock.com

He said: "If there is one lesson to be learnt from the transition programmes, it is that we placed too much focus on media law reforms at the expense of building the skills and competencies of the people – journalists - who are in fact supposed to be key drivers of the change we seek.

"We forgot that there was a deliberate policy to suppress journalism education; and that those that are coming out of schools need time to make a difference. We did not focus on the immediate and medium term capacity needs of the media industry. That is why, for me, five years on, the more things change, the more they look the same especially with respect to the quality of journalism."

The record of attacks on journalists under the new government looks scary. Between 2017 and 2019, there were over fifteen (15) instances of physical assault on media workers by police and politicians. This is twice more than the last five(5) years under dictatorship. And as it was under President Jammeh, so it is under President Barrow: culture of impunity. One way or the other Gambia missed the full benefits of the political transition as political leaders are now focusing on power retention and not continuing governance reforms hence the renewed attacks on the media.

In 2019 alone, at least four (4)media practitioners were arrested and detained and two radio stations were unlawfully shut down.

The rejection of the 2020 Draft Constitution is a striking blow to hopes of meaningful democratic transition and transitional justice. The Draft was voted down by legislators aligned with the president. Providing much broader and stronger guarantees for fundamental rights and freedoms, if adopted, it would have been a strong basis for an entrenched culture of press freedom.

In the face of upcoming presidential elections in December 2021, attention is shifting away from media reforms that are overdue. With the 1997 Constitution – a relic of dictatorship - in place, slow pace of security reforms, occasional threats of use of anti-press laws against journalists by the presidency and deep-seated culture of impunity, press freedom in Africa's newest democracy, The Gambia, is hanging by the thread.

Saikou Jammeh is a Gambian journalist and former Secretary General of the Gambia Press Union. He currently works as the Executive Director of Open Media Centre, a non-profit media organisation that specialises in investigative journalism. Follow him on @saiks2.

Where are the women?

by Wanja Njuguna

When Susan B. Anthony made this statement about 128 years ago, few would have imagined that a century plus later, the issues women in media were dealing with then, would still be present today, albeit in varied ways.

"We need a daily paper edited and composed according to a woman's own thoughts, and not as a woman thinks a man wants her to think and write. As it is now, the men who control the finances control the paper. As long as we occupy our present position we are mentally and morally in the power of the men who engineer the finances. Horace Greely once said that women ought not to expect the same pay for work that men received. He advised women to go down into New Jersey, buy a parcel of ground, and go to raising strawberries. Then when they came up to New York with their strawberries the men wouldn't dare to offer them half price for their produce. I say, my journalistic sisters, that it is high time we were raising our own strawberries on our own land,"

– Susan B. Anthony, May 23, 1893, World's Congress of Representative Women.

In the last 30 years since the Windhoek Declaration, has anything changed - from numbers of women in the media, numbers of women in media management to numbers of female sources in news stories? Evidence from various sources point out that little has changed, progress has been slow and disappointing. From the Windhoek Declaration, 30 years ago to date, one can say that women representation in the media remains a matter of concern and critical for media transformation. African based and international campaigns continue to raise the issue of gender equality in media and in society in general, but the question now is what else can be done. Of importance to note is that international campaigns such as the *#Metoo movement (with a follow-up in journalism by media personality, Zainab Salbi who had a show in 2018 on PBS called #MeToo, now What?), #HeforShe, #EndFGM, #TimesUp, #One* and many others have re-energised calls for reduction of gender discrimination across various areas of life including the media.

Representation of women in the news worldwide

One of the latest media reports, "The Missing Perspectives of Women in News" by Luba Kassova released November 2020 provides trends in India, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK, and the US that reveals both a mix of progress and lack of it in representation of women in the newsroom and as news sources. The report shows that "women's representation in the news has flatlined (if not reversed) in the 21st century and that women are still marginalized in governance/leadership roles in news organizations". In the six (6) countries that were analysed, "less than 1% of news stories cover gender equality issues. In 2019, women's share of protagonists or of quoted experts/sources in the news was between 14% and 30% in the six countries".

According to the said report, men still dominate management in news media organisations. It is however comforting to note that "South Africa is a global leader in gender parity in the newsroom (49% of journalists are women), followed by the UK (47%) and the US (42-45%). Gender diversity shows some improvement in Kenya (42% in 2015 vs. 35% in 2009) and in India (28% in 2019 vs. 19% in 2011), but may be declining in Nigeria (24% in 2015 vs. 38% in 2011)." South Africa also leads in terms of the proportion of women in senior leadership roles in news organizations (42% of top editors in 2020 are women). Nigeria lags significantly behind in terms of senior leadership, with just 4% of women occupying senior editorial roles in leading newspapers.

While the above statistics may seem to show a mix of progress and alack of it, a 2011 report by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) - *Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media* , published exactly 20 years after *Windhoek Declaration* might provide a different picture on what should be celebrated today. The report covering 59 nations, representing all regions of the world reviewed 522 media companies (79 of these in the Southern Africa region) indicates that only 33.3% (a third) of the full-time journalism workforce were women.

From the extensive research, some of the key results that might help inform the current situation in many regions, are indications that 73% of the media management and news gathering positions in media houses in the countries surveyed, were held by men while only 27% were held by women. However, the discrepancies were lower in some regions. For example, in Eastern Europe, the figures were 44% and 43% while in Nordic Europe, it was 36% and 37% respectively. The situation was worse in the Asia and Oceania regions where women were barely 13% of those in senior management.

In countries such as South Africa, women exceeded men in senior management level with at least 79.5%. The identified glass ceilings for women in 20 of 59 nations studied where most invisible barriers were found, was in middle and senior management levels. Of importance to note then was that "Slightly more than half of the companies surveyed [had] an established company-wide policy on gender equity. These ranged from 16% of companies surveyed in Eastern Europe to 69% in Western Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa."

Fast forward to the current situation in newsrooms, a 2020 International Media Support (IMS report titled - "*Women in Media – Balance the Imbalance*") shows discrepancies worth noting. Amongst others, the report shows that "Only 4% of all newspapers, radio and TV reports worldwide show gender balance in news stories, while only 24% of news subjects – (sources) are female. The report further explains that "only 19% of 'experts' used in the stories are women while only 16% of women are subjects in news that relates to politics and government."

In the Southern Africa region, the statistics are both worrying and encouraging. Whereas there has been extensive progress in the newsrooms and in the representation of women in the media, so much more needs to be done for the balance of 'newsmakers' and 'news readers' for real change to be felt. In the most recent *SADC Gender Protocol Barometer (2018),* a Gender Links report highlights amongst others that, while there is a paltry increase in women sources in the media from 17% in the 2003 Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) to 20% in the 2015 GMMPS), the "region has seen an encouraging increase in the proportion of women in media management from 27% to 34%". The report which is extensively based on monitoring, evaluation and results framework, further provides good news on the impact of the enrolment of more female students into journalism and media studies.

A key issue raised by Kassova (2020) is how patriarchy negatively impacts journalism, noting how, "patriarchal norms are at the heart of the existing invisible barriers for women in news" while "men are still in the driving seat in news media organizations. Women form a minority of leaders, governors and top managers in news organizations in each of the countries examined. Globally, 26% of governance roles in news organizations were held by women in 2011. When the governing structure of a news organization is dominated by men, even a gender-balanced newsroom continues to exhibit male biases".

Most recently, in a Reuters Institute Oxford research based on *Women and leadership in the news media 2021: evidence from 12 markets* shows "only 22% of the 180 top editors across 240 global media brands are women. There was a 2% change in women top editors between 2020 and 2021. In 11 out of the 12 markets, the majority of the top editors are men. Again, there is positive news from South Africa where 62% of journalists and 60% of top editors are women.

Where to from here?

There has been progress worldwide in representation of women in the media as journalists, media managers and as sources. Africa has equally made some positive steps though a lot more still needs to be done. It is also important to celebrate and take lessons from success stories such as South Africa where there has been a huge jump in women in media management positions. There is equally a notable increase in the uptake of journalism studies by women. This however does not necessarily translate to an increase of women in newsrooms or managerial positions and that might be worth a research to identify the reason behind this discrepancy and advocacy actions pushing back on patriarchy are needed. Finally the overall societal attitudes to women in all facets of life need to change for a holistic change to be seen in the representation of women in media.

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whk30.webdevelopment.co.za/where-are-the-women

Letter to the editor from an African queer

by Kevin Mwachiro

Dear Editor,

I am an openly gay man based in Kenya. I am a proud African and to cite the words of the late South African President, Thabo Mbeki, *"I am born of a people who are heroes and heroines, of a people who would not tolerate oppression. I am of a nation that would not allow that fear of death, torture, imprisonment, exile or persecution should result in the perpetuation of injustice. I am an African. I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa."*

I want to ask why your newsroom disregards, misrepresents and misinforms your audience of heroes and heroines from this very continent that you and I call home. They are no different from you and me. Let me put it like this; I am no different from you; all I do is love differently but love nonetheless. Africa's LGBTIQ community are part and parcel of the very fabric of this continent.

Even as we commemorate 30 years of the Windhoek Declaration, we are still primarily marginalised by the media, unless we are portrayed in a negative or sensational light. We are often shamed, ridiculed beaten, or bloodied when we do get any coverage.

Even as I write to you, I am filled with immense pride at their legacy and the footprint they left within me.

As a member of the Kenyan fourth estate, I will admit I have seen some improvement in the coverage of the LGBTIQ community in some quarters of the local press. But there is so much more that needs to be done. We see more progress on digital platforms, but yet again, in the age of the internet, we are also seeing those same platforms being used for cyber-attacks, bullying and homophobia. Even as I write this, it saddens me that whenever there is a positive story about us, there are voices that are quick to silence and even threaten. You watch in silence as they negate any form of inclusivity, are discriminatory and devoid of progressive thinking, and it takes us several steps backwards.

I am an admirer of the African press. I recognise the role it has played in fighting colonialism and single-party rule, in promoting democracy and holding governments to account. There was a time here in Kenya that The Nation and Standard newspapers acted as the official opposition, speaking truth to power. When the Weekly Review, I remember as a child, would make its way home thanks to my father, I found it too wordy, with hardly any cartoons or content for a younger audience, but I remember how its then editor, Hillary Ngwe'no, was revered.

There were names like Bedan Mbugua, who edited *Beyond Magazine*, which highlighted the massive rigging in the 1988 general elections. Even during his time as editor at *The People,* they pushed the envelope in an era that is seen as seminal in Kenya's history. Gitobu Imanyara, and his magazine, *Nairobi Law Monthly,* is another name from that time when the pen challenged the sword.

... I feel that there are still individuals like me who are missing in the newsrooms, on screen, on the radio and in the press.

As you and I know, Africa of the 80s lived under an autocratic and heavy sword. But during this period, many journalists dared. They risked much to tell the truth.

Editor, I don't know whether you remember any of the names like Drum, Bona, Pace, True Love? Even as I write to you, I am filled with immense pride at their legacy and the footprint they left within me. *Drum* and *True Love* magazines were weekly staples (thanks to my elder brother), and it was within those magazines that matters of not just entertainment, fashion and lifestyle were covered, but they were brave enough to talk about sexual and relational issues. *Drum* had the Dear Dolly advice section at the back of the magazine that was a must-read.

Our queer stories are part and parcel of this continent.

There was the rare occasion when homosexuality came up, and for a young man like myself, my eyes were being opened to a different form of sexuality. Dolly's advice was far from PC, but I knew there were individuals who loved differently. I will forever remember the edition where one of our national goalkeepers rubbished claims about being homosexual. The mere fact that a taboo topic got into print was

revolutionary, and it wasn't about a foreigner. It was about one of our own. There were other Kenyan magazines like *Men Only,* which were ground-breaking in their content. The magazine bordered on the erotic with cartoons that had men and women in fine and solid African form that left very little to the imagination. You must remember this was all happening when my emotions were all over the place, and I had no one to ask for guidance or help. I was alone, and these mag-

Too often, we hear the call for the bottom line or the push to go viral rather than the call for justice and for what is good, right and fair.

azines offered me the opportunity to tantalise my pubescent mind.

Editor, please indulge me, for I know I have gone via Mogadishu and Goma to get from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam. But as we commemorate 30 years of the Windhoek Declaration, as a media practitioner and consumer, I feel that there are still individuals like me who are missing in the newsrooms, on screen, on the radio and in the press. Our digital media seems to be making more headway, even though we know affordable access to data is still a privilege for many, our narratives and realities are normalised and visualised.

It is on the web that our African queerness comes out of the closest. There are an increasing number of podcasts, vlogs, Instagram pages and Twitter profiles that celebrate a more sexually and gender diverse Africa. Podcasts like *Afroqueer,* produce insightful and thought provoking episodes. *The Rustin Times* from Nigeria, covers all matters LGBTIQ from across the continent, *Holaa! Africa* has established itself as the website that celebrates women and gender non-conforming individuals from the continent. These are just a few.

Editor, don't miss this 'Africa Rising' bus that is being driven by our younger people. I urge you to get back to educating, informing, and entertaining audiences and helping them see the various realities from our four corners. Too often, we hear the call for the bottom line or the push to go viral rather than the call for justice and for what is good, right and fair. The injustices that are taking place against LGBTIQ Africans need to be highlighted. Laws that still criminalise same-sex relations, and politicians who propagate lies against our own fellow Africans should be called out.

Our young people are seeing themselves in ways that they never thought was possible.

I call upon you to be on the right side of history. This continent is changing faster than we could have imagined. Our young people are seeing themselves in ways that they never thought was possible. Our queer stories are part and parcel of this continent. There are many LGBTIQ heroes, heroines or they-ines who are trailblazing in their own little way. They, too, need to be read about, seen, spoken of, normalised, and celebrated for who they are - Africans.

Yours truly
An African Queer

Kevin Mwachiro is a writer, journalist, podcaster and queer activist.

Women, culture, war and media: sticking out in Mogadishu

by Farhia Mohamed Kheyre

Somalia is experiencing a turbulent political process with seemingly no end in sight. The parliamentary and presidential elections, which were planned for December 2020 and February 2021 respectively did not take place, putting the country in a political vacuum that has often turned violent. Moreover, with the second wave of COVID-19 ravaging lives and the economy, drought and famine in some parts of the country such as the Gedo region, and Al-Shabaab's rampant attacks, has all placed Somalia in dire straits.

This political and humanitarian crisis has an impact on media freedoms.

Freedom of the media

Practicing journalism in Somalia is very dangerous. In many respects, journalists face threats and attacks from government officials, private individuals, and the Islamist armed group Al-Shabaab. Given the precarious times presented by COVID-19 pandemic, government continue to intimidate journalists dissuading any critical reporting often portrayed as anti-government and promoting terrorism. An amnesty 2020 report captures the daily lives of journalists in Somalia, saying, "We live in perpetual fear: Violations and abuses of freedom of expression in Somalia"[1]. The incumbent government regularly harasses, arrests journalists for posting critical comments on social media. All this leads to self-censorship as journalists stay clear of anything that may be deemed controversial. This self-censorship is often higher amongst female journalists who face far more discrimination and gender based and personal attacks simply because of their gender. Other journalists are bribed to support the government and its positions.

To make matters worse, cases of journalists' harassment and killing are not thoroughly investigated and perpetrators are rarely punished, even though the country established an office and appointed a special prosecutor for crimes against journalists in September 2020. The conditions of Somali journalists remain bleak. You work alone and can die alone, no one cares.

A Media law signed by President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo on 26 August 2020 has become a serious issue of concern for Somali journalists. Media activists describe the law as a draconian law and found various problematic provisions within the law that were vaguely worded and open to interpretation in ways that could be detrimental to media freedom and expression. The law does not only impose censorship and threatens critical reporting, it also forces journalists to be registered in a government database, failure to be registered can be used to ban or harass journalists in the course of duty, an unacceptable requirement.

Women, culture and journalism

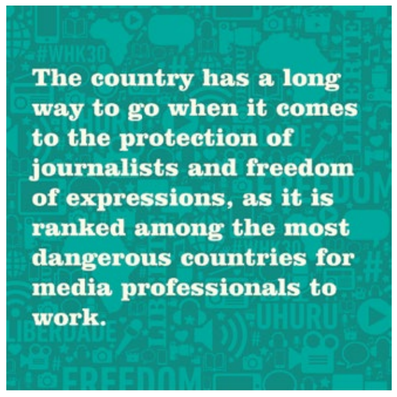
Female journalists face far greater challenges than their male counterparts.

Here are five of them.

First; culture is one of the chief impediments to female journalists' professional success. Somalia's patriarchal society makes it hard for young girls to pursue a journalism career. Somali parents believe that journalism is not an appropriate career for the girl child – in this case, the reference is given of how female journalists mingle with their male counterparts and even travel away from home to report stories from far places – and thus parents discourage their daughters from seeking careers in the media. In essence a woman who travels from home to work, and interacts with male journalists cannot be trusted and less likely to be married, hence shame the whole family. At least that's what is insinuated. As a female journalist and media rights activist, I have witnessed first-hand young female journalists changing their family names just to avoid being seen or heard from their families while working as journalists. The first point of silencing women journalists in Somalia is to deny them an identity, they have to work under anonymity to avoid an angry family. Even as female journalists can work using false names, such creative ways of survival are often cut short when one gets married. Culturally very few Somali men want their wives or girlfriends to work as journalists, so marriage often comes with a career-end for Somali women journalists. For the country to attract talented young female journalists, such stereotypes and harsh culture towards them must change.

Second; security is another key concern as to why competent young girls do not want to join the media. Many journalists, including females have lost their lives reporting on issues that are of utmost interest to the public. Al-Shabaab is the main perpetrator behind many of those killings. For instance, on 1 March 2021, a freelance journalist Jamal Farah Adan was killed in Galkayo city, in the Somali state of Puntland. This is the first reported case of a journalist being killed this year (2021), while many others have been killed in the past. It is this kind of violence that frustrate aspiring female journalists from following their dreams.

Third; Somali female journalists are not well paid and they are under-represented in senior media management positions. Regardless of qualifications, media owners would rather hire a less qualified man than appoint a qualified woman to a management position. Many female journalists are leaving media houses for other jobs in government or private business sectors where opportunities for professional growth are much better.



Fourth, sexual harassment is another factor that make skilled female journalists flee from media houses. Many also fear to publicly share their stories for fear of reprisals. Gender Based Violence (GBV) against female journalists in Somalia needs critical investigation. Anecdotal evidences suggest that more needs to be done by media directors and editors in curbing such despicable behaviour in newsrooms. While culturally conservative, women journalists face sexually suggestive talk; are also sexually harassed through unwanted touching and coerced into intimate relations to protect their jobs. This I have witnessed and have experienced as a journalist. The need for GBV awareness in Somali newsrooms cannot be overemphasised.

Fifth, low skills and lack of training opportunities. Journalism is a field in transition. It has been affected by the latest technological development and it has to adapt fast. Many Somali female journalists have no training background in journalism, media or creative industries; they joined the field with degrees in management or social sciences. Because of cultural barriers, many professional training opportunities are dominated by male journalists even those conducted by progressive development partners. Somali women journalists are at the low end of the packing order in training and have failed to get promoted because of low skills and patriarchy.

Advocacy and Somali female journalists' rights

My colleagues and I established Somali Women Journalists (SWJO) in 2013 solely to address the plight of female journalists mentioned above. SWJO has 215 members drawn from all regions of Somalia and the diaspora. Our aim is to continue sticking out as female journalists, pushing back against both industry and cultural prejudices.

Since SWJO inception, we have embarked on training female journalists on a range of subjects including ethical journalism, safety and reporting in hostile situations, digital storytelling, writing for TV and Radio, gender equality and many others.

We have collaborated with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), United States of America's Embassy in Somalia and International Media Support (IMS) – FOJO to build capacity for female journalists.

One of the major achievements to date is the drafting of the Gender Respect Declarations supported by International Media Support (IMS) – FOJO. The Gender Respect Declarations addresses issues of female journalists' recruitment, promotion, remuneration, leave, elimination of all forms of violence and sexual harassment.

So far, 47 media houses in Mogadishu and the regions, and media rights organizations such Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ) and Somali Media Associations (SOMA) have signed the declaration.

Since signing the declaration, many media houses have taken actions that created a positive change, somewhat restoring the hope of the female journalists and encouraging them to stand for their rights.

Also, some of the notable actions taken by the media organisations in this regard include; promotion of female journalists, provision of educational advancement and professional development to all employees, especially female journalists, gender equitable recruitment, adoption of policies that address sexual harassment and violence. Some also established gender departments led by a woman, which deal with female specific issues in male dominated media houses. Progress is low but we have taken the first step and we can only move forward.

Windhoek Declaration

As we celebrate 30 years of the Windhoek Declaration on 3 May 2021, all I hope for is a free, independent and pluralistic media in Somalia. I call upon the Federal Government of Somalia and its federal member states to adopt and uphold the principles enshrined in the declaration. The country has a long way to go when it comes to the protection of journalists and freedom of expressions, as it is ranked among the most dangerous countries for media professionals to work. This image can be changed when authorities put in place stringent mechanisms to investigate and prosecute individuals behind the killings and intimidation of journalists. Somali female journalists should be afforded equal rights and opportunities like their male counterparts. The government and international partners should give more support in building the capacity of the Somali journalists, particularly female journalists in the areas of online media, human rights, freedom of expressions and ethical journalism. This is my hope towards the upliftment of the quality of journalism in Somalia. Regardless we remain committed as the few women journalists to practice, our presence brings hope to young girls who want to be journalists.

Farhia Mohamed Kheyre is a journalist and Chairperson of Somali Women Journalists Organization (SWJO)

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Rejecting the 'politics of respectability'

Ushering in a new era for the youth

by Bertha Tobias

It's a night out with my girls. We're having a great time, catching up, living and vibing out to Saweetie's Tap In. I record our rapping along to the part which states "lil waist, fat a**, b**** tap in." I log on to Instagram, ready to share with the world what a great time I'm having. Instead of clicking the green button to share, I second-guess what I'm about to put out and decide against it. I decide that it doesn't add significant value to the world, that it promotes alcoholism and recklessness, but more importantly, that it's not "inspiring."

Disappointingly, I end up making the decision to self-censor not only because the content is "not of substance," but also because I don't know how to explain why I enjoy music about women who love money and themselves. The self-policing which I am constantly fighting is rooted in the idea that, as a "promising young woman," my best bet is to package myself as a one-dimensional flat character with no particularly colourful personality traits. To package myself as having little to no sexual prowess, no power ambitions, no roughness, no flaws, no mindless interests like partying and essentially, no fullness. Luckily, I get to draw from the strength of young women who are increasingly proud of their dynamic fullness. That is, to outdated and constricting notions of respectability, young women have said, "no more".

...as a "promising young woman," my best bet is to package myself as a one-dimensional flat character with no particularly colourful personality traits.

Young people and specifically young women all over the world are increasingly rejecting the politics of respectability: the notion that there are specific, acceptable forms of expression which are necessary in order for one to send the message that they are decent, noble and/or respectable.

More specifically, the politics of respectability is usually and primarily applied to women. It speaks to the self-censoring which occurs in the pursuit to "be taken more seriously" in the world. Ordinarily, it means refraining from sharing sexually explicit content, or content which alludes to alcohol, drugs or anything else which is deemed "uncultured" or "unrefined." In essence, respectability politics serves to gag the fullness of our humanity. It compels us to trade our fullness for "respect."

In recent years, young women have become actively engaged in the deconstruction of the restrictive parameters which constitute desirable respectability. The pushback by young women against emulations of one-dimensionality has various manifestations. It is most present in music and other works of art and cultural expression. Perhaps the best case study of defiance of respectability is the famous hit "WAP" by American rap stars Meg Thee Stallion and Cardi B. The track, which begins with "certified freak, 7 days a week, wet a** p***y, make that pullout game weak," has become a crucial tool in the rebellion against the modesty which women are often encouraged to embody.

In essence, respectability politics serves to gag the fullness of our humanity. It compels us to trade our fullness for "respect."

Inviting great uproar, the track opens up a wider conversation not only about respectability politics, but also about why the standards of respectability are generally different for men and women. That is, it begs the question as to why there is a widespread acceptance of generally explicit language by male artists, like Ty Dolla Sign's "You can ride my face until you're drippin' cum" in his track *Or Nah*, or Pop Smoke's "Every time I f***, she call me daddy. My lil' mama nasty I see the p**** through the panties," in his hit *Mood Swings*, but God forbid two black, grown women acknowledge their reproductive and sexual freedom.

WAP has been referred to as setting a bad example for young women and as "sheer savagery." Effectively, to many, it has rendered the black, female artists as less worthy of respect.

The policing which characterises the respectability politics of women is informed by a distinct form of misogyny which loudly implies that "a sexual" woman is mutually and fundamentally exclusive from an intelligent woman.

Importantly, aspirations at respectability are generally more common among black women. The hyper-sexualization of black women has resulted in the excessive collective attempt to constantly prove that we are respectable. The policing which characterises the respectability politics of women is informed by a distinct form of misogyny which loudly implies that "a sexual" woman is mutually and fundamentally exclusive from an intelligent woman. To that effect, young women are increasingly using their bodies as weapons to fight respectability and deconstruct the notion altogether.

For example, Chloe Bailey, actress and singer, was one of the most recent victims of policing attempts rooted in respectability. Bailey, who was attacked on social media after posting sexually explicit content, responded to internet trolls by sharing even more explicit content. That, ladies and gentlemen, is how you take out the trash! Chloe, like most young women, is actively reclaiming her power, taking ownership of her body and speaking truth to the power of age-old notions of respectability.

In conclusion, both young men and women are taking to social media to revolutionise dialogue and its accompanying methodology. Young people are increasingly dismissive of the ceremonious formalities which generally characterise dialogue as introduced to us by preceding generations. Using the immediacy which characterizes the fundamental nature of social media platforms, young people are "@ing" public leaders and speaking truth to power on a regular, sustained basis. They are defying the norms of communication as necessarily synonymous with norms of respectability.

In Namibia, young people are twerking in front of police officers at protests while shouting "do your job or lose your job." At surface level, in a post-conflict society with deep-rooted and bizarre social power dynamics, the action is "disrespectful." To young people, it's a powerful way of blurring the lines which often interfere with substantial and transparent discourse. Young people are consciously disregarding social embellishments in the form of "civilized" etiquette. The action speaks loudly to the fact that young people, in Namibia and beyond, are perceptive and firm in their rejection of potentially blinding respectability politics.

Young people are consciously disregarding social embellishments in the form of "civilized" etiquette.

Importantly, the solution is not to reject that discourse should be respectful. However, the solution is to invent a kind of discourse which doesn't require the resignation of individual fullness to be deemed as worthy of having something meaningful to contribute to the world.

Bertha Tobias is a 20-year old International Relations and Economics undergraduate student. She currently serves as Namibia's Youth Charter Representative for the Office of the African Union Youth Envoy. A fellow of the Apolitical Academy, she has served at the frontlines of #ShutItAllDown, a Namibian national protest movement against sexual violence with an estimated combined social and non-social reach of 11 million. Her youth professional development programme has been awarded the Go Make A Difference grant." Find her at @BerthaJTobias

From cyclones to terrorism: Separating truth from error in Mozambique

by Fernando Gonçalves

Mozambique has largely been seen as one of the few in Africa that had made a break with the continent's checkered past, having embraced a multiparty system of democracy anchored on the values of freedom and liberty.

In 1990, the country's then one-party national assembly adopted a new constitution enshrining the principles of regular democratic elections, freedom of expression and media freedom. This was followed by the adoption of the Press Law in August 1991, incorporating some of the most critical provisions of a free press and access to information.

A child plays on top of a burnt out motorcycle after insurgents ransacked a whole village in Northern Mozambique.

In 1994, the country held its first multiparty elections, which also marked the end of a brutal 16-year war between the government and the former Renamo rebels. After attempts to amplify the freedoms enshrined in the 1990 constitution failed under the first multiparty parliament, it finally happened years later. The 2004 Constitution, which still remains in force, is widely seen as a great achievement and a model of a modern liberal state.

"All citizens have the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the press, as well as the right to information," the constitution highlighted in article 48, further stating in paragraph 5 of the same article, that "the state guarantees independence of the public sector media, as well as the independence of journalists in relation to the government, the administration and other political interests".

With its progressive political, economic and social agenda, Mozambique was then hailed as a rare example of successful post-war reconciliation, reconstruction and development. Western donors and international financial institutions competed to help the country rebuild its shattered economy and infrastructure, develop its democratic model and restore its social fabric. Freedom of expression was taken for granted, as private newspapers, radio and television stations, as well as community media flourished.

Then the biggest financial scandal in the country's history was uncovered in 2015. In great part due to the prospects of becoming a major offshore natural gas producer and exporter, Mozambique had to rapidly develop a maritime security framework. And rather than bringing in expertise from elsewhere, the government of then President Armando Guebuza opted for a do-it-yourself approach.

To achieve its objective, between 2012 and 2013 the government established three (3) independent, but interrelated companies, all under the command of the country's national intelligence agency, SISE. One of the companies, EMATUM, would be a tuna fishing company with its own fleet of fishing boats; another company, PROINDICUS, would provide maritime surveillance and security, and MAM would develop shipyard facilities for building and maintaining the fishing trolleys or any other maritime equipment.

The entire project was estimated at about U$2.4 billion, with the funds being secured through commercial and syndicated loans that involved Credit Suisse and Russia's VTB Capital. All three loans (2 with Credit Suisse and 1 with VTB) were guaranteed by the state.

News about the scandal started filtering in early 2015, with the government always denying that there was anything irregular. Local media outlets that tried to further investigate the consistent reports coming mainly out of the United States were publicly chastised by government officials and ruling party bureaucrats as unpatriotic and servile to foreign interests bent on discrediting the country and its leadership.

This is also the time when attempts at suppressing the media started being more brazen. An academic and media commentator, José Macuane, was kidnapped and assaulted in broad day light by unknown assailants believed to be state security operators. The message was meant to be loud and clear; to silence any future public debate about the issue of the hidden debts.

A subsequent report funded by the Swedish government revealed the true extent of the scandal, and why the state security apparatus was being used to suppress any debate. The main contractor, Privinvest, a shipbuilding group based in the United Arab Emirates, had used a significant portion of the proceeds from the loans to bribe top Mozambican government officials while supplying substandard equipment. One of those involved was former finance minister Manuel Chang, who served under President Guebuza for both of his two five-year presidential terms. Chang is currently in a South African jail, awaiting a decision on whether to extradite him to the United States, where most of the bondholders for the scandalous loans initiated legal proceedings.

Further 18 individuals are awaiting trial in Mozambique in connection with their role in the fraud, including Gregório Leão, the former head of the country's spy agency, and his economic intelligence director, António Carlos do Rosário, who also headed the three (3) companies related to the project.

Terrorism in the North

As if the situation was not bad enough, what was to come later was even more catastrophic. By early October 2017, when Islamist-linked terrorists launched their war in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, official media bushing had become the norm in Mozambique. The government responded to the events happening in the north with an indiscriminate use of force that resulted in human rights violations.

To conceal these violations, the security forces adopted a strategy of turning Cabo Delgado into an off limits region, making it clear that journalists were not welcome in the province.

In December 2018, Estacios Valoi, a local journalist, in the company of David Matsinhe, a researcher working for Amnesty International, were detained without any explanation for three (3) days in Macomia District, with their equipment being taken away from them.

On 5th January 2019, another journalist, Amade Abubacar, was arrested by the security forces as he covered the arrival of a group of civilians who had been uprooted from their village, which had come under attack by the terrorists. Abubacar was taken to military barracks in Mueda District, some 200 kilometres away, where he was tortured, before being brought to the local Prosecutor's Office five (5) days later to face charges of espionage, together with his colleague Germano Adriano. They are still awaiting trial, more than two (2) years later.

On 7th April 2020, another journalist, Ibraimo Mbaruco, this time from a community radio station in the district of Palma, was kidnapped in what is widely believed to have been an officially sanctioned operation. He has not been seen ever since.

Cracking down on the media

As new and more vibrant media outlets came into existence, partly as a result of the growth in internet and social media usage, the government finds itself in a situation that makes it difficult to control the flow of information.

In an apparent attempt to confront the situation, in 2018 the government announced a whole set of new fees that local media houses and foreign correspondents would be required to pay in order to obtain or renew their licenses or accreditations. The fees were so exorbitant that most media houses would effectively cease to operate, with the country being shut from the rest of the world.

In response, media freedom advocacy organizations such as MISA-Mozambique led a collective effort to have the Constitutional Council declare the measures unconstitutional. Anticipating defeat, the government was forced to withdraw the decision almost one year later.

But withdrawing was just a strategic retreat; by no means it meant giving up. In December 2020, Cabinet submitted to Parliament a bill that seeks to replace the existing Media Law, which has been in force since 1991.

Media practitioners in Mozambique believe that if passed into law, the bill will tighten government control of the media, while reversing thirty years of freedom and democracy in the country.

"I believe the government is trying to capture the media and journalists, and use them to its own ends," says Refinaldo Chilengue, proprietor and editor of Redactor, a web-based publication. Chilengue points at examples of political interference even in the private media, saying that "those who rule politically are the same as those who wield economic power to force the media to bend backwards".

The proposed bill gives powers to the government to appoint the regulator and to decide who should be a practicing journalist. It has also removed a number of provisions in the current law which guarantee independence for media professionals working for the public sector media.

An already deteriorating political situation in Mozambique has been made worse due to Islamist-linked insurgency in the North.

If adopted as proposed, these and other provisions of the bill could in future trigger a constitutional challenge, since most of them are in conflict with the current constitution.

Observing that the country is facing "very dangerous prospects as a result of the policing of critical thinking", investigative journalist Luís Nhachote says that if adopted, "this Bill will take us backwards in terms of the gains we had made a long time ago with a great deal of sacrifices".

Fernando Goncalves is Editor of Mozambique's leading weekly newspaper, Savanna.

'Denials don't reach the point where rumours go'

… the objective limits of fact-checking

by Samba Dialimpa Badji

In August 2009, a Senegalese activist, popular on social networks, shared a photomontage on Twitter and Facebook comparing the costs of two sports facilities – one in Kigali, Rwanda (Kigali Arena) and the other in Dakar, Senegal (Dakar Arena). They had been built by the same company but he indicated that Kigali Arena cost at least 10 times less than the Dakar Arena, yet there was only a 5000 seat difference between the two. However, the author did not provide a source or sources for these figures.

… denials do not reach the point where rumours go. The saying reinforces the reality that fact-checking is always a step behind false information.

Some Internet users saw in this price difference the proof of mismanagement of public funds in Senegal, while others suspected the overpricing was a way to divert money. However at no time did anyone ask whether the information was correct.

This caught Africa Check's attention. It was not only about the photomontage, but also the framing of the tweet which was concerning and a little accusatory, probably in order to provoke a certain reaction from the public. Our curiosity was further piqued by the comments on social networks.

This prompted us to investigate.

it took us two days to finish our research and publish our article. Very often this process takes weeks, even a month or more. But two days is already too long to effectively combat the spread of false information.

With documents obtained from the building company, Africa Check's research determined that the Kigali Arena cost around 61 billion CFA francs, which was 5 billion CFA francs less than Dakar arena. This directly contradicted the popular activist's social media claims.

Africa Check's resultant article began with the original statement and the context in which it had occurred. We outlined the research and various sources consulted, compared the sources, presenting the evidence and drew a conclusion. When the article was published on our website, we shared it on Twitter and contacted the person who shared the photomontage on the same platform, to let him know the conclusions of our research in the hope of seeing it rectified. But in similar fashion to when we first contacted him to identify his source, he failed to react to our request. And the (false) photomontage remains unchanged on his Twitter profile.

Although our article was shared by some online users, mainly those who know Africa Check, others questioned the seriousness of our work. We wondered why a documented article, with material evidence, and which meets precise standards, would arouse more suspicion than the original misleading and false photomontage which was unverified.

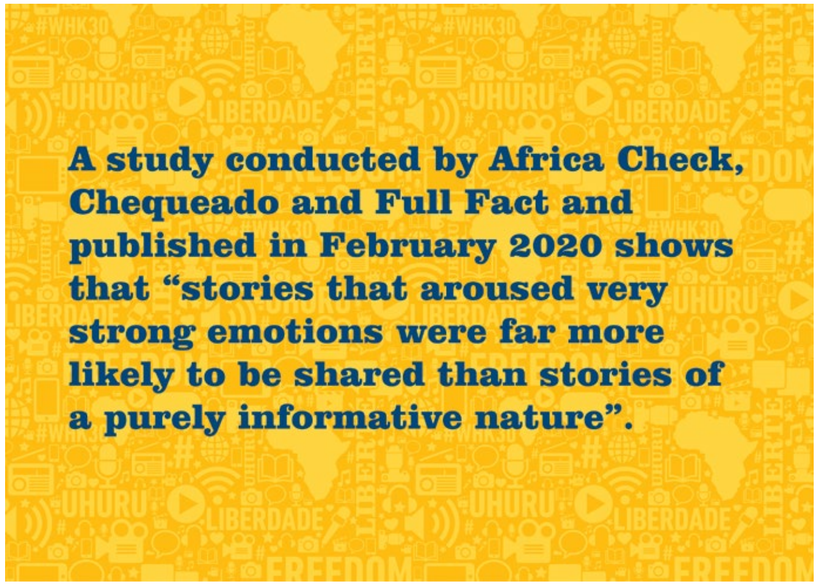
The example cited above is perfectly summarised by the Senegalese journalist, Babacar Ndaw Faye, who, quoting a Wolof (the most widely spoken language in Senegal) proverb, emphasised that "denials do not reach the point where rumours go". The saying reinforces the reality that fact-checking is always a step behind false information.

As Eric Mugendi, programme manager for East Africa at Meedan, a technology non-profit that builds software and initiatives to strengthen global journalism, points out: although fact-checking is a major tool in the fight against disinformation, it faces limits when it comes to preventing the spread of false information. For example "false information can be produced in one country and spread in another country within a very short time, and the fact-checks that respond to this false information may not reach everyone who is exposed to it".

Among the limitations, he points out that producing a fact-checked article requires time whereas false information can be created and shared on different platforms in a matter of seconds.

Mamadou Ndiaye, PhD in Communication and Director of CESTI, the school of journalism at the University of Dakar, emphasises that "disinformation will always be one step ahead because fact-checking seems to be an afterthought."

Another factor facilitating the spread of disinformation could be the public's growing distrust of the media. Digital News Report 2019 indicates that less than half (49%) of the population worldwide agree that they trust the news media they themselves use. This erosion of trust may also explain why some people are more likely to pay attention to false information than that which is delivered by the mainstream media, assuming that journalists are hiding the truth or even lying to them.



A study published in March 2018 in the journal Science that examined the trajectories of 126,000 stories, tweeted by about 3 million people more than 4.5 million times, revealed that the lie was spreading much faster and more widely than the truth. One of the reasons for this, is that false information is often structured in a way that evokes emotions and is designed to provoke certain reactions by relying on the virality facilitated by social network algorithms.

False information is often structured in a way that evokes emotions and is designed to provoke certain reactions by relying on the virality facilitated by social network algorithms.

A study conducted by Africa Check, Chequeado and Full Fact and published in February 2020 shows that "stories that aroused very strong emotions were far more likely to be shared than stories of a purely informative nature". In other words, emotional responsiveness preceded other factors: such as the usefulness of the content, the timing of the publication, and the reputation of the website.

Many cultural and social factors can significantly influence the impact of misinformation. Among these, Dr Sahite Gaye, teacher and researcher in information and communication sciences at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar, highlights the fact that Internet users often tend to retain only "those elements and details of a fact that seem to conform to their norms, values, beliefs and even prejudices".

Fortunately, the fight against disinformation is not limited to fact-checking. For almost two years, Africa Check has also initiated a media and information education campaign to teach the public to question the content they access on the different platforms in order to avoid falling into the trap of disinformation. It is also a question of providing the public with certain easy-to-use tools to verify for themselves. Serious studies need to be undertaken to get a clear picture of the impact of media literacy on disinformation, but initial feedback from Africa Check's experience with radio and WhatsApp use is encouraging. However, we do not feel that that the feedback is sufficient to draw any conclusions.

Dr Sahite Gaye suggests that "strategies should focus on what he calls "disinformation laboratories", such as messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram) and discussion groups on Facebook. According to him, "depending on whether one is alone or in a group, whether one is with family or friends, the message is perceived differently". And the Internet user often favors his "reference group", he says.

Africa Check is using the messaging application WhatsApp to produce content in national languages while collaborating with radio stations to offer fact-checking and literacy programs that reach a wider audience. It is not only a question of verifying and correcting false information already in circulation, but also drawing the attention of the public to help it avoid to fall in the trap of disinformation so it can contribute to limit the spread of falsehoods.

Samba Dialimpa Badji is a Senegalese journalist with 20 years of experience in print, radio and online journalism.

Media, Technology and Audiences: Africa's Media in the Digital Age

by Admire Mare

Since the signing of the historic Windhoek Declaration 30 years ago, the media in Africa has undergone transformative changes at various levels including, production, distribution, consumption and business models. These changes have shifted journalistic practice and recalibrated the ways in which audiences interact with news content.

This oft-cited 'revolutionary' process, which began to take shape in the 1990s, has been accompanied by rapid integration of digital media technologies into the newsroom, at a broader level and into the news making process at a very specific level. In fact, when the Declaration was ratified, analogue was the dominant way of news transmission.

At that time, computers were still a distant dream. Mobile phones were not yet a reality then. Websites were just beginning to find their way into the operations of organisations. Blogs were not in vogue. Social media was not even part of the popular lexicon. News was predominantly consumed via newspapers, radio, television, and magazines.

Starting with the slow but impactful domestication of the mobile phone and short message services in the late 1990s, the media in Africa have gone down and under in their quest to broaden and diversify toolkits necessary for news production and distribution. They also moved with speed to digitise news distribution through launching attractive websites and mobi-sites.

Some media organisations have launched value-added services structured around the SMS. At the height of the popularity of the mobile phone as a status symbol and communicative device, SMS-based news and information alerts are driving services such as breaking news, news headlines, sports fixtures and scores. While notifications on stock prices, weather, traffic and horoscopes also became the norm.

Adoption and Innovation

Despite Africa being one of the least connected places on earth, the media have adapted and innovated around these structural challenges. Surprisingly, it's the mobile phone that is credited for transforming the practice of journalism in Africa. The mobile phone has been harnessed in ways that has forced scholars to rethink the concept of the digital divide. It has enabled journalists, editors and audiences to interact and collaborate in the news making processes in complex but interesting ways.

In most African newsrooms, the so-called 'digital revolution' has disrupted the status quo to an extent that journalists and media managers have been forced to adapt to new processes of story-telling and to rethink business strategies in order to remain competitive. Others have introduced multimedia content as a way of 'following' their audiences who are increasingly migrating online in search of diverse, personalised and 'free' lunch.

Many media organisations in Africa have experimented with mobile and digital first strategies, creatively integrating social media platforms into the news making cycle. These innovative strategies included breaking news being published online first before it's eventually repurposed for 'Day 2 journalism'. While some have managed to monetise their online media products, taming the online jungle has been found a difficult goal.

Studies across African Newsrooms, have shown adopted digital technologies, particularly mobile phones, social media platforms and wireless Internet as instruments through which newsrooms can quickly collect, package, and disseminate information. Thus, digital media technologies' inherent properties have presented unprecedented flexibility in the professional communicative practices of editors and journalists in African newsrooms.

Instead of continuing with a business as usual approach, other organisations have recruited online/digital media editors particularly with 'taming the online jungle' and packaging multimedia content for a 'global' audience. The recruitment of multimedia journalists in newsrooms was initially met with resistance as the 'old guard' fought tooth and nail to preserve the status quo. Even the shift from the typewriter to the modern computer was not easy to effect in most African newsrooms.

As a result, since the early 2000s, the media ecology in Africa has undergone seismic changes. Gone are the days where news-making processes were dominated by manual processes. With audiences preferring to consume media products in digital formats, media organisations in Africa have had to introduce mobile news, social media updates, online newspapers, Facebook live broadcasting and Twitter news bites. For instance, news organisations such as Nation Media Group (Kenya), Mail and Guardian (SA & Zimbabwe), Media 24 (South Africa), Alpha Media Holdings (Zimbabwe) and others have led the way in coming up with innovative digital strategies and products.

'Analytic turn' in Journalism

The realisation that online content would cater for a global audience has forced media organisations to shift from 'hyperlocal' news towards content that could attract clicks, views, shares and retweets by global citizens in an increasingly interconnected world. In most cases, media organisations in Africa began to package news that would 'interest the public' rather than in the 'public interest'.

Buoyed by the strategic use of editorial analytics and metrics, online or digital media editors in African newsrooms have started to religiously monitor and evaluate the performance of their online stories. This 'analytic turn' in newsrooms meant that news as an industrial product became measurable and quantifiable.

In some news organisations, these measurement techniques have transformed the ways in which journalists understand their audiences and assess the performance of their content. Besides measuring the performance of news stories, these technological strategies have been utilized to monitor and evaluate reader engagement, hence helping shaping the next content. In this era of 'participatory journalism', audiences have become part of the news making cycle rather than simple end- users waiting for a 'product' produced and packaged by journalists.

Thus, user-generated content has become an integral part of modern newsrooms as eyewitness accounts and citizen journalists output compliments news articles produced by professional journalists.

Analytic tools like Chartbeat, Orphan and Lantern have been instrumental in the measurement of site visits or page views, depth of scroll, time spent on page, traffic source and device breakdown. This feeds into the overall company-wide engagement metrics that measure the frequency of visits, time spent reading, and the volume of articles read. They also enable news organisations to engage in digital listening, monitoring, and strategy refinement.

The digital divide and audiences

Although the creative appropriation of technologies in African newsrooms have opened up new spaces for news production and distribution, it is important to note that the issue of the digital divide continues to affect online news consumption. Many of those with access to digital media technologies, devices and data are based in urban areas and the diaspora. This means that those in the rural areas are still very underserved by online news outlets, a scenario which pushes them back to rely on radio as a key source of news and information. Furthermore, lack of access to reliable electricity, weak network signals and limited financial muscle skews online news consumption in favour of those who are connected to the Internet.

In the past, mobile news services through short message services (SMS) have proved effective in reaching the rural areas. However, the slow death of the SMS, has seen media organisations shifting their attention to website and social media updates. In some contexts, WhatsApp and TikTok now provide an important outlet to distribute online news.

However, the big challenge still remains, which is related to how to monetise content distributed through mobile instant messaging sites. Be that as it may, a silver lining is that; at the height of the fast-spreading coronavirus pandemic, media organisations in Africa have scaled up their distribution of PDF versions of their newspapers through WhatsApp, emails and specific online apps like Flip.

While these innovative distribution mechanisms have assisted some African media organizations to grow their online audiences, it is too early to conclude in terms of their impact on monetization strategies.

Given the uneven socio-economic development in Africa, access to information and news remains a key challenge for people living in underserved communities such as rural areas and most urban periphery. These communities do not have access, not only to online news portals but are also largely cut off from traditional media channels such as newspapers, radio and television. With their urban and youthful audiences changing the ways of consuming information, the media in Africa have attempted to keep pace with the changes, although this shift to online platforms further exacerbated the uneven access to information and news between those in urban and rural areas.

Looking into the future

It is clear that the media ecology in Africa has changed over the last 30 years. Whilst the issues of press freedom and safety of journalists remain precarious in some jurisdictions, the best way to sum up the situation is to use the "glass full, glass half empty" metaphor.

Over the past three decades, media in Africa have harnessed the full potential of digital media technologies even though most of them are still struggling to address the financial sustainability issues that have accompanied the 'digital revolution'. The migration from offline to online publications has not necessarily been accompanied by financial rewards.

Advertisers have been reluctant to follow media audiences online thereby paralysing the operations of some media organisations. In cases, where advertisers have embraced online ads, they have chosen to advertise with Facebook, Google, Twitter, YouTube and other big platform companies directly. This has complicated the business models of most African media organisations.

With Internet and social media penetration rates continuing to improve in Africa, there is hope for retaining and growing audiences willing to consume content online. The big question however is: how do the media organisations on the continent harness these people into monetisable audiences? An answer to this pertinent question will require thinking outside the box. Cutting and pasting models from the global North might not necessarily work because of the different socio-economic and cultural factors at play. Media managers ought to know their audiences, preferences, demographics, lifestyles and socio-economic statuses in order to produce and distribute relevant content.

Media audiences are no longer an afterthought in the news making cycle, they have become a crucial cog in the news production equation that ought to be consulted, listened to and allowed to participate through various invented and invited spaces of news engagement like readers comment section, social media accounts, tweets and comments. With the uptake of digital technologies having been escalated by the coronavirus global pandemic, it is up to media organizations in Africa to find relevant, context-specific and appropriate mechanisms to build productive and rewarding relationships with their audiences.

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Caught At The Government and Platform Content Regulation Crossroad

by Juliet Nanfuka

States and social media platforms are increasingly taking up the role of content gatekeeper. Where does this leave content creators in countries where both parties have made examples of users?

Through its safeguard measures, the Windhoek Declaration had visualized the potential of the future of Africa's media landscape, as moving away from legacy media, monopolies, and state control. The Declaration served as a beacon of hope for the establishment and maintenance of a media that was pluralistic, independent, and free, with the almost prophetic recognition that multiparty democracies across Africa would "provide the climate in which an independent and pluralistic press could emerge".

Both the media landscape and internet access in Africa would go on to grow in tandem, accompanied by shifts in how news is gathered and disseminated and bringing with it an influx of new online content creators, and increasing questions on how to adapt, remain relevant and authoritative in the face of new regulations and gatekeepers.

For many countries in Africa, the state often played the role of gatekeeper, such as during apartheid-era censorship in South Africa which also affected countries like Namibia. Or the regulation was advanced through the monopoly of state-run media houses. As the media and technology landscape has dramatically evolved, so have the rules of the media – especially those pertaining to regulation.

As the dependency on social platforms as a means of communicating, expressing themselves, building and maintaining relationships grows – so does their power.

Today, the media is caught in a content regulation power struggle between governments and social media intermediaries.

While circling the age-old problems of harmful content, unlawful content, misinformation, and disinformation, governments have exploited these concerns to their benefit through the introduction of regressive laws and regulations which have often gone against the spirit of press freedom, freedom of expression, access to information, and media independence.

In a move described by critics as a drive to suppress and silence independent news sources, Egypt introduced a law in 2018, that would regard social media accounts and blogs with more than 5,000 followers as media outlets. This description provides the authorities an avenue to control the content that both citizens and the media can distribute – ultimately a form of fuelling self-censorship and limiting freedom of expression and access to information.

In October 2020, the Lesotho government proposed a regulation that would require individuals with more than 100 followers on social media platforms to register with authorities and be treated as internet broadcasters. These moves bear semblance to the Uganda and Tanzania online content regulations which also serve to monitor and control content producers. Meanwhile, Nigeria's "Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill, 2019" will allow the government to block internet access or block specific social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter at its own discretion.

As the dependency on social platforms as a means of communication, free expression, building and maintaining relationships grows – so does their power. In addition navigating state online content regulations, content creators –now have to contend with platforms playing the role of online content gatekeepers. Alongside this power is considerable influence, which in similarity to the government, moves to control information and is increasingly shaping online narratives.

When in 2019, Facebook deactivated the accounts of at least 60 activists in Tunisia, it passed it off as "a technical error" stating: "we recently removed a small number of profiles, which have now been restored. We were not trying to limit anyone's ability to post or express themselves, and apologise for any inconvenience this has caused." Then in 2021, there were reports of an increased state initiated crackdown on social media activists who shared critical opinions about the government online and called for protests.

In Uganda, ahead of the January 13, 2021 election, Facebook suspended the accounts of a number of government officials for what it described as Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) aimed at manipulating public debate ahead of key elections. A similar stance was taken by Twitter who also suspended accounts targeting the election. The Ugandan government immediately responded by blocking social media access before blocking access to the entire internet echoing sentiments similar to those expressed by social media platforms.

Although states and platforms alike are tackling problematic content concerns, a "one size fits all" may serve to exclude on the side of error, rather than include members of the digital society.

In 2018, Facebook announced that it planned to prioritise high-quality news on the platform by allowing its users to rank news sources that they deemed as the most credible and trustworthy. The countries where the ranking works include Brazil, France, Germany, India, Italy, Spain, the US, and the UK.

As such, David Kaye, Special Rapporteur of Freedom of Information echoed the sentiments of many when he asked, "What will Mark Zuckerberg do when the needs of the community, in what it determines is trusted news, are different from what the government determines. Who will Facebook side with?" To date, no African countries have been included in the news ranking approach where their exposure to the whims of State online content regulation is particularly high especially during times of public protest and elections - which often coincide with increased levels of misinformation and disinformation from multiple fronts.

Unlike states who have made it blatantly obvious whose interests they serve in their content moderation stance, the interests of platforms remain a grey area despite their continued announcements of working against misinformation and fake news. With content as a business model, accompanied by increasingly shrewd algorithms, platforms

Although states and platforms alike are tackling problematic content concerns, a "one size fits all" may serve to exclude on the side of error, rather than include members of the digital society.

are caught doing a balancing act between being content gatekeepers and maintaining profits – both of which appear to be incompatible with digital rights. However, platforms are driven by advertising revenues heavily reliant on content algorithms, thus the interests of big business likely surpass the interests of users.

As internet access in the continent continues to grow, African media is faced with challenges that were non-existent 30 years ago. Meanwhile, content increasingly curated by states or platforms also introduces a dynamic to the viability of the media as the concept of the content creator and information gatekeeper is changing.

Perhaps, now is the time to revisit some of the principles of the Windhoek Declaration given the new realities of governments, the media, and global platforms in Africa.

Juliet has a background in journalism and has worked in the fields of communications strategy, publicity, branding and market research across East and Southern Africa. Connect with her at @ChewingStones

Conversations of Home:

How the Diaspora is Using Podcasting and New Media to Own their Identity and Connect with Home

by Natasha Fuyane

There is an unexplainable confidence that comes with knowing who you are and where you come from. Having now spent more years living outside my country of birth, Zimbabwe than I have in it, the United Kingdom has been my adoptive home since 2002 and one that I embrace. However, as with most migrant stories, my longing for and connection to the place I call home has deepened.

Leaving home as a late teen and settling into a foreign land, the only thing I wanted was to assimilate with my age-mates, make friends, and downplay my "foreignness". Afterall saying you were from Zimbabwe in the 00s was not considered cool. This, for more times than I cared for, meant clarifying where in the world Zimbabwe was located or better yet having to listen to academic Pan-Africanist's take on how great Robert Mugabe was or how terrible he was.

Carrying the politics of one's country everywhere would weigh down most people, least of all a young person that just wanted to enjoy life like her peers. In addition to the political slant that conversations would take when I mentioned my place of birth, it was the fact that there was still very much a culture of not speaking about politics amongst family and friends. There is a recorded history of individuals who have been vocal about misgovernance suffering at the hands of state-sanctioned violence. So silence became a self-preserving mechanism and one that was carried over borders - to the new places we now called home. As a young Zimbabwean, and coming from that prevalent culture of silence meant that I never had the agency to freely engage on issues that were happening at home.

The few times I engaged on issues happening at home, I came up against the flagship rebuttal "but you're not on the ground", making it difficult to give a comeback when indeed you are not on the ground.

So for many Zimbabweans, there was (and still is to some extent) a geographical divide determining the extent one could contribute to the national discourse. Fast forward to this age; with the acceleration of the digital revolution, particularly the increased access to the internet and more so social media platforms, the digital space has reduced that geographical divide.

Podcasting and New Media

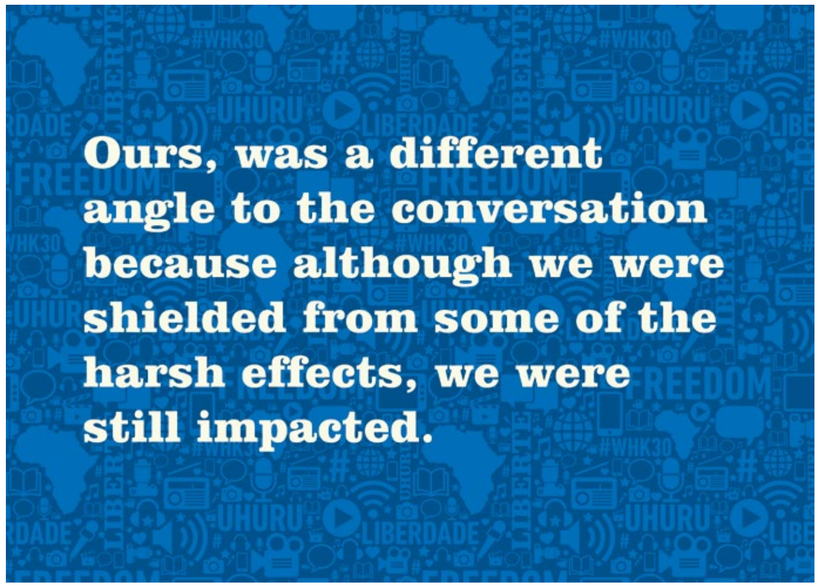
In 2019, Xolie Ncube and I launched Girl In Skies Podcast. Girl In Skies - a play on the word Skies, a triple entendre of sorts (representing travel, airwaves, and a homage to our city of birth, Bulawayo, which is at times referred to as Skies because of its beautiful blue skies). We started the Girl In Skies podcast because we are passionate about carving out a voice for the Zimbabwean diaspora community and filling in that gap between home and its many citizens scattered all over the world.

Why podcasting? This was a medium that we enjoyed and consumed. The attraction to podcasting was its low barrier to entry. We were two friends having conversations and simply needed a home for these conversations. We did not need to be politically connected or to have journalistic accolades to start a podcast. Also, housing these conversations via a podcast meant there would be no policing of our opinions. Our location also offered safety as we did not have to worry about some of the very real dangers that individuals in Zimbabwe face when they talk about the state of politics and human rights issues.

We were not looking to speak from a point of authority about things that were happening "on the ground" but felt strongly that there was a space for the diaspora perspective to be articulated and heard. We cared deeply about home, we cared about the high unemployment, the arts, the lack of access to basic healthcare, the stifling of political freedoms. We cared, not only because it affected our families at home, but also because it affected us. Ours, was a different angle to the conversation because although we were shielded from some of the harsh effects, we were still impacted. For example, the high unemployment in Zimbabwe means that many in the diaspora have to financially support their families (Black Tax) and be the buffer for any emergency costs that may come up. These types of conversations allow for sharing of ideas and solutions to issues specific to people in the diaspora. They are also a way of sharing the diaspora experience with people living in Zimbabwe, and by using these conversations we can find common ground.

Connecting across borders, generations and cultures

Since its launch, Girl in the Skies podcast has grown to thousands of weekly listeners per episode. A significant cohort being the Zimbabwean diaspora located in over 26 countries. The podcast is a weekly staple of entertainment, news, and our take on events happening at home and beyond. The reception and feedback showed that there was an appetite for new voices, a different perspective, and something innovative. Our podcast covers light-hearted issues as well as conversations on the political landscape in Zimbabwe and beyond. We have also covered issues such as Lobola (marriage rites and payment of bride price), the 1980s killing of minority Ndebele community known as Gukurahundi genocide, and more.



There were two things we had not anticipated though. Firstly, that so many people based in Zimbabwe would listen and engage with the podcast, and secondly, that so many second-generation immigrant Zimbabweans would listen to the podcast. The most interesting revelation has been how educational and informative some of our younger listeners have found it. A significant number of these listeners have been born and raised outside of Zimbabwe or moved from Zimbabwe at a very young age. They have been able to get a better understanding of our history and some of the traditional practices.

The fact that people in Zimbabwe are also listening to the podcast shows the role that new media is playing in reducing the geographical divide and connecting people across borders.

This means that people at home are also hearing our perspectives about issues happening at home as well as some of the complex dynamics and tensions between the diaspora and our roots. These are likely to be better received from podcasters that people do not know at a personal level than they would be from family members. The podcast also serves as a bridge between families in Zimbabwe and those in the diaspora. We can have uncomfortable conversations around black tax, dating, marriage, and many other issues affecting people in the diaspora. These conversations are also likely to be considered when they are not charged with the emotion that comes with the very complex family dynamics of transnational families.

Cultural Identity

The importance of cultural identity can never be overstated. It is arguably even more important when one is planted in a society where theirs is not the dominant culture. There is a danger of having the illusion of inclusion - a concept we have unpacked in our podcast. In summary, the illusion of inclusion is where one grows up believing they are part of the fabric of the society they live in only to have a rude awakening along the way. This happens when the dominant society explicitly shows you, in no uncertain terms, that you are not part of the fabric. This could be through lack of career opportunities, systemic and overt racism; and other isms. To mitigate against the harsh impact of this, the next generation must have a connection with their cultural identity and the podcast is serving that purpose.

Conversations and other platforms for expressing different perspectives are important. Conversations are the home of ideas, ideas allow for innovation and push societal thinking. There is space for various voices to be heard, despite geographical location, and I am glad I have found mine.

Natasha Fuyane is a writer and podcaster, among other things. She is a Zimbabwean living in the United Kingdom. She is passionate about amplifying African diaspora issues and creating spaces for conversations. You can listen to her every week on Girl In Skies podcast and can find her on twitter at @malaikadiva.

Journalism training: Meeting the demands of a changing industry

by Sarah Chiumbu

A New World

The practice of journalism has evolved since 1991, when the Windhoek Declaration on 'Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Media' was signed. Rapid developments and the use of information technologies, including mobile computing and increased access to the internet, have transformed how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Journalists no longer have a monopoly over news production and dissemination.

Audiences have become producers of news and now compete with professional journalists to break news. Citizen journalism now both comment against and compliments professional journalism. Traditional media such as hard copy newspapers continue to lose readers to the likes of Google and Facebook. Traditional broadcasters are competing against video streaming services such as Netflix, Showmax, and Amazon Prime.

Today's audiences spend more time on mobile smartphones than reading a hard copy newspaper or watching news on television. Google and Facebook dominate news space though they are not publishers themselves in the strictest sense of the word.

Loss of audiences has consequently led to the loss of advertising revenue. As newsrooms lose advertising revenue, inevitably, they downsize and shut down. Many journalists have lost their jobs the worldover.

The current environment, which allows anyone to produce news, has led to the scourge of 'fake 'news. Collins dictionary named 'fake news ' the word of the year in 2017. News websites with a propensity to create and spread rumours and falsehoods are on the increase in Africa. Social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp are actively used to spread disinformation and misinformation.

The fourth industrial revolution brings new realities where machines rely on artificial intelligence to perform tasks that humans would typically perform. As a result, the journalism industry is being transformed as process automation, and the use of algorithms becomes more mainstream.

Newsrooms Adapting

Newsrooms are adapting. They are finding, as noted by Amy Schmitz Weiss[1], new forms of multimedia storytelling through mobile and tablet platforms, engaging audiences through social media channels, and employing new ways of doing investigative journalism with sophisticated data-driven techniques. A different set of skills is now required for journalists to thrive in this new environment. Whereas previously, there was a clear distinction between broadcasting and print, convergence is now the order of the day. It is no longer enough to be a prolific writer whose well-articulated pieces draw readers to newspapers printed pages. The changing landscape requires a storyteller capable of utilising written text, audio, and visuals. Therefore, journalism is no longer just about writing stories but content creation across different digital platforms.

Like other industries, the news industry is adapting to the new realities of the fourth industrial revolution. Newsrooms elsewhere are already experimenting with using bots and artificial intelligence to collect information and automate news production. Developments with machine learning and algorithms point to a future where there is an increase in automation of the news production process. Shujun Jiang and Ali Rafeeq[2] argue that new job titles in newsrooms will include enhanced reporter, augmented reality producer, bot developer, principal researcher, ecosystem manager, platforms manager, lead data scientist, and automation experience designer". The training of journalists in this ever-changing environment needs to be agile enough to acknowledge these new trends and adapt accordingly.

In a society characterised by big data, it is no surprise that data journalism has become key in converged newsrooms. This data comes in the form of statistics, visuals, maps, financial flows, etc. As noted by Allen Munoriyarwa[3], there is an increase in data journalism uptake in African countries, particularly in South African countries. Data journalism led to the exposure of corruption cases such as 'State 'capture' in South Africa. There is, therefore, a need for journalists to be adequately trained so they can fully analyse big data. Data can be highly complex, and traditional journalism skills may not be able to unpack such complexities. Courses in data analytics are becoming increasingly crucial for the digital era journalist.

The days of big media houses employing multitudes of journalists are past. New online news websites are competing against traditional big media houses. In South Africa, respected titles such as Daily Maverick, Business Tech, and Moneyweb are exclusively distributed online. The same is happening in other Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Namibia. Traditional media houses have established online presence with some introducing paywalls to try and recoup some lost revenue. The paywall model has so far not managed to stem the tide of revenue loss because there are many equally good free sites online. In Zimbabwe, Alpha Media gave up on paywall after failing to attract a significant number of subscribers. As journalists lose jobs, entrepreneurship is increasingly becoming a way out. Therefore, it is imperative that journalism training includes entrepreneurship to equip journalists with skills necessary to face a world with limited newsroom opportunities.

The Future is Digital: What Needs to be Done?

With journalism content now increasingly available online, are journalists adequately trained to meet the demands of this changing landscape? The prevalence of online media, demands journalists who are skilled differently from the days of traditional media dominance. If journalists are to meet the demands of a converged newsroom, it is vital that their training shifts from specialisations such as broadcasting and print. Converged newsrooms require journalists capable of telling stories using all these formats. Lack of equipment, such as video cameras and audio recorders, is no longer an excuse. Training can utilise smartphones that can now perform all tasks of creating visuals, audio, and written text. The availability of editing apps for smartphones makes it possible for a journalist to create, for example, a news documentary without the need to employ a specialist video editor. Some universities, such as Rhodes University, University of Eswatini, University of Johannesburg, University of Cape Town, and the University of Botswana, are already implementing such training. Still, it is safe to say all training institutions need to follow this route.

Many editors complain that journalists who join newsrooms from training institutions are not ready to work and often need several more weeks of training in the newsroom to do some decent work. While there are several arguments to this view, what is indisputable is that training needs to adapt to converged newsrooms' needs. Training should emphasise data journalism, artificial intelligence and research skills in the digital era, and so on. Journalism curricular in Europe and the USA now contains several modules in digital media and electives relevant to digital realities. It is crucial that training institutions in Southern Africa are not left behind. Skills such as Google Analytics, HTML, and JavaScript have become vital for journalists and training institutions need to include such in their curricula as is already happening elsewhere in the world.

Basic coding skills are also becoming increasingly necessary. Institutions such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) based in South Africa help with short courses. It offers short courses such as Mobile Journalism (MOJO), Social media as Source and Platform, Becoming a Multimedia Journalist, etc. While these may help mid-career journalists, there is a need for universities and other diploma-giving institutions to adapt their curricula to train journalists who are ready for the evolving newsroom from day one. Organisations that offer journalism training, such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Media Monitoring Africa and IAJ mentioned above, need to work together with entities such as Code for Africa that leverage technology and data-driven practices for storytelling.

The prevalence of the so-called fake news necessitates that journalism curricula adapt to equip journalists to be relevant in this environment. Fact checking has become key in this environment where disinformation and misinformation are ubiquitous. Journalism training in Southern Africa needs to emphasise fact-checking if the profession is to maintain and regain some lost trust. Journalists need to be trained on how best to fact-check information before publishing. Working with organisations such as Africa Check may help training institutions. Perhaps it is time, as argued by Bruce Mutsvairo and Saba Bebawi, to have Fake News as a standalone module rather than as a component of other modules.

It is important to state that incorporating digital technologies does not negate the importance of theory in journalists' training. There is a need for balance to avoid valorising technology over journalistic talent and an awareness of complexities of world politics, economy, and social and cultural realities that help contextualise the news. If theory was not important, then IT professionals could just be employed in newsrooms. The changing environment still requires journalists capable of providing deep analysis of world events. This only now needs to be done in multimedia forms so stories can be disseminated via different platforms.

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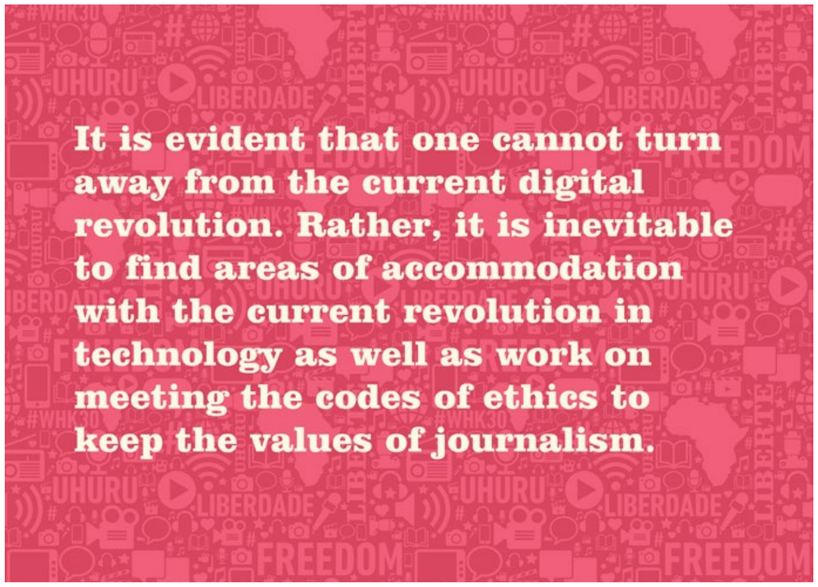
References available at **whk30.webdevelopment.co.za/journalism-training-meeting-the-demands-of-a-changing-industry/**

Media ethics: How digital disruption reshaped ethics and professionalism

by Mulatu Alemayehu Moges

In this article, I attempt to reflect on major digital disruptions that have brought significant changes in the media industry specifically on journalism ethics and the profession based on the principles of the Windhoek Declaration. At most, this reflection mirrors experiences and research from Ethiopia. A key consideration in the Windhoek declaration was the need for a professional, independent and diverse media that serves society. The question today is, what has changed more so in the era of digital media and is journalism adhering to the ethics and codes of the profession.



One cannot deny that digital technology has revolutionised the ways in which media operates throughout the world. Digital technology has made reporting (production and dissemination) both easy and difficult; easy in terms of collecting, processing and disseminating information to the large audience in various forms. At the same time, digital technology has created an opportunity for all interested to act as information or news mediums or purveyors to produce content and reach out to their target audiences. News and information production has increasingly been informalised more so by the prevalence of citizen journalism. Many people have turned to platforms such as Facebook, twitter, youtube, and other such platforms to create content and disseminate to their followers and in some cases without due consideration of media ethics. Some writers have large followers and can influence national narratives either positively or negatively. These people with huge followers have come to be known as influencers. This ultimately makes the right to freedom of expression more viable, especially in less democratic countries but equally fraught with danger in the era of misinformation. Oftentimes social media driven violence and hate speech has resulted in social instability. Mainstream media has been tempted, in some cases, to follow the lead of social media in fear of losing audiences hence compromising ethics.

In Ethiopia and globally, digital technologies have had a huge impact on mainstream media, with as an example, the number of audiences declining over the years yet significantly rising on social media more so the sensational ones. The expansion of digital technology in Ethiopia has seen mainstream media such as radio, television and newspapers changing the way they interact with audiences. The media are now live streaming news and engaging audiences on platforms as Facebook and Youtube which in itself brings new demands on ethics in terms of moderating debates or feedback and verifying stories posted on such social media platforms. Nevertheless social media platforms have increased mainstream media disseminating power allowing local media to reach out to global audiences, more so Ethiopia's huge diaspora estimated at 3 million. More importantly, online streaming provides an opportunity for the audiences to reflect on views and engage the content by commenting, liking and sharing.

This shows how digital technology has changed the overall production and dissemination of information and in a way shifted the practice of journalism from a strictly newsroom driven content production to a situation where audiences are equally a key player in content production considerations. In many ways newsrooms are in an ethics minelfled in which new skills and new routines are needed to avoid mistakes.

It is also fair to note that digital technology has allowed journalists to move from mainstream media to the digital platforms or online journalism. Journalists working in hostile areas of Ethiopia are increasingly using online platforms to share their stories and remain safe. Some work under the cover of anonymity for their safety and yet again raising ethical questions on the authenticity of the content they share. A positive outcome of online journalism is however that media and journalists have opened new revenue streams with new business approaches emerging in which journalists are making money from online news sharing platforms, consequently engaging in various business development models

Another area of concern for journalism in relation to digital platforms are the unintended consequences in which journalists are under pressure from social media audiences to process and share information which may not be fully verified. As a result of pressure to "break the story", mainstream media journalists are falling into the social media trap by reporting unsubstantiated information often informed by social media posts. This has presented a huge challenge on media ethics with journalists standing accused of reporting unverified information or falsehoods. In many countries this has become a media policy flashpoint with governments accusing the media of peddling fake news.

Ethiopian newsrooms have been caught in this crisis and many have no capacity for orienting journalists to guard against these ethical lapses and code of practice breaches. While journalists are concerned with professional and ethical values in relation to online platforms, there appear to be no concerted effort both in Ethiopia and Africa Sub region on suitable responses hence a growing fear of the erosion of media ethics. The challenges that mainstream journalism faces in keeping itself at the forefront of news stories production and dissemination is the competition from social media and in that a desire to catch up and keep audiences. A key factor is that online media content producers do not exhaustively apply the codes of ethics to report stories objectively, hence they get caught in misinformation and in some cases sensationalism. The temptation is high for mainstream journalists to keep pace with social media, hence the ethical traps and pitfalls that many journalists are falling into. This is because social media content producers are not measured with the same professional yardstick as social media content producers or influencers. Social media is often measured by the number of clicks, views, likes, comments and shares which is also a source of income for such platforms and far less on ethics and objectivity, balance or fairness. The interest of social media content producers is to reach out to a large audience, hence the rush to post stories without thorough investigation or verification. In the mainstream media, clicks don't hold space and the judgement on journalists is harsher should they be found on the wrong side of professional ethics and codes. In essence journalism is facing its most trying times and how the profession will develop into the future is a matter of conjecture. What cannot be denied is that journalism must remain truthful to facts yet responsive to audience needs.

The other issue that has been observed in the current media is expansion of hate speech in news stories or posts. Unlike other periods in time, the extent of hate speech is increasingly becoming rampant both on online and in mainstream media. This is largely supported by the fact that the digital media allows information to be shared more quickly and sometimes in real time. Social media audiences and content creators talk freely, and express their ideas on different platforms and using hate words and antagonistic ideas towards people in general has become a custom especially on polarising issues such as ethnicity in the case of Ethiopia. This is sometimes observed in the mainstream media too. In a rapid assessment I conducted in 2019 and focussed on a sample of three-month content of mainstream media, I found out that 20% of the selected content from the online media platforms such as Facebook and Youtube, used hate words that could incite conflict and animosity hence a danger to society.

It is evident that one cannot turn away from the current digital revolution. Rather, it is inevitable to find areas of accommodation with the current revolution in technology as well as work on meeting the codes of ethics to keep the values of journalism. As we mark 30 years of the Windhoek declaration it is important to reflect on issues of media professional development in the era of digital media platforms. There is a need to keep journalism professional while enhancing its reach and capacity using digital platforms. Balancing this will need resourcing in training, new tools in how newsrooms operate and media literacy awareness to guard against misinformation and disinformation often at the heart of conflict, violence that we now see in many societies.

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Exiled for offending the King

by Eugene Dube

Publishing informative and critical articles which touched on the king and governance issues led to me being branded a revolutionary journalist and being forced to go into exile by King Mswati III's police officers.The Royal Eswatini Police officers raided my house without a search warrant from the 23rd of April 2020 and for several times more in the same day and the next.

As the sun peeked over the horizon, I would be anxious about what would happen to me and my family.

"Eugene's case must be handled by a magistrate who has a history of giving harsh sentences. Let us find a magistrate who can do such a job,"

During the first raid, I suffered bruises on the shoulders as I tried to escape through the window due to fear of being arrested and tortured by Eswatini Police officers. They came four times armed with guns within the month of April 2020 and forcefully entered my house and seized personal gadgets and documents including a laptop, three cell phones, 12 notebooks and company documents. "When we come back for you Eugene, we will leave you reeling in a pool of blood. Why do you criticise the king? Stop criticising the king," threatened senior police Superintendent Clement Sihlongonyane during the interrogation. "Eugene's case must be handled by a magistrate who has a history of giving harsh sentences. Let us find a magistrate who can do such a job, "whispered Sihlongonyane to his colleagues.

It was at this point that I realised that this was pure persecution.

On 24 April 2020, I left my house at 06:15 am to buy bread from a local shop. To my surprise, I received a phone call from a relative alerting me that the police officers were back again, fully armed with guns.

On that very day I had to sleep in a forest in fear of police's continued torture and detention. For over five days in the forest, I had no food and a roof over my head. I had to survive on bread alone.

Earlier before the raids and my exile, Eswatini Police also had tried to force me to testify against the EFF Swaziland President Ncamiso Ngcamphalala who was my source of information on the many corruption scandals in Eswatini. I refused, hence the continued harassment, raids on my home and threats of arrest.

Opposition leader Ngcamphalala is facing a sedition charge after I published his interview on the Swati Newsweek website. Section 24 of the constitution of eSwatini promotes freedom of expression, but this right remains elusive as both journalists and sources of information are harassed. The police informed me that criticizing King Mswati III constitutes high treason. Fearing for my safety, on May 5th, 2020 I used one informal crossing route in southern eSwatini to escape and seek asylum in South Africa. I took a risk at dawn and crossed the Mozane River.

I find life in exile miserable as it is expensive to afford basic needs like quality healthcare, shelter, food and clothing and the fact that I can no longer practice journalism is depressing.

On 30 May, 2020, Eswatini weekly publication the Independent News quoted the National Police Commissioner, William Dlamini, as having said that journalists writing negatively about the king would be muzzled. This I took to refer to me and other journalists seen as troublemakers by the government. My troubles began when I published various articles criticising the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first article, published on 8 April 2020, I published an article titled "King Reckless on Swazis' Health". In this article, the Swati Newsweek criticized King Mswati's government for failing to enforce social distancing in local hospitals when COVID-19 first hit Eswatini. The second article, which aggravated matters, was titled "King's removal possible". This story, published on 14 April 2020, was an interview which featured the president of the opposition party, Economic Freedom Fighters of Swaziland Ncamiso Ngcamphalala.

In this story, Ngcamphalala said eSwatini should have a constitutional monarchy, not an absolute monarchy. Linked to the statement by Ngcamphalala was a widely publicised December 16 2020 statement by EFF South Africa opposition leader Julius Malema, declaring that King Mswati III of eSwatini would fall.

During the first raid, I suffered bruises on the shoulders as I tried to escape through the window due to fear of being arrested and tortured by Eswatini Police officers.

EFF-Swaziland was formed as inspired by EFF-South Africa led by Malema. I believe this might have scared King Mswati III; hence his police officers sought to silence Ngcamphalala and myself. Honestly, it is difficult to work as a journalist in eSwatini. My action to leave followed a road well-travelled by many, such as the former Eswatini Observer Managing editor Musa Ndlangamandla who was forced to leave Eswatini in 2012.

The late eSwatini Prime Minister Barnabas Dlamini wanted him incarcerated for promoting democracy. My story and that of many other journalists is an ongoing story of media repression in Swaziland. Ex Times of Eswatini newspaper journalist Andile Nsibande was assaulted by police officers while covering a workers' strike in Nhlangano on 30 August 2018. According to an article published by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on May 1, 2020, eSwatini Royal Police officers had arrested and tortured another exiled independent editor Zweli Martin Dlamini for writing critical articles about the absolute monarch in his Swaziland News online newspaper.

I find life in exile miserable as it is expensive to afford basic needs like quality healthcare, shelter, food and clothing and the fact that I can no longer practice journalism is depressing. I slept on a grass mat for 14 days when I first arrived in South Africa and later two good Samaritans lent me two blankets and a wooden bed. I have faced attempts to rob me of my few possessions in exile and I cannot recall the times I have had to flee from criminals in Durban, South Africa. I have realised that independent journalism is a big crime in eSwatini. I later reported this matter to the African Union on 17 July 2020 but I have not received feedback thus far.

On January 12, 2021 whilst still in exile, I was exposed to COVID-19. On the second day, my health condition deteriorated; hence I visited a clinic for medical treatment. Luckily, I survived after treatment.

A case for reform.

eSwatini must reform its repressive media and free expression laws and enforce legislation preventing police from harassing journalists and interfering with their work. All the 32 media and free expression laws in eSwatini must be amended and others repealed altogether. There is a need for a Crisis Committee for journalists in eSwatini tasked with helping journalists who have been arrested, exiled or jailed. Amongst its duties, the Crisis Committee must ensure that the safety of the journalist is guaranteed. I have been a victim of greedy lawyers who hike fees willy-nilly during cases. Journalism bodies must fight against such abuse and build solidarity networks including with regional and international media and free expression networks. Additionally, there is an urgent need for eSwatini journalists to be trained on safety issues on a regular basis. Furthermore, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) should identify a new generation of progressive Swazi journalists who will protect press freedom and support the call for democracy in eSwatini. These journalists should be assisted to establish their own websites to advance the course for good governance and democracy in eSwatini and report uncensored and informative stories.

Eugene Dube is Editor of Swati Newsweek, an online publication. He is living in exile in South Africa.

In Zimbabwe, a journalist's family detained, tortured to bait him

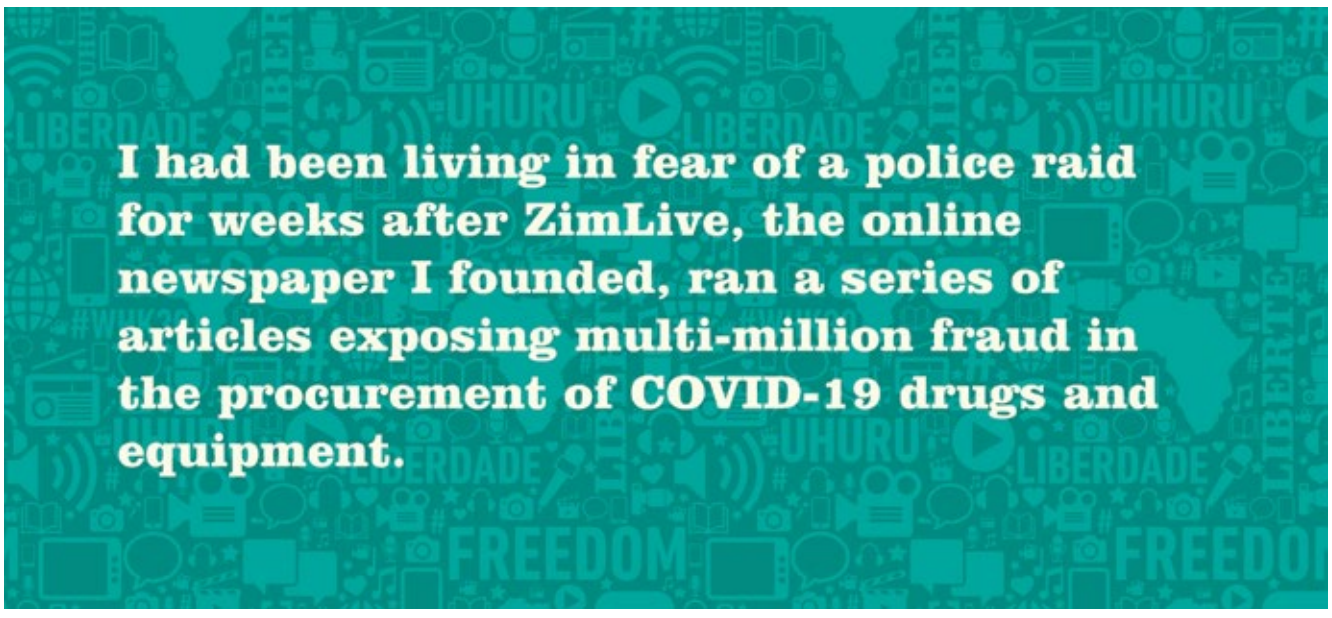
by Mduduzi Mathuthu

THERE was just enough time to pick up my laptop and a toiletry bag. I walked briskly, taking footpaths and avoiding the main road leading to my house.Just five minutes later, the phone rang. It was my brother, speaking in a low tone. "They're here.Nathan had jumped over the two-meter-high perimeter wall as a white 4x4 vehicle pulled up at our gate.The doors were open before the vehicle came to a stop. I had a terrible feeling about it," he whispered from his hideout. He had observed six men and a woman enter the house.

Inside, my elder sister Nomagugu picked up the story. "They say you must come now Fa, or they will take me," she said. The menacing visitors, armed with guns, had identified themselves as police officers, but they would not show their badges. They told my sister they had seen me jump over the wall and I had to come back, or they would take her with them as bait.

My sister, her voice trembling with fear, had just done a brave thing. Fa is Nathan's nickname. She was selling them a dummy. She just wanted me to know they were there; that Nathan had escaped – and more urgently for her she was telling me to keep walking.

By now, my family is accustomed to me getting in the crosshairs of the ruling regime in Zimbabwe, which has ruled the country since independence from British rule in 1980. To them, it's almost like living with a drug dealer – you always expect a knock from the police, except the only opium the regime wants me to stop is plying the masses with the truth of their industrial-scale corruption, abuse of office and cyclic election fraud.



Where it all began

In 2001, I was chased down a dirt road in Nyamandlovu, in the province of Matabeleland North, by men carrying axes. I was a junior reporter for The Daily News, then the biggest circulating newspaper in the country, and had answered an SOS from a white ostrich farmer whose land was being invaded by men claiming to be independence war veterans. I was let go after a barrage of kicks, slaps and punches. They also hurt my arm which I carried in a sling for a week.

Less than a year later, I was with two colleagues Eugenia Mauluka and Collin Chiwanza in Wedza, Mashonaland East province, when again – answering a call by another besieged white farmer – we were surrounded by the invaders who beat us blue with a motorbike chain. We were saved by a brave soldier who ordered the brutality to stop, and fired shots in the air to emphasise his seriousness.

I left for university in the United Kingdom shortly after, and was lured back years later to take up a role as editor of The Chronicle, a state-owned publication. It was a brave call by the information minister Jonathan Moyo, who had an ambitious plan to reform state media.

In 2014, just a year after my return, President Robert Mugabe described me and other new editors appointed to head state newspapers "weevils" working within to bring down his government. In the end, I was turfed out after publishing a story highlighting the then Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa's role in the 1980s massacres of the minority Ndebeles in southern Zimbabwe.

Mnangagwa is now the president, and the men rummaging inside my house were his agents. They carried a warrant signed by a magistrate which accused me of "organising and advocating for illegal demonstrations against the government of Zimbabwe pencilled for July 31, 2020," – the next day. The document further said I was "believed to be manufacturing, storing and distributing to members of the public some materials for use during the illegal demonstrations." It empowered those carrying it to seize my "cellular phones, computers, cameras, offensive or subversive material likely to be used during the illegal demonstration."

A visiting scene from the past

My 73-year-old aunt who was visiting from our rural home would later tell me that the scene reminded her of Gukurahundi, the 1980s killing of thousands of minority Ndebeles, many of whom were dragged out of their homes as their families watched, forced to dig their own graves and then bayoneted. Mnangagwa headed the intelligence ministry then, whose agents identified targets to be abducted, tortured or killed.

As I trudged on, not sure of my destination, I sent out a tweet: "Police are at my house." Then I remembered I had a Twitter friend a few streets from my house. I headed there. A knock at the gate and she opened. "I saw the tweet, come in," she said, saving me the trouble of explaining why I needed refuge.

There was a reason I had left the house with such haste. Earlier that day, Nathan had dispatched three nephews in two vehicles to a hardware shop to buy some materials for our aluminium fabrication business. When they did not return, and were not answering their phones, he got worried and drove into town looking for them. Driving past the main central police station in Bulawayo, he saw two of them – the drivers Amandlenkosi and Advent – talking to men in civilian clothes. A third nephew, Tawanda Muchehiwa, was not part of them. He called me to relay what he was seeing, and I told him then the picture was not good, he had to get away from there and race home.

I had been living in fear of a police raid for weeks after ZimLive, the online newspaper I founded, ran a series of articles exposing multi-million fraud in the procurement of COVID-19 drugs and equipment. At the heart of it was a company called Drax International fronted by a local businessman, Delish Nguwaya. Nguwaya is a known business associate of President Mnangagwa's twin sons Shaun and Collins. The web also involved the health minister Obadiah Moyo, who was later arrested and then sacked.

The investigation angered the ruling party, which called several press conferences demanding that the media should stop "attacks" on the "first family."

I was acutely aware that the regime wanted to know our sources who supplied the documents that unravelled the fraud. For this, they would have to cook up a charge which would allow them to enter my home and office with dubious authority to seize my cameras, computers and my phones.

My fears had only heightened in early August, when Hopewell Chin'ono, a journalist who had also reported on the Drax scandal, was arrested and accused of inciting Zimbabweans to stage violent protests against the regime. During a raid on his home in Harare, police broke down a glass door to gain entry. They took away his computers, phone and a video camera.

Torturing my family as bait

While still digesting the drama of the preceding hours, a lawyer who had arrived at the police station called to say he had three members of my family – the two nephews seen by Nathan earlier and my sister, the hostage. "No, they must be four," I insisted, sending him back to look for my other nephew, Tawanda, a second-year journalism student at a local university.

Tawanda was not there. The police said they had not arrested him. Then, talking to Advent and Amandlenkosi, the lawyer realised something terrible had happened. Almost half-a-dozen vehicles had surrounded the nephews. As the two were bundled into a sedan and driven to the police station, Tawanda was driven away in an Isuzu pick-up truck to an unknown destination.

Barely clinging to life, Tawanda was dumped near a railway line close to our home three days later, but only after a High Court judge had ordered the state to produce him. Doctors who treated him said his kidneys were barely functioning. His buttocks were just but a large open wound, the result of repeated beatings during torture. More than once, they put a gun to his head and told him it was over.

Tawanda's abductors, who were five, wanted to know who finances ZimLive and who was our contact at the British and United States embassies – a preposterous assumption that all criticism of the government is sponsored by western countries.

Eventually, the three family members at the police station were let go after several hours of haggling between the lawyer and police. Tawanda, who spent three weeks in hospital and subsequently two months in rehab, has sought refuge in neighbouring South Africa, abandoning his studies, family and the only life he knew. I spent months living in hiding, emerging only after my lawyer challenged the warrant police used to enter my home based on political lies.

To date, no-one has been arrested for the abduction and torture of Tawanda. Dramatic CCTV footage of his abduction which was later obtained by ZimLive has provided a rare insight into the operations of a shadowy unit of Mnangagwa's security forces known as the Ferret Team, which rights groups say is behind the abduction and torture of over 70 activists in the last 18 months.

Operating outside the law, and with impunity, the Ferret Team has highlighted a harsh reality for journalists under Mnangagwa's authoritarian rule. A journalist must choose what they value more: exposing corruption or their family. While I am alive, I choose both.

Mduduzi Mathuthu is the editor of ZimLive.com