



iSPEAK

**MY VOICE
YOUR VOICE
OUR FREEDOM**

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Greetings, and a warm ubuntu welcome to iSPEAK.

On 3 May 2021, as the world celebrated World Press Freedom Day, it also marked the 30th anniversary of the **Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an independent and pluralistic African Press**. This seminal declaration which came from the heart of African journalists had global impact and became the catalyst for new policy frameworks for media and communications the world over (see the infographic).

This year's 30th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration birthed the **iSPEAK platform**, a free monthly newsletter linked to a dedicated website through which we hope – over the coming months - to take you on an interactive journey of the multifaceted right to freedom of expression. Here we'll explore and challenge narratives on this fundamental right and its manifestations on the African continent and beyond, from different perspectives in all its dimensions and in the most inclusive manner possible.

In this launch edition, the First Lady of Namibia, Monica Geingos, shares her views on the internet as a safe space for women. Earlier this year, on International Women's Day, she responded to the #ChooseToChallenge hashtag. Her **video**, a personal protest to cyberbullying, went viral. She joins us on our first iSPEAK podcast to share her experiences of online harassment and how she's learnt to navigate her relationship with social media.

Political analyst Brian Kagoro reflects on youth-led protests in Africa and the implications for the future. He warns that there is a decisiveness and force which can no longer be concealed in the way that young people are asserting their agency across the continent. In the same vein, youthful Bertha Tobias unpacks the politics of respectability in her nuanced analysis of this moralistic discourse. She challenges the narrative which links worthiness for respect to sexual propriety and behavioural decorum. In her own words, young people are "consciously disregarding social embellishments in the form of civilized etiquette".

Moving further up the continent, we mark Malawi's Independence Day (6 July) with contributions from countrymen Golden Matonga and Levi Kabwato reflecting on the 2019 tripartite elections and 2020 presidential elections in Malawi as defining moments in the country's history when a court annulled election results and ordered a rerun.

Remember, the iSPEAK newsletter is free so please do share word of iSPEAK far and wide with others who may have an interest in reading the analyses provided here and who may wish to participate in our monthly event (see website). We are focused on providing the African context and narrative on freedom of expression issues and look forward to providing challenging views on current debates, that inform or change the way you think.

Make sure you don't miss out on our monthly edition by signing up on **WhatsApp** or joining the **mailing list**. Feel free to get in touch with us via email on **info@ispeak.africa**.

Until next month.

The iSPEAK team

My Voice | Your Voice | Our Freedom



Policy developments since 1991

3 May 1991

The Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press is adopted by African editors and journalists. The Windhoek Declaration calls for freedom of information and expression as a “fundamental contribution to the fulfilment of human aspirations”.

1 October 1995

The Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information were adopted by a panel of experts in international law, national security and human rights. The Johannesburg Principles have been endorsed by the UN Committee on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression.

3 May 2001

The African Charter on Broadcasting was adopted by participants at a 2001 UNESCO conference in Windhoek to mark the 10th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration. While the Windhoek Declaration focuses mainly on the print media, the African Charter on Broadcasting focuses on the broadcast media.

2002

The Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa was adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, a body established under the auspices of the African Union.

12 December 2003

The WSIS Geneva Principles were at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held by the UN in conjunction with the International Telecommunications Union. While the WSIS Geneva Principles mainly covers issues concerning universal access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), they also contain some important statements on the media more generally.

2005

The African Media Barometer identifies and analyses the shortcomings and best practices in the legal as well as practical media environment of different African countries. Using a variety of African documents as a benchmark, the AMB can serve as a tool to lobby for media reform.

2008

UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communications published a document entitled '**Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development**'.

24 November 2010

Resolution 169 on Repealing Criminal Defamation Laws in Africa was adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

19 September 2011

The African Platform on Access to Information (APAI) Declaration is adopted by the African Union (AU) representatives, and media and civil society organisations at the conclusion of the Pan-African Conference on Access to Information (PACAI), at Cape Town, South Africa. A number of the Namibian civil society and media organisations go on to establish ACTION Namibia in 2012 and are signatories to the APAI.

25 February 2013

Model Law on Access to Information for Africa was adopted by African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

16 May 2013

The Pan African Platform adopts the **Midrand Declaration on Press Freedom in Africa**, calling on – amongst others, for member states to use the African Commission for Human and Peoples’ Rights’ Model Law on Access to Information in adopting or reviewing access to information laws.

12 June 2013

The Tshwane Principles on National Security and the Right to Information address the question of how to ensure public access to government information without jeopardizing legitimate efforts to protect people from national security threats.

18 December 2013

The United Nations General Assembly adopts **Resolution A/RES/68/163** at its 68th session proclaiming 2 November as the ‘International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists’ (IDEI). The Resolution urged Member States to implement definite measures countering the present culture of impunity.

27 June 2014

The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection was drafted to establish a ‘credible framework for cybersecurity in Africa through organisation of electronic transactions, protection of personal data, promotion of cyber security, e-governance and combating cybercrime.

5 December 2014

The African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights delivered a landmark judgment when it ruled that Burkina Faso was in violation of **Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and article 66(2) (c) of the revised ECOWAS Treaty**. The Court ordered Burkina Faso to change its criminal defamation laws. The ruling set an authoritative precedent for all African countries where imprisonment for libel is still used as a tool to silence members of the press, bloggers, political activists and human rights defenders. The threat of prison for journalists who expose corruption or criticise the government is one of the major impediments to effective journalism.

September 2015

The African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms was developed by members of the African Declaration group to promote human rights, standards and principles of openness in internet policy formulation on the continent.

10 November 2015

The Guidelines on Access to Information and Elections in Africa were adopted by the African Commission during its 61st Ordinary Session. The guidelines address the absence of a regional standard on access to information and elections as a means of guaranteeing the credibility of elections and the overall strengthening of democratic governance in Africa.

17 November 2015

The 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference adopted **Resolution 38 C/70** declaring 28 September as International Day for Universal Access to Information.

November 2019

The adoption by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) of the **revised Declaration of Principles of Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa** during its 65th Ordinary Session is seen as a landmark development that elaborates Article 9 of the ACHPR. It is to contribute to the enhancement of the normative standards for freedom of expression, ATI and digital rights in Africa, in line with international standards and human rights.

25 June 2020

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court issued a pivotal **decision** for the right of freedom of expression in Togo and other West African States. Access to the internet has to be protected under the law, the court ruled, and by shutting it down during the anti-government protests in 2017, the Togolese government violated human rights. Moreover, the court found Togo’s national security arguments unpersuasive, and insufficient to justify the internet shutdown under local nor under international law.

Windhoek @30: Time to take stock

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.

Windhoek Declaration @30: Time to introspect and act

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 a gathering that was just organised to discuss the 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.

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 3 and Botswana 3. This has been a trend, in a region famed for birthing the Windhoek Declaration.

This poor ranking is a reflection of the reality on the ground. As often said, figures only tell half the story. In the recent past, Southern Africa has witnessed an 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, as 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 Ibrahim 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 detained by 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.

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.

“I think our greatest undoing is to assume that Press freedom serves a special class of citizens called journalists. In truth, journalists only exercise that freedom on behalf of the people, and that’s why it’s worth defending.”

- Wangethi Mwangi, Senior Advisor, African Media Initiative

A call to action

It is against this backdrop that the world needs to seriously deliberate on 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 an effective antidote for increasing media repression plaguing the region.

Nhlanhla Ngwenya is a media and freedom of expression advocate.

A winter of discontent or season of revolution?

Brian Kagoro reflects on recent youth-led protests in Africa and the implications for the future

In the first two weeks of July 2021, protests triggered by the incarceration of former South African President Jacob Zuma rocked South Africa resulting in social, economic and political carnage.

These losses are difficult to comprehend without appreciating the racial, class and gender profile of South African society where 49 percent of the country is classified as chronically poor; 13 percent are transient poor; 14 percent are vulnerable; 20 percent are middle class and 4 percent constitute the elite. Poverty, unemployment and inequality shapes the attitude of the majority of South Africans to their State and indeed business sector.

A week earlier, sporadic month-long protests transformed into deadly uprisings in the usually quiet Kingdom of Eswatini and it's believed that at least 40 people were reportedly killed by security forces. The protests in Eswatini had wide ranging demands, including democratization of the political system, unbanning of political parties, a shift from an absolute to constitutional monarchy and an end to all forms of State economic and political impunity.

The outrage by African youth against the establishment, state, civic, religious and market economy has global and regional antecedents and triggers which the Covid-19 pandemic and its various contexts have helped to dramatise.

Trend or Sign?

Globalisation has enabled imperialism, racialism, oppression, populism and militarisation to thrive in the context of non-inclusive growth, political and economic liberalisation. Since 2011, we have witnessed recurrent mass uprisings by African youth from North, East, West, Central and Southern Africa. Some analysts have hailed these as a “triumph of the oppressed and the exploited”, a modern proletarian social revolution of sorts.

Despite the euphoria that has attended these insurrections by African young people since 2010 (Maputo, September 2010 bread riots), there are no real examples where huge sacrifices have resulted in a complete overhaul of the economic or political systems in favour of African youth. If anything, the situation of young people has worsened in the last 11 years. Authoritarianism has also worsened in the intervening period.

However, there is a decisiveness and force which can no longer be concealed in the way young people globally are asserting their agency across the continent from #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #EndSARS among others. Emerging from the slums, villages, townships and suburbs of Africa, the spectre of youth-led revolutions now haunts the streets, parliaments and cabinet meetings across Africa. This phenomenon is reconfiguring African political thinking and only now are policymakers and development agencies beginning to grasp its significance.

But what most don't seem to realise is that this Street Power – manifesting as Youth Power - is in essence a clash of paradigms of development. It is a confrontation between the masses of the African people and new versions of imperialism, neo-colonialism, exploitation and aggression in many parts of Africa.

In Africa, the so-called ‘Youth Question’ has become more or less a polite conversation about the trajectory of development and economic structural transformation in Africa. For almost two decades now since the advent of multipartyism conversations about economic alternatives, agrarian revolutions and radical redistribution have been taboo. Since the late 1980s, abnormal efforts have been put into whitewashing and obscuring the real issue in Africa.

What African youth are demanding is economic and political self-determination in the context of the right to development. As Maya Angelou once said: “There is nothing as tragic as a young cynic, because it means that the person has moved from “knowing nothing to believing nothing”. African youth believe that another Africa is not only possible, but it is imperative.

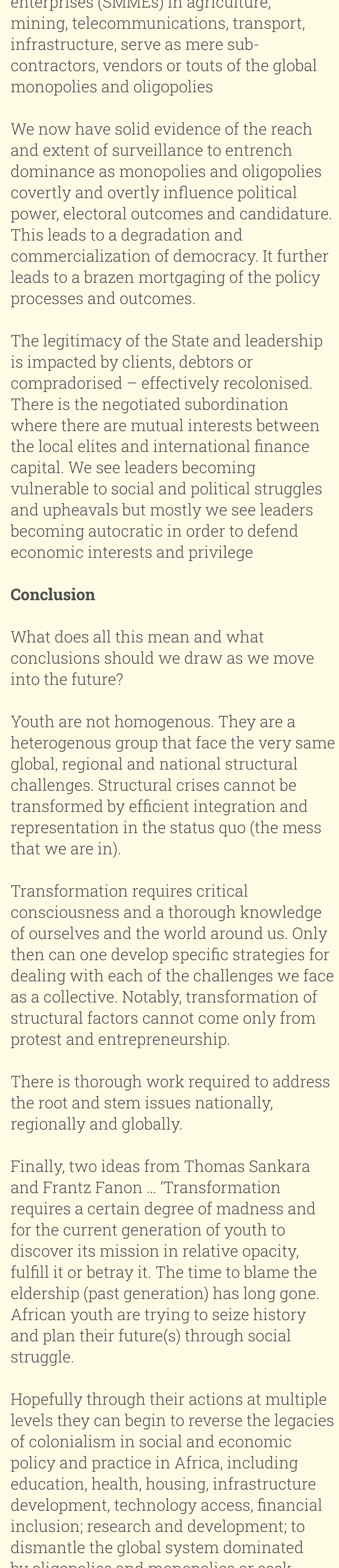
African youth are angry about the ‘system’, their governments, and for good reason.

Socio-economic and political stress and repression is the leading cause of death amongst African youth. African youth are traumatised and they continue to experience chronic stress, especially during this time of Covid-19 because of state repression, overall environmental

As a result of various factors, the majority of African youth are culturally disconnected from their families, communities, the economy and society at large due to exclusion. Sadly, young women in particular, suffer doubly as a result of regressive cultural practices, economic exclusion and rising sexual and gender-based violence in an increasingly militarised patriarchal society

As the youth suffer from the otherisation and discrimination in broader society based on race, ethnicity, gender and class, the impoverished youth also become easy prey to various elites and anti-State groups that seek to recruit them into violent extremism or political violence

Overall, poverty, inequality, exclusion and State repression and impunity fuel the rising tide of youth-led revolution in Africa.



The Explanations

On the face of it, the tumultuous state of Africa suggests amongst other things multiple failures, including leadership, electoralism, liberal idealism, governance, ethics and professionalism, institutions, service delivery, economic management, State, market and society, citizenship and followership to mention a few.

It requires a deeper look into the soul of the continent, its history, economic structure, governance systems, political culture and overall direction of travel suggests that the following is what is really going on. Let's take a look at the real challenges that are there:

The system is broken, i.e. the economic development trajectory and logic as well as the political systems and institutions that support it. The masses of African people work and a few elites, who may not labour at all, will benefit from that work. Many generations of the poor will continue to be impoverished whilst the wealthy get wealthier and less accountable.

Our current economic development trajectory will not produce transformation for women, youth, peasants. The neoliberal pathway that we are following cannot resolve poverty, inequality and exclusion.

Our economic development trajectory will not and cannot produce liberty, freedom, self-determination and self-reliance. Neo-liberalism will not avail healthcare for all, education for all, skills development, value-adding and locally vibrant economies. Our system will not produce greater accountability and transparency from State elites.

This system will continue to feminize poverty and entrench racism, classism and the Deep State.

We face choiceless and contentless democracies where elections are mere rituals and lead to the betrayal of public trust in institutions and leadership or merely the recycling of the same gerontocracy.

The breakdown in social contracts has led to wide-spread anti-establishment sentiments amongst the youth transforming into radicalisation while political populism thrives.

With the systemic failure or the hijacking of institutions and constitutions, the Deep State becomes naked and unashamed.

With a hollowed-out State and soul-less civil society organisations both the State elite, the civil society elite, academic, military, bureaucratic and business elite become mere echoes of the empire.

There is global and local concentration of capital and power as well as the militarisation of both.

The COVID-19 pandemic era has highlighted the link between global economic policies, economic decision-making, science and technology and the control of intellectual property rights (IPRs).

We see how instruments, tools and means of domination are used. Transnational corporations and multinational corporations are producing goods and services. In turn local private sector and especially small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) in agriculture, mining, telecommunications, transport, infrastructure, serve as mere sub-contractors, vendors or touts of the global monopolies and oligopolies

We now have solid evidence of the reach and extent of surveillance to entrench dominance as monopolies and oligopolies covertly and overtly influence political power, electoral outcomes and candidature. This leads to a degradation and commercialization of democracy. It further leads to a brazen mortgaging of the policy processes and outcomes.

The legitimacy of the State and leadership is impacted by clients, debtors or compradorised – effectively recolonised. There is the negotiated subordination where there are mutual interests between the local elites and international finance capital. We see leaders becoming vulnerable to social and political struggles and upheavals but mostly we see leaders becoming autocratic in order to defend economic interests and privilege

Conclusion

What does all this mean and what conclusions should we draw as we move into the future?

Youth are not homogenous. They are a heterogenous group that face the very same global, regional and national structural challenges. Structural crises cannot be transformed by efficient integration and representation in the status quo (the mess that we are in).

Transformation requires critical consciousness and a thorough knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. Only then can one develop specific strategies for dealing with each of the challenges we face as a collective. Notably, transformation of structural factors cannot come only from protest and entrepreneurship.

There is thorough work required to address the root and stem issues nationally, regionally and globally.

Finally, two ideas from Thomas Sankara and Frantz Fanon ... ‘Transformation requires a certain degree of madness and for the current generation of youth to discover its mission in relative opacity, fulfill it or betray it. The time to blame the eldership (past generation) has long gone. African youth are trying to seize history and plan their future(s) through social struggle.

Hopefully through their actions at multiple levels they can begin to reverse the legacies of colonialism in social and economic policy and practice in Africa, including education, health, housing, infrastructure development, technology access, financial inclusion, research and development; to dismantle the global system dominated by oligopolies and monopolies or seek alternatives to it.

Alternatives

Domestic struggles against local or regional comrador classes is insufficient unless it includes the system of international institutions, donors that govern development agendas and control levers of power and favours or propagates interests of white supremacists or the West above the rest.

African youth are seeking to dismantle coloniality in local institutions, policies and practices in all social sectors and the economy: to go beyond the fixation with and sole focus on behavioural change amongst African elites to fighting for structural changes in the global, regional and national economies.

Across Africa, protesting youth are seeking to dismantle supremacism - white supremacism, genocidal tendencies, exploitation of labour, land-grabs and over-exploitation of natural resources; male supremacy/patriarchy, and human supremacy - that justifies the destruction of the planet and biodiversity to the detriment of future generations.

Brian Kagoro is a Pan Africanist and a constitutional and economic relations lawyer.

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".

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.

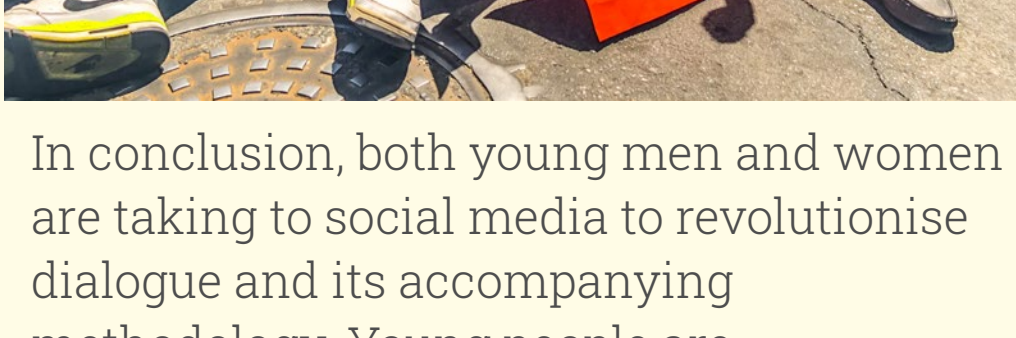
More specifically, the politics of respectability is usually and primarily applied to women. It speaks to the self-censoring which occurs in the pursuit to "be taken more seriously" in the world. Ordinarily, it means refraining from sharing sexually explicit content, or content which alludes to alcohol, 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.

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.

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.

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

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 presidential election 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

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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 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 of the army which safeguarded them as they travelled to various locations with armed escorts to ensure their safety. They also coerced them to wear bulletproof 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.

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 detail," the Malawi Human Rights Commission, a state funded constitutional body, reported after investigations.

The 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 an 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.

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.

The Supreme Court shortly afterwards 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 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.

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Media, elections and political change in Malawi

By *Levi Kabwato*

The 2019 tripartite elections and 2020 presidential elections in Malawi were defining moments in the country's history. For the first time, a court annulled election results and ordered a rerun. Only in Kenya had this happened before. Marred by irregularities, incompetence and injustice, the 2019 election results, which kept incumbent Peter Mutharika in power, were challenged first on the ballot itself, then in the streets and finally in the courts, which then ordered a fresh presidential poll.

Between May 2019 and June 2020, Malawians learnt of numerous attempts to subvert the electoral popular will, arrogance and defiance of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC), the strength of the Judiciary in the face of threats and political interference and the potency of their own strength as citizens.

Media – the proverbial Fourth and Fifth Estate – were kept busy, and in an environment of rapidly increasing polarity and volatility, fulfilled the mandate of keeping the nation informed while yet other media attempted to manipulate information and misinform.

The critical markers of how much progress Malawi has made in its young democracy were: citizens' months-long protest action; judiciary independence, including granting of access for live nationwide broadcasts of court proceedings (open justice); evolution of technology tools to monitor elections (election situation room); a relatively free media, with attendant benefits of investigative journalism. To properly analyse the importance of the latter and its relationship to elections and political change, it is important to contextualise the evolution of media in Malawi since independence.

1964 – the making of un-Freedom

6 July 1964 – Independence. Yet, the promise of the moment soon disappeared and in its place, the pseudo-nationalist politics of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda unfolded. Jail, torture, fear, death and poverty were normalised for three (3) decades. Banda's reign – exercised through the logic of the one-party State – was the re-making of un-Freedom in the colonial aftermath. In Malawi, therefore, the primary assault was on the right to freedom of expression. Media were tightly-controlled, speech was monitored and mistrust was sowed amongst citizens, thanks to a not-so sophisticated but highly-effective spy network. The result: threatened journalists, jailed academics, disappeared political activists and fearful citizens.

Banda acquired Blantyre Print and Publishing Company (now Times Media Group), publishers of Malawi's oldest newspaper titles – The Daily Times and Malawi News. All this while he exercised control over the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) as well as the Malawi News Agency (MANA), the country's largest news network. The effects of this 'totalitarian' control of the mediascape shaped and influenced the organisation and editorial approaches of the media in Malawi in the early 1990s. As media in Malawi evolve, they are continuously tasked – wittingly or unwittingly – with evaluating their relationship with the State, which is often conflated with the ruling party of the day.

1994–2020: whirlwinds of change, Politics and Politricks

In 1994, Malawi was caught up in the proverbial 'winds of change' which swept across Africa and other parts of the global South from the late 1980s to mid-1990s. By this time, the logic of the one-party state was no longer holding, as appetite for multi-party democracy increased. Caught up in the resistance, open defiance aided by citizens' expanding access to media and information, Banda's dictatorship collapsed. Thus arrived the era of multiparty politics, logically followed by other tenets of (neo)-liberalism – expanded rights, media pluralism, privatisation and severe under-investment in public goods. Bakili Muluzi became president, sponsored by the United Democratic Front (UDF), which had popular support.

At the end of his constitutional two-terms in office, Muluzi decided to run for a third, a clear attempt at reversing the 1994 gains. Resistance to this bid was organised by civic and political movements, mainly students, religious, other groups and political parties. The media, too, exposed the machinations while spotlighting and amplifying pro-democracy voices and narratives. Muluzi's way of getting around the defeated bid was to flout intra-party processes and bring in an outsider, Bingu wa Mutharika. The 2004 election that brought Mutharika into power remains one of the most heavily contested and violent elections in Malawi. So much was the violence that the metaphor of the moment is the killing of nine year-old Epiphania Bonjesi, killed by a 'stray' bullet fired by police during a clampdown on protest action.

The media have also played a critical role in exposing machinations to subvert popular will. Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship eventually collapsed after numerous atrocities were exposed by independent media.

Like Muluzi before him, Mutharika flouted UDF's internal processes, resigned from the party and formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Towards the end of his two-terms, and consistent with the aspiration of sitting Malawian presidents to manipulate succession processes, Bingu brought in his brother, Peter, also an outsider. Unfortunately, he (Bingu) did not live to see this plan come to fruition as he succumbed to a heart attack. Immediate attempts by the DPP to see through their succession plan were thwarted by the constitution, military, civic organisations and media, the latter having exposed the circumstances around Bingu's death as well as the intention to subvert constitutional order. Vice president, Joyce Banda (no relation to Kamuzu), having been ostracised by the DPP to make way for the younger Mutharika, became president in 2012 and would lead Malawi until the next election in 2014, which she lost to Peter Mutharika.

In 2019, yet another heavily-contested election saw Mutharika win a second term in office. Much like in 2004, however, citizen-led protests broke out across the country citing poll irregularities. The High Court agreed with a challenge brought forward by two (2) of the leading opposition candidates, Lazarus Chakwera from the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and Saulos Chilima from the United Transformation Movement (UTM). Once the Supreme Court of Appeal upheld the decision of the lower court to nullify the 2019 elections, both Chakwera and Chilima, together with other political parties formed an electoral coalition, Tonse Alliance, to contest the 2020 presidential elections, which they won.

Corruption: the abscess that hurts the nation

It was during Joyce Banda's term that one of the biggest corruption scandals in the country was exposed. Now commonly-referred to as 'Cashgate', this scandal revealed the extent to which various people in government were manipulating the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS). Simply put, large cheques were being issued for services that were never rendered. Once the cheques had been honoured by the Reserve Bank of Malawi (RBM) and other financial institutions, they would then be deleted from the system. Whilst the IFMIS abuse was exposed during Joyce Banda's term, most data point to an established and elaborate practice of the same in preceding administrations. Such has been the pervasiveness of corruption in Malawi that all former presidents are implicated in numerous scandals, all amounting to billions of Kwacha.

Media: the glue holding Democracy together

In the immediate aftermath of Malawi's historic political transition in 1994, various media entities were established. However, only a few have enjoyed longevity, especially in print. Broadcast media have consistently grown, thanks to a friendly policy environment. However, most constraints in this sector are a result of inadequate resourcing (human, technical and financial). This is evident in the limited capacity of these media to effectively meet their mandates, especially for community media which, despite being critical to the sustainability of democracy, face perpetual threats of shutting down because of under-resourcing.

The media have also played a critical role in exposing machinations to subvert popular will. Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship eventually collapsed after numerous atrocities were exposed by independent media. As mentioned above, Muluzi's third-term bid failed largely because of push-backs by the media. Both Mutharikas were routinely exposed in the media for wrongdoing. And Joyce Banda's short presidency was also subject to powerful investigative reporting, which unearthed wrongdoing, especially the Cashgate scandal.

Despite early shifts towards liberalising the media space, Muluzi's government used regulatory bodies, especially the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) to frustrate the opening up of space to broadcast media through, among other things, delays in the issuance of licences. Beyond this, MACRA has also been instrumentalised in blocking and effectively censoring broadcast media, including community media. This usually occurs during electoral periods, with vague regulations and laws being used to prevent citizens' access to information. State-run broadcast media, with their history of continued interference and manipulation by the government of the day always seem to get away with similar, and in most cases worse, infractions. In a country with low literacy levels, this has huge implications for the type of information most citizens have access to.

Investigative Journalism, Institutions and Critical Masses

If vibrant media are critical to sustaining democracy then, in Malawi, this has been proved true. For the greater part of the country's young democratic life, media advocacy groups fought for the enactment of an Access to Information law. This became a reality in 2020, over a decade after initial attempts started. From 1994, Malawian media have faced numerous threats – journalists coming under fire, withdrawn advertising and lawsuits. The resilience and resolve demonstrated by the privately-run media ahead, during and after both the 2019 and 2020 presidential elections is a result of their constant evolution since 1994. It is not something that was cultivated overnight. This sequence also follows the elevated nature of investigative journalism across most newsrooms. This area, which requires significant resources, time and commitment was largely neglected for many years as most media outlets spread resources in an effort to answer ever-present sustainability questions.

Significantly, investigative journalism in Malawi has also benefited from the growing strength of other institutions – Judiciary, Security, oversight bodies, civil society and an informed citizenry. In 2014, particularly, the introduction of the multi-stakeholder elections monitoring and reporting platform – the Election Situation Room (ESR) – opened up various pathways and tools for generating, processing and distributing data that enhanced the transparency and integrity of elections. It is some of this data that investigative journalists used to expose widespread irregularities, and it is also data that found its way into the electoral petitions submitted as evidence to challenge the 2019 vote outcome.

The period 2019-2020 especially revealed the importance of a critical mass in confronting institutions that fall victim to political capture. In this case, targeting MEC, resulted in its transformation with the implication that the subsequent election that was held was largely free, fair and credible. This 'confrontation' was consistent with the mass action that brought an end to Kamuzu Banda's 30-year dictatorship; pushed back against Muluzi's third term bid; resisted Bingu wa Mutharika's authoritarianism; pushed back against Peter Mutharika's attempt at subverting constitutional order; sought answers for Joyce Banda's 'Cashgate' scandal; and demanded the nullification of 2019 presidential elections.

The age-old adage – "informed citizens make informed choices" – is likely to ring true for Malawi for years to come, as long as critical investments are made in the media, and if the resolve of investigative journalists persists.

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new episode!

By Gwen Lister

**MULLING MATTERS OF
MEDIA - A CANDID
CONVERSATION WITH THE
FIRST LADY OF NAMIBIA**

