

Dynamics of Elite Power and the clash of media reform agendas in contemporary Zimbabwe

Abstract

The current political and media policy framework in the country has resulted in Zimbabwe ranking among the few most dangerous countries to practise journalism in. Reporters Sans Frontieres (2008 Press Freedom Index) state that: "Being a journalist in ... Zimbabwe (151st) - is a high risk exercise involving endless frustration and constant police and judicial harassment". Journalists continue to be harassed, arrested, tortured and unlawfully detained. This paper explores the emergence of policy elites and their role in influencing the evolution of media legislative policy framework that has been emerging in Zimbabwe since 2000. It considers how the bipolar political contestations between the two dominant political formations in the country polarised the policy-making environment with resultant problems sharply manifesting themselves in the way the media operated and related to the rest of society. The media laws that get passed from around 2001 were themselves a product of a political process deeply divided. This discussion focuses on the ideological contestations among different elites at such institutions as the University of Zimbabwe faculty of Media and Communication Studies and the Department of Mass Communications at Zimbabwe Polytechnic College, as they co-opted and were co-opted with other elites in government bureaucracies, media professions councils and other intellectuals in diverse fields of expertise to set different and at times conflictual agendas for media reform in the country. The paper employs Alford's schema of Dominant, Challenging and Repressed interests to analyse various actors as they competed to determine and drive the ongoing media reform process in Zimbabwe. Over the past decade there has emerged three major elite coalition tendencies vis-à-vis media policy making in Zimbabwe. There emerged a clearly pro-regime policy lobby crystallising in the Media Ethics Commission set up by government in 2001 and a pro-libertarian coalition of media interest groups that congeal in the form of the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe. The paper seeks to establish the extent to which the policy-making process in Zimbabwe can be argued to be top-down and undemocratic. It reviews key research reports, commissioned or un-commissioned and conference documents, position papers by key interest groups as its evidence. Media content on important media policy related issues is also analysed to establish the role the media themselves played in facilitating or impeding popular participation in the media reform debates. The discussion hopes to raise questions about the democratic deficits inherent in the current media reform trajectory.

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Introduction

Whichever way one may look at it the past decade saw Zimbabwe's media operating in a policy environment that may at best be described as very restrictive if not hostile to citizens' exercise of free expression. While in a democracy public policy ideally begins and ends with the people exercising their citizenship. This investigation which is still ongoing seeks to determine the extent to which elite theories of policy making may be applicable in understanding how competing interests have sort to influence and shape media policy in Zimbabwe, with a particular focus at the period since 2000. The analysis presented here focuses not on the policies themselves, but on the elite nature of the political contestations and processes that produce those policy outcomes. It seeks to identify who the policy actors were, their policy advocacy strategies and activities through which they sought to influence policy. Discussions centering on what is the ideal media structure for Zimbabwe generate intense debate in the population particularly in the period after 2000. This intense focus on the structure and role of the media in society should be viewed as far from accidental. Implicated are questions about the political environment which provides the context for the policy process that yields a particular media policy outcome. From the time when Muzorewa's party coined the slogan "That is what the people want" in an attempt to hoodwink the international community into believing that the government that came out of the internal settlement enjoyed wide acceptance at home by the majority of the black population

Public Policy Formulation, A conceptual Framework

Anderson (1975) cited in Osman (2000) understands public policy as referring to a government's deliberately chosen course of action or inaction in order to solve a social problem. Some scholars argue that public policy may best be conceived not as a one off event, rather as an ongoing process, something fluid and ever changing, as the political system responds and adapts to its environment, Easton (1965). Easton's Political System Model can be applied to understand the impulses that gave rise to a shift in policy direction with regard the structure and operations of the media. The policy process according to this theory can only be understood when analysed with reference to its context. One would need to understand the whole social political and economic milieu within which a policy process unfolds. In this regard policy decisions represent a political system's response to pressures, threats to its interests and self preservation as a system emanating from the environment both internal and external to the system itself. Zimbabwean political system had enjoyed relative stability throughout the first two decades after attainment of

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independence in 1980 with ZANU-PF party easily establishing and maintaining unassailed hegemonic dominance yielding a de-facto one party state on the population. Serious threats to the perpetuation of the political status quo manifest in the shape of serious political competition as policy of liberalisation extends naturally from the sphere of economics to the sphere of politics. Before adoption of the IMF and the World Bank sponsored economic liberalisation policy package in 1991 the government of Zimbabwe had hitherto enjoyed a near monopoly over the definition and interpretation of the political reality in the country through its ownership and control of the mainstream media channels both print and electronic. The Media Professionalism and Ethics Committee set up by government to study the media problem in Zimbabwe made the following observation based on its findings about what it understood as the true nature and source of the media polarisation problem in Zimbabwe:

Until the time of the Structural Adjustment Programme, government had never faced a serious challenge from the privately owned media about the definition and causes of all these challenges which most people now seem to agree have congealed into a 'crisis'. Up to the time after the adoption of ESAP, the government could both manage and define the challenges. ESAP did two things to change this position: it led to the proliferation of privately-owned media, and it made the challenges more difficult to manage, thereby opening the way for the growing privately owned media to define and explain the challenge in ways quite contrary to the government's definitions and explanations. (MEC 2002: 233).

In terms of this study's findings the problem with the media was a result of over-liberalisation of a strategic sector resulting in government loss of its prerogative over the all important power to name and define the Zimbabwean reality to its people and the world in a way favourable to the ruling party's political interests. The way forward for the ZANU-PF government was to institute policy reforms to reverse whatever the liberalisation of the communications sector for government to regain lost ground. The outcome was the introduction of a raft of media legislation between 2001 and 2002, whose calculated effect would amount to whittling the embryonic privately owned media which government characterised as local megaphones of western imperialist forces hostile to the Mugabe government's nationalist policies. The overall aim was to reclaim and restore government's dominance in the media sector in order to deploy it as an ideological weapon to strike back at what was perceived to be an international campaign of vilification aimed at discrediting Mugabe and his nationalist government for daring to challenge the global market order, (Gowan 2008). Thus in terms of Easton's political system model loss of power to determine the agenda and content of the debates on Zimbabwe itself induced by government's implementation of an earlier policy of economic liberalisation becomes the input

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into another wave of media policy formulation, implementation and review process. .

Alford's (1975) theory of structural interests explains public policy in terms of the power struggle among various interest groups within a policy sector. According to the theory of structural interests as applied to the media policy sector is defined by the changing nature of power relations between three power centres Alford refers to as dominant interests, challenging interests and repressed interests. The policy area is therefore seen as a contested terrain with policy interest groups always shifting relative to each other and vis-a-vis each other. Applying this theory to the Zimbabwean Media policy process one would characterise political elites in ZANU-PF as the dominant interests commanding an influential position in government policy making and policy implementing institutions, while civil society media think-tank organizations working in cahoots with private capital in the media publishing business would probably constitute what Alford refers to by the challenging interests. The majority of the ordinary citizenry who may have an interest in the media but have no wherewithal or organisational capacity to influence policy would constitute the repressed interests. These positions however need not be viewed as permanent but constantly shifting positions. Key in setting and driving the policy agenda is the work of what may be referred to as media experts and analysts in think tank organisations such as universities. In the case of Zimbabwe the University of Zimbabwe provided that theatre for the clash of ideas. Certain scholars and academics became consistently associated with particular discursal positions. It was from this institution that the Mugabe government drew most of its ideologues to sell its ideological programmes. The former Minister of Information and Publicity Professor Jonathan Moyo, was himself a University of Zimbabwe lecturer before getting his appointment in Mugabe's government and he in turn drew on his former colleagues at the same university for people who could be counted upon to assume important responsibilities in policy implementing institutions of government.

On the other side of the media policy divide also developed a network of scholars academics and researchers gravitated around a more liberal doctrine of how the media should be organised. There developed two opposing tendencies in networks of think-tanks often called upon to provide the moral and intellectual leadership for the competing policy agendas on the media.

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“Policy networks and communities are important concepts which”, according to Sutton (1991: 12) “have been useful for developing understanding about the role of interest groups in the policy process. They provide a mechanism whereby narratives and political interests can be brought together in policy development” the policy narratives and discourses have been structure in terms of the same binary opposites that have characterized political debates in the post liberalisation period in Zimbabwe with name calling and labelling being used by each policy interest group to discredit, criminalise and delegitimize the rival policy position. The pro status quo lobby group described any suggestions for policy reforms in favour of a more open and self regulating media as a regime change agenda and those championing such policy proposals as running dogs of imperialism, puppets of the imperialist West bent on recolonising the country. On the other hand the challenging interests in their turn used terms such as draconian media laws as a blanket criticism of government media legislation and media hangmen to refer to those tasked with the administration of the laws. They invested time and resources in documenting and recording instances of what they called cases of human rights violations torture and persecution of journalists and media practitioners perceived as critical of government policy and actions. Media watchdog organisations conducted extensive research themselves or sponsored third parties to conduct research and collect evidence to enable them to make a case against the state’s interventionist policies in the media. MISA’s annual reports “So this is Democracy” and other reviews and analyses of the media legislation are clear examples of this cooperation and networking between organisations sharing a common policy position. MMPZ’s regular column on Media Watch published through the independent press also falls in this category. The intellectuals in university research institutes form “a dominant epistemic community, a particularly influential group that has close link with policy makers, and forces an issue on to the agenda and shapes policy-making.” Sutton 1991: 31).

The Framing of the communication issues in Zimbabwe

“Framing works to ‘distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others’”, (Sutton 1991). The communication problem in Zimbabwe has been framed differently but mainly along two binary opposing stand points championed by elite organizations aligned to the two major political ideological formations and orientations that characterized Zimbabwean polarized politics during much of the decade since the emergence of a strong political opposition party in

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the form of the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999. The policy bargaining positions that emerge may best be understood by using Alford's analytic framework of a dominating elite, a challenging elite and a repressed elite in that order. The first group of policy actors and which may be described as representing the dominant elite in terms of Alford's theory and that has largely been able to influence media policy in the period under review frames the media problem in Zimbabwe as part of larger global market-centric conspiracy bent on undermining the nationalist project locally. The then Minister of Information and Publicity in the President's Office, Professor Jonathan Mayo and the government bureaucracy that fell under his ministry is generally seen as its foremost representative. This policy position also manages to get takers from among some prominent scholars, academics and individual elites as its think tanks. The nascent and embryonic but vocal media that is critical to the state is viewed by this group of policy actors in the ruling party as representing the most sinister threat to the nation state and its interests. The policy prescription to address this challenge and to reign in what they characterised as an errant media, (MEC 2001) is seen as greater state control of the media and the rolling back of a neo-liberal anti-statist free-flow, free-market crusading media.

Pitted against the dominant nationalist interests of ZANE-PF elites in government emerged a challenging policy advocacy lobby adopting a pro-neoliberal view that ascribed a watchdog role to the media. It defined the media problem in Zimbabwe after 2000 in narrow oppositional terms as one of too much state intervention stifling free flow of information and the development of a free press. Statutory regulation and an expanded role of state and its agencies in the media sector was thus characterised as an affront to the people's inalienable civil and political rights and therefore anathema and dysfunctional to the true interests of media democracy, and citizenship. This position was articulated mainly by a well networked coalition of media watchdog non-governmental organizations culminating in the formation of the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) in 2007, an organization that brought together like-minded, largely donor funded civil society organizations like the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) and the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) working together with and through much of the media that characterize itself as the independent press. It must be pointed out the constellation of stars in both the dominant interest and the challenging interest groupings has been relatively stable over time. The same names and particular individuals have

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continued to be associated with the articulation of specific policy positions a phenomenon which guarantees change with continuity in the way media policy has been shaped in Zimbabwe. For example, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for Information and Publicity who represents and best articulates ZANU-PF policy interests in the media has kept his job over the past decade. Tafataona Mahoso and most of his colleagues in the MEC credited with pro scientific basis and legitimation of the restrictive media policy regime in the post-ESAP period have continued to be recycled to serve in various influential positions from which they directly influence and impact media operations in the country. The same could be argued with reference to the limited pool of prominent media experts and analysts, Andy Moise of the MMPZ, Takura Zhangazha of MISA and Mathew Takaona former president of ZUJ and now member of the newly established statutory media regulatory body, the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). (Sutton 1991: 12) points to this conservative tendency in policy communities when he states that:

Epistemic communities may express strong opinions about the way policy decisions should be made, and if politicians agree with these positions, they may invite the experts into the circles of power, providing an opportunity for such communities to have a substantial influence on the policy process”.

The majority of ordinary Zimbabweans, rural based and who live on the margins of poverty far from the madding media generally lacked the wherewithal to be able to articulate their own interests in the ongoing media policy debates in the country. This group is characterized by lack of organization skills to be able to influence policy to cater for their own interests. Their actions and activities were cast in a reaction mode. They react as individuals to policy impacts whether positive or negative and their own policy input comes in the form of a reaction to policy implementation and may only influence policy change in the very long term given the fact that elite regimes with weak and unstable democratic institutions are generally insensitive and least responsive to their policy environments. This amorphous group would include among its ranks many scholars, academics and professionals who emigrate to the diaspora because conditions at home are less than satisfactory and accommodative of their own interests. They then form themselves into a diasporic lobby that actively pursued means of keeping themselves tethered to chosen policy coalitions on the home front. They create loose networks of like-minded groups and individuals on either side of the media policy debate through on-line news groups and discussion forums. The very emergence of the phenomenon of pirate radio stations transmitting their broadcasts into Zimbabwe from outside the country is a clear manifestation of a policy

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reaction to a media constricting policy environment intolerant of alternative voices to the political mainstream. Reaction to a constricting media policy environment within the country principally takes the form of a mass migration from ZBC TV and radio channels to watching and listening to satellite television and pirate radio stations on shortwave. While this characterization may be true for most urban based families in Zimbabwe the case is quite different with regards the rural poor and other marginalized groups with no access to the mainstream media. Communication policy debates that narrowly focus on state or self regulation, freedom of the press make little sense to people in the margins. The people about whom Mukasa (2003) writes when he states that:

For the bulk of the Zimbabwean population living in rural areas, the national mainstream press has little, if any, influence on their lives. Even a constellation of peri-urban community newspapers have not had any demonstrable impact on the rural masses. This raises the question of whether Zimbabwe, and indeed the rest of Africa, can be said to have any mass media at all, considering the fact that most media circulation is largely confined to urban areas.

The rural populations of Africa would thus be considered as falling at the epicenter of those whose policy interests on media are largely ignored as there is no process of aggregating their interests. The preoccupation of a well resourced coalition of urban based civil society organizations with the object of wresting media from government control often diverts their attention away from poor people's policy issues in media and communication. Conflicting elite media reform agendas being pushed by either side of the policy divide have little to do with the interests of the rural majority who according to Rusike (2003: 13) unlike their urban counterparts, have no means of keeping themselves informed and largely rely on networks of interpersonal communication. In Zimbabwe like most of Africa,

...the flow of information dries up as one moves away from the national capital and urban centres to the villages. The net result is that there are two socio-political systems in Zimbabwe, one rural another urban, two information systems, one rural, which relies upon person-to-person contact and the other urban, which has well-developed and efficient media of communication.

The ZANU-PF pro-status quo lobby in the coalition government on its part seems committed to and guided by what it claims as the findings of a Media Professionalism and Ethics Committee (MEC) after a countrywide consultative research process in 2001 which established the rationale for legislating against liberalization of the media sector. That document has remained foundational in directing government policy on media since 2002 and the ZANU-PF lobby in government seems reluctant to depart from this entrenched position. This becomes apparent from

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the tenacity with which the Ministry of Information (one of the key ministries which ZANU-PF has retained under its control) continues to recycle the same individuals, think-tanks who played an instrumental role in crafting the current policy regime in their place in spite of an increasingly vocal call for their replacement in key policy positions. This was evident in the line up of keynote speakers at the Kariba Media All-stakeholders Consultative Conference held in Kariba in May 2009 in the person of Professor Jonathan Mayo, Dr. Tafataona Mahoso former CEO of the now defunct Media and Information Commission which became infamous for closing media houses critical of government, Mr. Patrick Chinamasa, and Johannes Tomana equally discredited for selective application of the law to criminalise and persecute the private media. As if this was not enough Tafataona Mahoso keeps bouncing back at one time unilaterally appointed to head the new-look Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe BAZ in direct contravention of the letter and spirit of the Global Political Agreement Article 19 which provides for such appointments to be made in full consultation between the three principals to the agreement, and then as head of the secretariat of the newly constituted Zimbabwe Media Commission. This has been viewed as a deliberate attempt by ZANE-PF to stall progress towards any serious reform of the media.

Press freedom day celebrations among other media events such as press club meetings have provided a forum for constantly keeping the media reform issue on the spotlight for public debate. The parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Media established in 1999 has also provided a useful avenue for media reform activists and advocacy coalitions to access and lobby policy makers on media policy issues. The composition of the portfolio committee with the two main political parties ZANE-PF and the Main faction of the MDC formations each represented by six members of Parliament generally renders the organ's mandate to seek reform ineffectual on the basis of irreconcilable ideological positions of the two political parties. In the context of the inclusive government the members include:

Chairperson of this Portfolio Committee Gift Chimanikire [MDC-T] Members of the Committee Fungai Chaderopa [ZANU-PF], Peter Chanetsa [ZANU-PF], Makhosini Hlongwane [ZANU-PF], Noel Mandebvu [ZANU-PF], Bright Matonga [ZANU-PF], Eliah Jembere [MDC-T], Pishai Muchauraya [MDC-T], Simbaneuta Mudarikwa [ZANU-PF], Shuah Mudiwa [MDC-T], Edward Musumbu [MDC-T], Jani Varandeni [MDC-T], (Sokwanele 2010).

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The fact that the chairmanship of the committee is with the MDC would normally place the MDC party in a privileged position to take leadership and determine the pace, direction and quality of policy reforms in the Media sector. Developments on the ground however, tend to reveal that the executive arm of government holds the key in determining what actually happens regards policy formulation and implementation in Zimbabwe. Thus the fact that the ministry responsible for media is headed by a ZANU-PF Minister and given the fact that key personnel who manned the bureaucracy which had been instrumental both in the formulation interpretation and implementation of the policies currently in place, hardly changed tends to work in favour of a more conservative and slow incremental approach to reforming the media sector in Zimbabwe.

Ultra-nationalist backlash

The crisis facing the media reform agenda is found in the Global Political Agreement (GPA), article 19 signed by the three political forces which constitute the present-day government of Zimbabwe. It states that the process of registration and re-registration of new and closed media players respectively will be done under the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA). It is a paradox that the two pieces of legislation which led to the closure of the media space can become the foundation of reforms and/or transformation. It's a misnomer given how the acts are repressively structured to curtail the very same goal of media freedom which every well-meaning Zimbabwean is yearning for. (Moyo 2010).

The GPA provisions on media reform therefore from both political divides represent half-hearted measures committing the political belligerents to a less than satisfactory policy path. Simply removing a Mahoso headed outfit to replace it with yet another state regulator albeit of a mixed political parentage is itself fraught with many debilitating problems not to mention the fact that the statutory body so formed would still be implementing the same statutes through the same bureautic structures who would be inclined to interpret the law much in the same way as before. The state functionaries who had been given to carrying out ZANU-PF party policy unquestioningly generally express a similarly contemptuous attitude towards the compromised ZMC structure. According to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity, George Charamba (2009: 11)

The recent changes to the constitution are ominous to the media and should have, one

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would have thought, galvanised the industry into creating genuine, consensual bodies reflecting your will, never of the external other. It scares me stiff when violent opposition to the media and Information Commission (MIC) is cured by a poor recreation of the same MIC with greater powers implied by the aura of constitutionalism. The raw message coming through the constitutional Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) is that better be misgoverned by gods than by mere mortals.

Charamba's above sentiments expressed in his address to the editors at a UNESCO organised roundtable represent the fears that those in government particularly members of the former ruling party harbour against an open media environment. The discourses of "regime change agenda", and "running dogs of imperialist interests" pushing for the ouster of the ZANU-PF government bent on recolonising the country lends an easy classificatory schema for dealing with reformists and other media interest groups. The ultra nationalist lobby in ZANU-PF party structures and the government bureaucracy directly in charge of media policy depart from the view that they are the guardians of an essentialist nationalist tradition which needs to be safeguarded from a neo-liberal onslaught. The best policy framework is seen as that which rolls back or checkmates a neoliberal market-centric ideology in the country. This oversimplification of media policy issues tends to harden positions and stall any movement towards a common policy position. Those challenging the current media set up structure their arguments around discourses of free flow of information, free, pluralistic and diverse press self-regulating as opposed to state regulated. These seem to be irreconcilable policy alternatives.

When Charamba goes on to confide that: "...no politician fears the people. Politicians fear whoever it is that puts thoughts into the mind of the people." This betrays a mindset among ZANU-PF politicians in government which prefers a situation where government or rather politicians maintain a firm control on the media and would be reluctant to let go of the power to choose who may or may not speak to the people through the media.

Another important revelation that Charamba makes about the direction that media policy reforms are likely to take was when he says: "After the constitution of ZMC, and with the announcement of the new Board for BAZ recently, the Ministry will have little to do in respect of enforcing rules of the media game. If anything its role will trim down to making policy, itself a residual role. What will enlarge is its role as a media proprietor." This raises many questions about the government's genuine commitment to opening up the media to private and independent players

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in the foreseeable future. Developments in the media in Zimbabwe since the formation of a coalition government point to continuation with the old media order rather than genuine media reform. Recent developments already seem to confirm this abiding attitude in government that it should never let go of its stranglehold in both the electronic and print media sectors, given that it has gone on a licensing spree and self fragmenting by launching new newspaper titles as well as broadcasting channels creating the false impression that there are new entrants in the 'liberalised' media market. Zimpapers (1980 Limited) the newspaper giant in whom government owns a controlling stake launched a new newspaper title the H-Metro towards the end of 2009 and ZBC launched a commercial television channel in Harare in May 2010. A truly privately owned media player is yet to be licensed under the reformed media environment. It shows that government's acceptance of the principle of liberalisation of the media market is conditional on it filling the space itself or with government friendly media owned and operated by its loyal friends.

Towards a compromise

Article 19 of the General Political Agreement represents a political compromise document on the basis of which a coalition government is formed by the three main political parties in Zimbabwe, provides for progressive measures to reform the media sector to open it up to more and diverse opinions and views. It points to the need to review existing media legislation with a view to making it less repressive in line with regional standards of best practices on media policy and regulation, which generally favour self regulation for the media.

As long as the government arrogates to itself the right to regulate the press, its laws will always tend to limit rather than promote press freedom and exclude rather than broaden access to different political, cultural and social groups. Nyamnjoh 2005:268).

The Windhoek Declaration on the Promotion of an Independent and Pluralistic Press, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights entrench freedom of the media in recognition of the civic role that media are expected to play in a democracy.

Inferring from the mixed signals coming from different political camps in the coalition government progress towards full implementation of the GPA provisions on media reforms is likely to be very slow characterised with retractions of policy commitments or even reversals or even open hostility to certain policy tendencies. This probably explains how the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity could use strong condemnatory language

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to express the ZANU-PF position on the issue of self regulation. He declares that, “The Voluntary Media Council will never come right until and unless it abolishes itself, to again found itself as a genuine media effort.” Charamba 2009: 11). The Minister of Information and Publicity, himself a member of ZANU-PF is equally eloquent in expressing his party’s cynical disapproval of the ongoing media reform measures by calling the current steps taken to open up the media spaces as “a giant step backwards” when addressing journalists at a press freedom day commemoration. The MDC members of the coalition on the other hand are more upbeat about the reforms declaring that the offensive media laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Broadcast Services Act will have been repealed by end of the second year of the coalition government.

The Deputy Minister of Information and Publicity Mr. Timba expressed a view representative of the pro-reform lobby in government when he stated that,

There is so much commitment within the inclusive government for repealing and or amending any legislation that has affected peoples' basic freedoms. With respect to AIPPA there was a specific unanimous recommendation at Kariba that AIPPA be repealed and be replaced by Freedom of Information Act and the Media Practitioners Act, (Sokkwanle 2009).

While the recent appointment of former Zimbabwe Union of Journalists to the Zimbabwe Media Commission, may be interpreted as a change of heart in government and an expression of goodwill towards a former ‘adversary’ signalling the end of a confrontational and the beginning of a new paradigm of cooperation and partnership between some sections of civil society and political actors in government. There is a real possibility however, that it will be the Journalism Union which will change and capitulate towards the former ZANU-PF government position. There is a greater probability that the former ZUJ President will use his influence in the Journalism union and the extensive networks with civil society organisations such as those in the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ) to work towards fostering greater rapprochement between those in government who have hitherto worked to maintain the status quo and a radical pro-liberalisation anti-statist lobby in civil society. The problematic that has escaped critical analysis is past experiences of more than half of the members of the ZMC who cut their professional teeth as media professionals working for the same largely government controlled media either at the national broadcast or at Zimpapers may predispose the statutory regulator towards a more

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sympathetic to a pro-continuity rather than to a pro-reform media policy position. The context of inclusivity appears to be a serious game changer in the media reform process with room for more trade-offs. When the government agrees to dissolve and liquidate the MIC it should be understood to represent some form of bargaining strategy in terms of the incremental policy theory. Interpreted in terms of Alford's theory of policy making as the result of a nexus of contenting and competing interests such policy outcomes make sense only in terms of policy struggles between different ideologically oriented powerful policy positions where ideas are allowed to fight it out, bargain and negotiate in a democratic space. The theme suggested by ZUJ for the 2009 Press Freedom day commemorations aptly captures this new orientation within some sectors of the civil society lobby to be more accommodative rather than confrontational. But then what may not be apparent is how the various policy actors connect with sections of the larger society they purport to represent. They act from the view that they know best what is in the interests of the common men and women on the street and countryside. The disconnect poignantly becomes manifest in questions members of the public often ask when they see MISA activists stage marches and demonstrations in the city centres demanding liberalisation of the airwaves and other media spaces. What is all this about? Can anybody put the airwaves on the table to feed our families? How can we jump from no radio or television signal at all to wanting diversity? What seems to be more urgent to the ordinary man is making what media outlets there are reach the remotest villages of Muzarabani, Bulilima, Lupane or Honde Valley first. How can people start by wanting to run before they have learned to stand up and walk, they ask.

Conclusion

The media policy context in Zimbabwe gets a lot more complex as it is impacted by and tries to respond to political developments at home in the shape of a coalition government between former political rivals who have to work together in government on the one hand, and the global financial meltdown that has dried most donors' coffers leading to donor fatigue. The two imperatives impel policy coalitions and various policy constituencies to revise and rethink their policy positions or risk being irrelevant. There is a greater likelihood of thawing and softening of policy positions and scope for greater accommodation, confluence of ideas and policy convergence among different policy lobby groups around media reform in Zimbabwe in spite of political posturing of political actors across the ideological divides that keep the major political

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parties apart. The perception that political fortunes of real political actors in both parties may be intricately intertwined with the capacity to leverage media and command it to shine or not shine on particular individuals and political elite constellations tends to complicate and delay the process of negotiating policy change. But whatever direction and pace that media policy reform will take in the interim, it is least likely to bear the imprint of the majority ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe both in texture and content.

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