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Online diasporic political spheres: inside the emerging spaces for Zimbabweans

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ONLINE DIASPORIC POLITICAL SPHERES: INSIDE THE EMERGING SPACES FOR ZIMBABWEANS

By Brilliant Pongo

2013

ONLINE DIASPORIC POLITICAL SPHERES: INSIDE THE EMERGING SPACES FOR ZIMBABWEANS

BY

Brilliant Pongo

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF MEDIA, ARTS & DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RESEARCH INSTITUTE (CAMRI) DEPARTMENT IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The study investigates how online media are contributing to democracy in Africa. It is interested in the growing online media spaces and their democratic promise. The case study is on diasporic media by citizens from troubled Zimbabwe, whose mass media environment remained a subject of much debate. Between 2000 and 2009, many Zimbabwean local independent media organisations were banned from reporting from within the country and many ordinary Zimbabweans were forced to seek economic and political refuge in South Africa, Britain, Australia, USA and many other countries. Some journalists were arrested and most researchers linked this to the erosion of democracy under the ZANU PF government, which has been in power since 1980.[1] A new opposition challenged ZANU PF monopoly of political power but fiercely contested elections saw the diasporic media engage with Zimbabwe issues more and more. Faced with an intransigent political situation, Zimbabwe's three main political parties[2] agreed a coalition/inclusive government in February 2009, as an interim measure. In the main, diasporic media continued to call for the removal of restrictions imposed on the media[3]. This is not to rule out differences amongst Zimbabweans abroad. Zimbabweans abroad seek to promote a more pluralistic media approach and operate websites transnationally, and in ways that have begun to challenge the existing media monopoly in Zimbabwe. Influential diasporic sites include newzimbabwe.com, zimdaily.com, talkzimbabwe.com, zimbabwemetro.com thezimbabwean.com and thezimbabwetimes.com. My study is focused on the use of internet communication forms for democratic purposes by such groups. The aim of the research is to ask how such new media is influencing traditional forms of control of information by political and economic groups in Zimbabwe. The research will argue that new media technologies have the potential to allow users, mainly those in the Diaspora, increased opportunities to share and develop participate in current affairs and politics. While the state has tightened its grip on the old media (e.g. radio, print press and television) new media technologies have enabled their users to undermine the government's monopoly on information distribution. The tight legislative response of the state is a testament to the effectiveness of these forms of new media. The main thrust of this study will be to investigate new internet sites and their role in Zimbabwean democracy, using Zimdaily.com as a case study. The work contributes to work on the role of African Diasporic Media in Democratic Processes, on the one hand, while on the other hand, it is also about New ICTs and Democracy in Africa.

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[1] This media environment is contradictory to the government's manifesto of 1980 and promises after the country's independence. In the early 1980s the first Minister of Information, Post and Telecommunications, Dr Nathan Shamuyarira, declared: 'Government remains committed to the freedom of the press as stated in its election manifesto. We will neither publish nor edit any of the newspapers' (Shamuyarira cited in Nyahunzvi 2001). Despite these assurances media freedom in both electronic and print forms has remained limited and continues to be restricted.

[2] Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front(ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai(MDC T) and Movement for Democratic Change Mutambara (MDC M)

[3] See BBC News 09/10/2009 'Zimbabwe media 'still not free <'http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8295834.stm>

DEDICATION

To all my family

"Prophets are never accepted in their home town"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a product of cooperation. I received much help from many people with the process of putting this down on paper and in its printing.

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Thank you very much to my brother James Mynd Pongo, for free use of his time and for being a great resource for me on the ground in Zimbabwe. What are brothers for?

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1. INTRODUCTION

i.   *Background and purpose*

During the past decade Zimbabwe has experienced an outward migration of its population that is described as 'exodus' of an estimated quarter of the population - and approximately a third of the population entitled to vote. The reasons for this mass migration are manifold but relate largely to the humanitarian, economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe following the controversial land reform programmes and disputed elections since the year 2000. The ruling party has responded to the opposition and media criticism and resistance with intimidation, exclusion and persecution. In the name of safeguarding national interests, territorial integrity and sovereignty and with the help of new and amended legislation and security forces, democratic rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech, press, information and assembly have been severely restricted for the political opposition, journalists and civil society. Hence, alternative opinions within the public societal and political sphere have been met with restrictive measures, limiting space for democratic participation and political pluralism close to zero. Non-state media and political opposition activities within Zimbabwe have become dangerous – if they can be carried out successfully at all. As a consequence, a growing number of Zimbabwean nationals have been forced to leave the country. Not being allowed to vote in national elections but using the alternative democratic space in their host

countries, politically active Zimbabweans in the diaspora still try to influence political change in their home country through other means.

Consequently, the number of news websites purporting to provide news and information to Zimbabweans in and outside the country continues to grow with websites such as newzimbabwe.com, zimdaily.com, talkzimbabwe.com, zimbabwemetro.com thezimbabwean.com and thezimbabwetimes.com, to name but just a few, leading the way. It has been argued that Zimbabwe's media environment is repressive, and that during the period between 2000 and 2009, almost all international and even some local independent media organisations were banned from reporting from within Zimbabwe and as such constitutionally enshrined rights that guarantee access to information as well as media freedom in Zimbabwe were severely restricted.[4] However, when the country's three main political parties[5] entered into a coalition/inclusive government some of the restrictions imposed on international news organisations were eased, albeit not completely[6].

Electronic media (radio and television) has remained a monopoly of the state. The total control of these media channels allows for the close supervision of the content of what is broadcast on radio and television. On the other hand, those in the print

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[4] This media environment is contradictory to the government's manifesto of 1980 and promises after the country's independence. In the early 1980s the first Minister of Information, Post and Telecommunications, Dr Nathan Shamuyarira, declared: 'Government remains committed to the freedom of the press as stated in its election manifesto. We will neither publish nor edit any of the newspapers' (Shamuyarira cited in Nyahunzvi 2001). Despite these assurances media freedom in both electronic and print forms has remained limited and continues to be restricted.

[5] Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front(ZANU PF) and Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai(MDC T) and Movement for Democratic Change Mutambara (MDC M)

[6] See BBC News 09/10/2009 '**Zimbabwe media 'still not free**
<'http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8295834.stm>

media have subjected themselves to self-censorship, what Nyahunzvi (2001) attributes to as 'culture of fear'. He argues, that 'the 'culture of fear' characterized life in Zimbabwe during the first decade of independence, when any dissension or the mildest criticism of officialdom was tantamount to being anti-establishment and lack of patriotism (…)' (ibid: 33). Consequently, the censorship was just *de facto* and not *de jure* as there was in fact no law compelling journalist to be in accordance with a certain political line.

It was not until September 2000 when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of *Capital Radio* - which set itself up as a new independent radio broadcaster and thereby challenged the governments' monopoly of the airwaves - that the state authorities used brute force to assert their dominance and demonstrated that Zimbabwe's media freedom rested with the ruling *Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front* (ZANU PF). The Supreme Court ruling on 22 September 2000 nullified the state's broadcasting monopoly. Six days thereafter *Capitol Radio* was broadcasting. However, within a week state authorities had located and raided the studios of the broadcaster at Harare's Monomotapa Hotel stopping all broadcasting activities. The following months and years saw a tightening of Zimbabwe's media laws with the passing of *The Broadcasting Services Act* (BSA) of 2001, *The Public Order and Security Act* (POSA) of 2002 and *The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (AIPPA) of 2002, which basically made what was de facto censorship de jure. All media houses and journalists who did not 'toe the line' could now find it

difficult - if not impossible - to register for a licence to practice or operate in Zimbabwe as provided for in these controversial laws.[7] The provisions within AIPPA, POSA and BSA not only violate the rights of Zimbabwean citizens as provided in the constitution of Zimbabwe but also go against the Windhoek Declaration of Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press of 1991 and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which Zimbabwe is a signatory to.[8]

In sum, it can be argued that it is as a result of the repressive provisions found in AIPPA, POSA and BSA and the draconian enforcement by the government of these provisions that the media environment has deteriorated significantly in Zimbabwe since the year 2000 resulting in four newspapers being shut down and hundreds of media workers losing their jobs. According to the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Rankings (2008) Zimbabwe was ranked 151st (out of 173 countries) on the press freedom index. Gathering and disseminating information is a high risk exercise for those operating from within Zimbabwe, often involving endless frustration and constant police and judicial harassment for those deemed to be

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[7] Under the new media laws it is now a requirement for all media houses and journalists to obtain accreditation (licensing) on an annually basis to practice or work in the media industry.

[8] Chapter 3 of the Constitution proclaims the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. Section 20 (1) guarantees the protection of freedom of expression, stating that "Except with his own consent or by way of parental discipline, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, that is to say, freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and freedom from interference with his correspondence" (Republic of Zimbabwe 2007). Article 9 of the Windhoek Declaration states "African states should be encouraged to provide constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and freedom of association and expression" (UNESCO 1991); and Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression: this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers" (UN 1948).

reporting news classed as unfavourable to the government. Having a monopoly on the public media, including the airwaves, the Zimbabwean government is in a position to 'educate' people 'on the right lines', thus, promoting hegemonic alliances through propaganda.[9] Given this environment, hundreds of media practitioners and journalist from Zimbabwe have either fled or have been forced out of the country choosing to operate transnationally and thus countering Zimbabwe's repressive media laws and the government's propaganda through new media from locations in the Diaspora. Using new media technologies such as e-mails, online news sites, blogs, podcasts, webcasts, the use of mobile phones, short wave and online 'pirate' radio stations from their host countries they hope to circumvent the oppressive media laws that restrict access to divergent views and information from within Zimbabwe. By operating from outside Zimbabwe diasporans are challenging the media monopoly that the government has enjoyed.

 (self-) exiled journalists have taken advantage of the freedoms given to them in the host country by making their opinions public, by engaging in media activism and by continuing to provide information for the international community and Zimbabweans inside and outside Zimbabwe via new forms of media. By operating beyond the

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[9] According to Jowett & O'Donnell (2006: 278) '[p]ropaganda is associated with the control of information flow. Those who control public opinion and behaviour make maximum and intelligent use of the forms of communication available to them. Certain information will be released in sequence or together with other information. This is a way of distorting information because it may set up a false association.' This intensified manipulation of the media to promote dominant ideology is succinctly captured by Ranger (2004) when he talks of the emergence of 'patriotic history' in the state-controlled media in the weeks running up to the presidential election of February 2002.

borders of the Zimbabwean state they circumvent state control and are considered to undermine the government's authority and challenge the state's sovereignty.

The media environment in Zimbabwe has since the country's independence in 1980 constantly caught the interest of scholars. Most of these studies pay attention to the notable parallels and continuities in the history of mass media in Zimbabwe before and after independence. In particular, these scholarly contributions point to the control of the media environment by the state and the instrumentalisation of the mass media for propaganda purposes (see Frederikse 1982, Saunders 1999, Rønning & Kupe 2000, Zaffiro 2002, Moyo 2004). More recent studies have focussed on the constant dwindling of the political public sphere, media freedom and democratic space since the new millennium due to a growing monopolisation of the print media and broadcasting as well as the passing of restrictive media legislation and the subsequent closure of the most vocal and government critical private newspapers to secure the ruling party's position and political interests (Melber 2004, Chiumbu 2004, Ranger 2005, Waldahl 2005, Mazango 2005, Chitando 2005, Chari 2007, Moyo 2005 and 2007, Mano 2005b and 2008). Most of these studies have pointed to the political effects of this unbalanced media environment, which has left the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government not only in control of the *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings* (formerly *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation*), which encompasses the only

national television and four radio stations but also of the *New Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency* (NEW ZIANA) and the *Zimbabwe Newspapers* (also known as *Zimpapers*), which includes the most circulated daily and weekly newspapers.[10] This domination of the media environment by the state has been used to deny the opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and civil society groups critical towards government policies a platform to voice their alternative views through these public mass media. Thus, the closure of the major private newspapers, which had formerly given the political opposition and civil society a platform to speak, had a severe impact on the political public sphere within Zimbabwe.

However, less attention has been paid to the activities of (self-)exiled media practitioners in the diaspora many of whom had previously worked for the private newspapers closed down since 2003 under the strict media laws. By making use of new media technologies they have launched a number of online newspapers and radio stations. This allows them to continue working in their professions while challenging the ruling party's dominant narratives in the government-controlled media and the monopoly on information dissemination from abroad. These alternative media websites aim at creating a democratic space heavily restricted in

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[10] The radio stations are *Spot FM*, *Power FM*, *National FM* and *Radio Zimbabwe*. The most circulated dailies in Zimbabwe are *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*. The most distributed weeklies include *The Sunday Mail* and *The Sunday News*.

Zimbabwe. They allow the many Zimbabwean citizens now in the diaspora[11] who have left the country due to the unfavourable economic and political circumstances to access news and information, to still engage in political debates about the developments in their home country and thereby to participate in an alternative transnational public sphere outside the borders of Zimbabwe. By countering the bias of the mainstream government-owned mass media and by offering alternative discourses these websites challenge the dominant authoritarian narratives and redefine the notion of patriotism so often employed by the Zimbabwean government to refer to government supporters as patriotic Zimbabweans while discrediting opposition supporters and those who left the country as unpatriotic. However, by doing so many of the online newspapers engage in more than the mere distribution of information and news. By exposing the abuse of power and positions by members of the ruling party, and the government as a whole, as well as by calling attention to human rights violations and corruption some of the news websites engage in what can be referred to as diasporic new media activism. Here, the boundaries between journalistic reporting, political and civil society activism are blurred and merge to what has also been referred to as advocacy and campaign journalism, and which will be explained in more detail shortly.

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[11] There are no reliable figures on the number of Zimbabweans abroad. However, unofficial estimates assume that there are about four million Zimbabweans who have left the country during the last decade mainly to neighbouring countries like South Africa und Botswana but also to Western states like the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

This paper intends to discuss the transnational, diasporic new media activities of two UK-based websites, the news website *ZimDaily.com* and the internet radio station *SW Radio Africa*, as well as collective campaigning of Zimbabwean diasporans in order to identify the possibilities, challenges and dangers of new media journalistic activities and mobilisation. It looks into the question of whether these activities can have an impact on political processes within Zimbabwe, on the one hand. On the other hand, it establishes in how far they contribute towards the creation of a more democratic media environment, a more inclusive transnational democratic space and a more open political public sphere within the diaspora, i.e. outside the borders of Zimbabwe, which tolerates and facilitates political debates between divergent views that cannot be voiced within the country.

The central question that this paper tackles is ***"Have new media technologies circumvented state monopoly on information dissemination?"***

The paper argues that, while diaspora-based Zimbabwean media has contributed to raising international awareness, it has also done so in shaping the international perception of the situation within the home country by framing the events in Zimbabwe from a particular perspective. The paper concludes that, viewed from above, the diaspora-based Zimbabwean media has broadened the overall Zimbabwean public sphere. Viewed from below, however, it has not managed to do so in the particular case of the local Zimbabwean public sphere

found in the United Kingdom. There it has created an *alternative* political public sphere, however, not an *open* and *inclusive* one.

The study employs a multi-methodological approach including the analysis of the selected news websites, personal conversations and in-depth qualitative interviews with diaspora-based journalists and editors as well as long-time personal observations and participant observation. The paper is divided into five parts. The introduction is followed by an overview over the theoretical framework in which the Zimbabwean diaspora-based media activities can be located. The third part presents the historical background to the media environment, which has forced parts of the privately-owned media to relocate to territories outside the borders of Zimbabwe. This is then followed by a short description of the Zimbabwean media environment abroad and the analysis of the selected examples of online media activities of Zimbabweans based in the United Kingdom. The last parts discusses the findings in more general terms and draws a conclusion concerning the potentials, challenges and dangers of diaspora-based media activities in general, and advocacy and campaign journalism in particular, for the development of a more democratic environment in Zimbabwe and a more inclusive political public sphere in the diaspora.

(ii) Methodology

(a) Using a qualitative methodology

As does not need to be stressed, it is of fundamental importance to get to know as much as possible about the research group before conducting fieldwork. In order to get a picture or profile (economic, social, demographical and political) of the Zimbabwean diaspora and to identify the target group for this case study I reviewed existing and relevant literature. However it was my findings that only very few studies so far were concerned with Zimbabweans in Britain and only Pasura's study included some research (a chapter) on diaspora politics.

In addition, I spent over 12 months interacting with different political groups to get an impression of what I will be dealing with and to make some contacts. Both (re)shaped the choice of my research instruments and approaches and modes of data collection which I consider most appropriate and suitable to bring results.[12]

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(b) Target population:

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[12] Due to the desk study and investigation on the Zimbabwean diaspora I became aware that methodological choices are limited. Due to the nature of the research subjects (politically active people in diaspora including undocumented migrants, political refugees) and the topic (online diasporic political spheres) quantitative research with randomised samples and structured questionnaires cannot be considered suitable in order to obtain reliable, balanced and valid statistical material representative for the whole diaspora. Hence, the initially intended use of additional quantitative information gathering through online questionnaires was abandoned since several recent studies among Zimbabweans in the diaspora suggest that this method is not sufficiently effective or at least faced with serious limitations at the current state since suspicion and fear among the Zimbabwean diaspora and especially undocumented migrants against everything 'official' including researchers is strong; filling out questionnaires has a low priority and willingness to participate is weak (see Chetsanga 2003: 20, Solidarity Peace Trust 2004: 16, Bloch 2005, IOM 2006, Pasura forthcoming). Consequently, operating with questionnaires would be time consuming without bringing the expected results. Even though this limits the kind of investigation possible, direct in-depth interviews with key informants, participant observation and informal discussions seem to be better suited for the purpose pursued in this study under these circumstances.

To give a short overview of the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain: Zimbabweans in Britain show a diversity of characteristics as found by both, Bloch and Pasura. They comprise of students, labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and 'naturalised citizens' of the country of residence i.e. Zimbabweans with British ancestry. Whereas a minority came to Britain during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the country has experienced increased influx which is a direct result of the economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe particularly between 2000 and 2009. Hence, quite a number of the diaspora are refugees and asylum seekers and, according to Pasura, failed asylum seekers and those who overstayed their visa i.e. undocumented migrants. [13] Zimbabweans in Britain have been found to be highly educated and skilled originating mainly from the middle class (Kirk 2004, Bloch 2005, Pasura forthcoming). They keep strong ties with their homeland but vary in their engagement in diaspora politics, especially homeland politics (Pasura forthcoming). However, the most visible group of Zimbabweans in Britain are political and human rights activists.

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[13] The number of undocumented Zimbabwean migrants in the UK is not known. Existing studies show different results of the possible scope of undocumented migration. While Bloch in her comparative survey among Zimbabweans in Britain and South Africa only found 6 per cent of respondents in the UK to be undocumented (2005: 27), a mapping exercise conducted by Dominic Pasura for the International Organisation for Migration on Zimbabweans in the UK states that "the vast majority of Zimbabweans in the UK are undocumented migrants […] and thus they may be subject to compulsory removals if arrested" hence "it is difficult to access people who spend much of their time trying to avoid detection, trying to be invisible" (IOM 2006: 4). It is likely that Bloch's research team faced the problem of reluctance of such a hidden population to participate in research; thus, they might not appear in the survey at large. Another point might be that Bloch's survey was carried out at a time (mid-2004) when Zimbabwean influx had just started around three to four years ago and a number of asylum cases where not yet rejected.

In his study on the Zimbabwean diaspora in Great Britain Pasura (forthcoming) suggests a very useful four-fold typology of diaspora members for analysing their participation in political activism: visible members, epistemic members, dormant members and silent members. The first two groups were of particular interest to my study as they are the most active ones; the third group will be interesting for obtaining additional information and to ensure greater representation regarding attitudes towards diaspora politics. However, as I was faced with constraints in time and other resources this could only be a marginal part of the overall research. The latter group was of less interest to my study and was thus not included. The following presents a short characterisation of Pasura's typology and my target population:

Visible members

are those Zimbabweans in diaspora most active in the political sphere engaging in political and civil society activism 'on the streets' (demonstrations and protests, e.g. Zimbabwe Vigil, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Diaspora Action Group, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum) and include members of reassure groups, human rights and political organisations and opposition party branches.

Epistemic members

Are what Pasura referrers to as 'cyberspace' or 'desktop' activists engaging in virtual discussions about the political and economic future of their home country. Being highly qualified and educated their method of engagements and participation in diaspora politics is that of online discussion forums or internet radio debates instead of grassroots political activism 'on the streets'. They also attend conferences to discuss and influence public opinion. By operating through the internet this group has built up transnational networks of political activism discussing the politics of the homeland and spanning Britain, South Africa, the US and Zimbabwe. (e.g. representatives of online news agency and online broadcasting stations such as NewZimbabwe, ZimOnline, The Zimbabwean, Zimdaily, ChangeZimbabwe, TalkZimbabwe, SW Radio Africa as well as exiled journalists such as from the Association of Zimbabwe Journalists and Zimbabwe Journalists). The fact that SW Radio Africa was jammed up by the Zimbabwean government with the help of Chinese technology suggest that the influence of such epistemic members of the diaspora is feared by the homeland government.

Dormant members

are those inactive for reasons such as fear of the Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), fear of the British Home Office if they are undocumented migrants, overwork as sole breadwinners to increase earnings for sending remittances to relatives in Zimbabwe (here political activism becomes a low or

secondary concern) as well as disillusionment about the lasting crisis in Zimbabwe besides ongoing protest and diaspora activities. Pasura rejects the term 'passive' for this group since "they may remain committed and wired into political and economic events in the country of origin but internal and external factors restrict them from full participation" (ibid: 84). Pasura's findings suggest that undocumented migrants' space for political activism is restricted due to their everyday insecurity. In addition, Pasura observed that regarding political activism, the old diaspora and those who migrated to Britain for purpose of work seldom engage in diaspora politics.

Silent members

Are a minority of Zimbabweans in diaspora who distance themselves from being Zimbabwean. Rather, they adopt an alternative national identity and see themselves as Rhodesians, Zimbabwe-South Africans or Zimbabwe-Jamaicans – the latter two to hide their nationality because of fear of deportation or because of Zimbabwe's bad reputation in Britain. Pasura observed that "[w]hile visible members and epistemic members are passionate in identifying themselves as Zimbabweans and maintaining strong ties to the homeland" the situation is different silent members who are "unlikely to participate in diasporic activities or develop a commitment to diaspora politics as they regard themselves as non-Zimbabweans" (Pasura forthcoming: 85).

In sum, my key target group were representatives of or informants in key positions within human rights and political organisations, opposition party branches as well as Zimbabwean journalist and British politicians

(c) Multi-method approach: triangulation methodology

In order to get a round-up picture and to capture all relevant aspects, dimensions and facets of the research topic with a view on the research purpose a multi-method approach was best suitable (Lamnek 2005: 299). Triangulation is an approach in social research which suggests the combined use of multiple methods and data sources in order to counter-balance the weakness of one method with the strength of the other (ibid. 328). Information that might not be possible to be obtained with one method might become available with another technique. Hence, triangulation aims to enhance the validity of research results through the use of different research instruments and because it discloses and corrects biases of the researcher or aims to minimise such biases and a one-sided view. Taken into account that Zimbabwean diaspora activism is presumably complex and that the diaspora is not a homogenous entity different methods and approaches to data collection had to be used for analysing different dynamics and actors. This methodology seems a good approach for quantitative research as it allows a more in-depth analysis. In addition, as the research can be described as a sensitive topic

a combination of direct and 'non-reactive' methods (including analysing documents, records and other written material as well as observations) as well as 'imagination' might be most appropriate (Lee 1993: 12, 207):

"Since routes to sensitive data are often blocked, alternative or multiple methods of reaching one's destination often have to be found […] Looked at in this light, methodological invention may also betoken a refusal to be daunted by the obstacles which sensitive topics place in the path of the researcher." (ibid. 207-208)

(d) Approaches to information gathering (oral, written, visual):

➢ *semi-structured, guided in-depth interviews* with informants in key positions within political and civil society organisations, opposition party branches, journalists, embassy staff and British politicians: The interviews were guided by research questions but otherwise most were open in order not to dominate the conversations. A guided, semi-structured in-depth interview offered me the chance to concentrate on relevant topics and questions for my research and guide the discussion thematically while at the same time giving the interviewees space to explain in depth from her/his own perspective. Even if it required investing time from the interviewee and the interviewer, in-depth interviews are suggested as a method for exploring

sensitive topics as they allow building trust and are thus more likely to lead to disclosure of sensitive and confidential information, to getting beyond the surface and to produce more valid information (Lee 1993: 101-114).[14] During a pilot phase the guideline questionnaire were tested in order to make sure questions were easily understandable and appropriate. Necessary modifications and adjustments were made. The interviewees were informed about the intention and the topic of the interview. The language of the interviews were mostly in English, however some ChiShona and Ndebele were used here and there. The interviews took place at different places such as offices, homes and cafes. However, where possible a place familiar to the interviewee was suggested for conducting the interview which on average lasted about one to two hours. The interviews were recorded on tape but mostly noted down during the conversation – depending on the agreement with the interviewee to use a tape recorder or not. Given the sensitive character of the research, uneasiness or even disagreement with the taping of conversations from the side of interviewees was always expected and was respected. Notes (content of conversation, personal impressions of the person and his/her behaviour, environment of

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[14] Lee points out that survey studies are not suited with regard to sensitive studies (1993:101). However, with *quantitative* data gathering e.g. depersonalising data is much easier as in the case of *qualitative* interviews. In addition, presenting Brannen's approach to in-depth interviewing, Lee also points out that there are certain issues to be considered when conducting in-depth interviewing including approaching the topic, dealing with contradictions, complex and emotional situations during the interview situation, reflecting the control and power relation in the interview process and the conditions under which the interview is conducted. (ibid.: 102).

interviewing etc.) were taken with or without recording the interview. Taped interviews were then transcribed and analysed. The objective of the interviews was to collect information on the following questions and issues:

- o What has been the role and influence of new media particularly the Diaspora online media on Zimbabwean politics during the 'political crisis' period 2000 to 2009?

- o How has the Zimbabwean Diaspora online media created a 'public sphere' which allows citizens, mainly those in the Diaspora, to share and develop their concerns, thoughts and ideas on issues that affect the governance of the country?

- o To what extent are these new media platforms adhering to journalistic standards, laws and ethics (follow up questions here focused on ownership, political mobilisation and vigilante journalism).

- o In what ways if any, have the prominent online news websites in the Diaspora managed to cultivate the new political culture of debate among Zimbabwean citizens?

- o To what extent has the creation of an alternative media platform, afforded by the Diaspora online media, influenced the news agenda with regards to Zimbabwean political news? (Is the agenda still set by those in government within Zimbabwe?)

➢ *Informal interviews*: since spontaneous discussions or the conducting of unplanned informal interviews with relevant persons (other than the intended key interviewees) where taping/recording was not possible I needed to be ready for such eventualities (since it offers more flexibility in an interview situation) these types of interviews were also included to back up the study. The content of spontaneous discussions were noted down as soon as possible.

➢ *review and analysis of relevant documentary materials* (including information about political activism displayed at relevant web pages, demonstration posters/flyers, reports and documentations of politically active organisations of Zimbabweans in the UK and British politicians active for the Zimbabwean diaspora)

➢ *Participant observation at selected sites* such as social gatherings and events at community centres, pubs, protest theatre performances, public protests: In contrast to self-developed questionnaires or guideline questions which have the disadvantage of being elaborated with certain assumptions, participant observation offers to gain additional information of importance less influenced by the researcher's ideas, aims and

assumptions. They might offer an internal perspective of the field, nevertheless the researcher needs to maintain awareness of being an outsider, thus keeping a balance between getting familiar and keeping a distance (Flick 1999: 161). Because participant observation allows to take notice of a variety of issues regardless of their importance, it might open up new aspects and questions worthy of further investigation that have previously been unrecognised by the researcher. Thus, initially seeming unstructured and arbitrary, participant observation limits the danger of the simple imposition of the researcher's view on his/her topic of investigation. In addition, this method allows the researcher to enter settings more indirectly which is of use with regard to sensitive topics. Field notes/ observation protocols will accompany these observations.

(iii)   Problems and challenges

"Researching sensitive topics makes substantial demands on researchers. They require skill, tenacity and imagination if they are successfully to confront the problems and issues which arise when research in various ways poses a threat to those who are studied." (Lee 1993: 210)

(a) Researching on sensitive topics: methodological challenges and the role of trust in the research process

Conducting research among the Zimbabwean diaspora means operating within and studying a sensitive environment (see Lee 1993). According to Lee sensitive research can be defined as 'research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it' (ibid.: 4). Due to the sensitive nature of the study topic focussing on activism of political exiles (creating political spheres) including asylum seekers and undocumented migrants the range of possible informants willing to participate in the research might be limited. In addition, those researched might point to the question of meaningfulness of the research and benefits but also to issues of security for them personally or the community (ibid. 7). Organisations might also be sensitive regarding how they are portrayed in the study (ibid. 9). Studies might be more successful and participation more encouraged if research can be presented as official or policy oriented and with the aim to aid the studied group in one way or another; a purely academic study might be faced with more problems to find access to respondents (see Bloch 1999: 377). Here, I need to try to keep a balance between explaining a potential gain to encourage participation and not promising anything to raise expectations that are bound to get disappointed.

(b) 'Moving targets' and 'hidden populations': researching diasporic communities

When carrying out research among Diasporas certain methodological issues need to be taken into consideration. The Zimbabwean diaspora includes refugees and undocumented migrants such as failed asylum seekers who – as they try to avoid running the risk of being caught by the police and deported back – can be considered a rare or hidden group difficult to locate and to identify for the purpose of research (see Lee 1993). Being vulnerable and trying to hide their activities and be invisible they may be reluctant to (fully) participate in research studies due to a lack of trust towards a stranger. During his research on the Zimbabwean diaspora Pasura was confronted with the problem of respondents whom he was able to locate for a first interview but not for a follow-up interview (see Pasura forthcoming). The variability of immigration status can mean that a person can move from an insecure to a secure residence status (e.g. an asylum seeker becomes a refugee or a refugee becomes a citizen of the host country). But it can also mean the opposite: an asylum seeker whose application has been rejected can become an undocumented migrant forced to hide if not to be deported. Bloch (2007) points out that immigration status impacts on vulnerability. In one of her earlier studies on forced migrants in Britain, she found that refugees were more likely to participate in research than asylum seekers due to fear that information could be given to the

British Home Office or local authorities affecting their asylum process (see Bloch 1999). They also needed more assurance of confidentiality and anonymity (ibid.). Pasura hinted that quite a number of Zimbabweans in the UK are undocumented migrants, many of them failed asylum seekers who live and work without the necessary legal documents. I expect strongly that they will try to protect their privacy with all available means. Access to this hidden population is thus difficult. In the absence of other means, Lee (1993: 65-69) points to snowball sampling which has become a common approach in qualitative research in cases where the target population is hidden and research sensitive. The advantage of this approach is that between the researcher and the potential interviewee(s) there is an intermediary, a gatekeeper, who serves to ensure trust and can 'put in a good word' to encourage the participation of the person or group in question.

(c) Gaining access and trust

The problem of hidden populations did not interfere so much with my research intentions among key position informants, access to and especially trust of research participants as a preconditions for successful fieldwork did not become a big issue of concern for me in this study. Gaining access and building trust become a lengthy process and was taken into consideration in the case of my research as it touched on a sensitive topic. Lindner points to the stereotypical assumption of the researcher as a spy which results not only from the fact that he or she is a curious

stranger but also because of his or her cultural as well as social (class) affiliation (Lindner 1981:58-59, see also Lee 1993: 133). This has proven to be true for the Zimbabwean case. Since my study dealt with the sensitive issue of political activism I expected suspicion towards me and on the veracity of the project aims. This however would affect the availability and quality of the information I can get leading to negative consequences for the reliability and validity of my research (see Lee 1993: 2). Existing studies on diaspora Zimbabweans point out to this problem. Given the sensitive nature of the study, gaining an interviewee's trust was certainly not an easy process. Regarding her comparative study in 2005, Bloch noted that "[s]uspicion about the research was much more evident in the UK, where there are larger numbers of asylum seekers and refugees as well as political activists than in South Africa" (2007: 237-238) – a factor that forced her to adjust her fieldwork approach and study instruments. The consequence for her research team was that concerning the multi-sited research among the Zimbabweans "it would have been impossible to use Zimbabwean interviewers in the UK, where there were concerns over government spies and infiltrators. Nevertheless, it was crucial to involve community members because they act as gatekeepers by verifying the legitimacy of the survey and the independence of the research team" (Bloch 2007: 243). What this citation raises are two main issues: there is strong suspicion among Zimbabweans when it comes to curios strangers asking too personal questions and there are ways to overcome this suspicion.

However, as I am dealing with two different diasporas in two different destination countries, intend to do multi-site research in both cases and have limited financial and time and no additional human resources I do not have the opportunity to spend lots of time to engage with community gatekeepers in large and with my target group before interviewing them or start the in-depth research in general. It is my hope with the help of a few gatekeepers, the stress on reciprocity and exchange as well as confidentiality (possible use of pseudonyms) and a non-condemnatory attitude as suggested by Lee as framework for trust, legitimising the research and encouraging accurate reporting (1993: 98, 164) to build up good relations in a short time. However, even if trust has been granted there is no guarantee that it will be once and for all as Pasura e.g. experienced when he was repeatedly asked if he was definitely not working for the Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) even after he spent several weeks with his respondents (personal talk).

While contacting representatives from public organisations is usually less of a problem the nature of the research was likely to cause distrust among some potential interviewees – be it in the position as representative of an organisation or institution or as an 'ordinary' Zimbabwean. In addition, to avoid a homogenous picture of diaspora political activism the study aimed at involving a broad range of different kinds of actors and organisations these differed in their willingness to discuss political topics with a stranger. My research among the Zimbabwean Diasporas relied on organisational and individual gatekeepers or intermediaries

who could facilitate access to organisations and individuals, dispel suspicion and encourage participation of possible interviewees who were reluctant to do so without such connecting contacts. Hence, snowball techniques which are based on personal contacts and referrals among individuals seemed to be most suitable to gain access and especially trust. While it has been warned that snowball sampling carries the risk of getting a chain of contacts with similar characteristics or interests (see Welch 1975), it was possibly the only available strategy in the initial phase to get access at all to certain groups. As Lee emphasises "[t]here is simply no guarantee that a sample selected from among those found in a particular setting is representative of the wider population of interest for the researcher" (1993: 70). However, diversity and heterogeneity is important. While on the one hand, it is desirable to get into contact with organisations that share the same interest – in my case, diaspora politics participating in online media (creating political spheres) – I would only get a one-sided picture, on the other hand, if the only accessible groups would be government opponents. It was suggested to me from various sides to use community congregations as point of entry to the community where I could inform about my project and be accessible for people interested and willing to participate in the study.

(d) Ethical considerations

Sensitive topics raise questions about ethics and legal questions of research as they might involve a certain level of risk to research participants which can result in problems regarding collection and dissemination of research information; a researcher must be aware of his/her ethical responsibility to research participants and in certain cases even decide for self-censorship to protect research participants (Lee 1993:2-4, 187-194). Given the sensitive character of the study and the obvious vulnerability of some possible interviewees (undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers) high ethical standards including confidentiality and anonymity have to be reassured and guaranteed for those at risk. However, with qualitative research "it is much less easy to ensure that the link between the data held and the individual to which it refers has been broken" (ibid.: 180). As qualitative research cannot that easily depersonalise data as quantitative research it is much more dependent on trust of the research participants. This in turn can lead to a situation whereby sensitive but important information must be withhold in order not to put the informant at risk or lead to betrayal of trust (ibid.: 209). However problematic dissemination of information was assurances had to be given that information obtained would only be used for the purpose communicated to those having participated in it. In cases of doubt, pseudonyms to disguise respondents were used. Personal information of discussion or interview partners were treated confidentially if the person wished so since confidentiality is a matter of absolute importance when researching among people who do not feel secure voicing their

opinions on national politics publicly or might risk deportation from their current country of residence when discovered. Thus, in order not to violate the ethical principal of not doing harm to the researched, the security of these informants needs to be respected.

(e) Legal regulations of research in Britain

In the UK researchers need to comply with a number of standards and conditions regarding their research information. The British Data Protection Act is very strict about circulating personal information or details about individuals. Hence, people might be reluctant to give away potential informants' contacts which make snowball or network sampling as recommended by Bloch (2007) and Lee (1993: 65-69) for sensitive topics and hidden populations difficult. However, my hope is that the majority of my target group does not know about the content of the act.

c) The researcher in the research process: Personal biographical background

Methods used need to maximise reliability and avoid biases or distortions due to strong subjective, personal influence or prejudicial assumptions within the research process. In addition, a balance between 'too close' and 'too distant' from the research topic and participants is said to be important. However, as well known in social research the personal technical competence and biographical background of the researcher, i.e. one's own history, identity, social characteristics, gender,

experiences and expectations shape the research process, interpretations and subsequently the outcome of the study (see e.g. Lee 1993: 99-101). Due to such biases that impact on and influence the research and study results Lindner (1981: 60) even speaks of the 'Mythos der Objektivität' (the myth of objectivity). Similarly, the assumption that the researcher can be fully objective has been criticised by feminist researchers who instead call for a constant reflection of the researcher's own role and (e.g. power, gender, social) position within the process of the study conducted. Hence, my personal background needs to be kept in mind while conducting fieldwork and evaluating my research results.

Having worked in the media in Zimbabwe and now being actively involved with online publications and radio stations that have been set up outside Zimbabwe (in the Diaspora), my positioning in this research as a member of Zimbabwean diasporic community influences the questions I will ask. As Stanfield II (1998: 334) argued, "autobiographies, cultures as well as historical contexts of researchers matter; these determine what researchers see, as well as their ability to analyse data and disseminate knowledge adequately". The researcher and people in the research carry with them a history, a sense of themselves and the importance of their experience (May 1997). My own biographical details mean that I am not only a resource for my investigation but I am likely to receive support from other Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Furthermore, my biography would be salient to my research in terms of gaining access to sensitive issues, for example, narratives of

other exiled journalist and media practitioners from Zimbabwe. Negotiating access to the researched will not be taken for granted, as this is a continuous process for the entire research period. One of the dangers of qualitative research is that the researcher may 'go native', whereby the researcher loses his or her awareness of being a researcher and is seduced by participant's perspectives (Bryman 2004). I will have to engage myself critically in order to 'rethink the familiar' and to be on guard against the risk of subtly translating my own demands for affirmation and validation (Blaxter et al 2001) so that "[b]y listening and experiencing, impressions are formed and theories considered, reflected upon, developed and modified"(May 1997:174). I will use my own cultural equipment reflexively to understand the narratives of my fellow media practitioners.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME: THE STRUCTURING OF THE WORLD AND THE POLITICAL PUBLIC SPHERE – THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF THE MEDIA

In the analyses of the current Zimbabwean media environment two discourses play a central role: first, the media as the guard of national interest and sovereignty against a Western 'media onslaught' and 'media imperialism' and, second, the media as a democratic force countering an authoritarian elite. The former is the position on the media of the Zimbabwean government, the latter that of the (self-) exiled private media now operating in the diaspora. Both discourses, the domination of Western media and the democratisation potential of the media, reflect aspects that have widely been discussed in the field of media and communication studies. Thus, before discussing the specific Zimbabwean case, it is worth paying a closer look at these discourses.

i.   *Western mass media hegemony*

The role of the mass media in the distribution of news and information has been critically discussed, not only by scholars in the field of media and communication research but also by a broader public in general. On the one hand, as opinion makers' big media houses and news agencies such as Reuters, AFP, BBC and CNN shape people's perceptions of the order of the world. This has not only been the case during the Cold War period with its divide in East and West but also relates to reporting on the 'developed' and 'developing', on the North and the South nowadays. As they direct the flow of information and news through agenda/attention setting and employing a filtered lens, they consequently

'manipulate truth', create and shape images of reality and of how the world is structured economically, politically and socially. Taking into account that the global mass media – and thus influential news distributors – are dominated by a few Western global media companies it becomes clear how such a hegemonic position can impact on the global flow of news and information and thus on the perception of world orders. This unequal world media order has been clearly articulated by the UNESCO International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems which in its 1980 report *Many voices, one world* called attention to the existing inequalities in the North-South flow of news and information and between the producing and receiving ends of these information flows. Pointing out the cultural imperialism of the information flow dominated by the Western world the commission called for a new world communication and information order and the development of alternative forms of media to balance the global information flow, in short, a democratisation of communication (see MacBride 1980).

However, for some parts of the world little has changed. A telling example is the news reporting on events and developments on the African continent which continue to be dominated by Western news agencies like Reuters and AFP and to be characterised by portraying Africa as the 'Dark Continent' suffering from natural disasters such as droughts and floods, diseases such as Malaria and HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, violence against women, civil war and genocide (see e.g. Franks 2005). According to Moyo (2005:73) "[t]he prime device through which

representations of Africa have been circulated through the Western media is through stereotyping [= the simplification of issues through the process of selection, magnification and reduction] […] The very process of selection serves not only to stereotype but also to exclude many features and ways of understanding the issues in Africa."

To understand the image that Zimbabwe has gained in the Western media, it is important to pay attention to this dominant position of Western news agencies with their filtered lenses and negative images of Africa since they as mainstream global media have significantly contributed to shaping the prevailing images of the Zimbabwean crisis. However, and as will be shown in section 3 of this paper, this dominant position of the Western media also played a role in – and has to be considered in order to understand – some of the developments in the media environment within Zimbabwe.

ii.   The interrelation between media freedom and democratic processes

On the other hand, as key sources of information a free and diverse media is seen as vital for the functioning of a democracy, not only for its development but also for its consolidation. It is the free flow, exchange and access to reliable information that allows citizens to form and shape political opinions and perceptions, which in turn allows them to judge critically and participate in political debates and decision-making processes (Meiklejohn 1960, Keane 1991). Thus, the rights to freedom of

opinion, expression and information – in order to articulate and access information – as well as freedom of assembly and press – to exchange and distribute it – are crucial components and closely intertwined with democratic processes. The media in its various forms (print press, radio, television, new forms of media) has been viewed as providing a democratic space and being a key element in the development of a political public sphere (Habermas 1974, 1989) - or even a plurality of public spheres (see e.g. Fraser 1992, Keane 1996). For Habermas (1989:136) the public sphere serves "the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally - and, in periodic elections, formally as well - practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure in the form of a state." According to Habermas private citizens grouped together could form a powerful entity able to influence decisions made by the state. He views the public sphere as the space, "which mediates between society and state, in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion" (Habermas 1974:50) - in short as a forum for public participation and opinion formation. However, Habermas, who constantly developed his ideas further, built his theory on the model of a European society with constitutionally enshrined freedoms and an open political culture. Many African societies, including Zimbabwe, experience an environment characterised by state-media monopolisation and restrictions in freedoms of expression, which do not provide for the development of such a liberal pluralist ideal of the public sphere (see Berger 2002). As Moyo (2005:112) points out for the case of Zimbabwe: "The effect

of state dominance in the media has been the narrowing of the public sphere and hence an impoverishment of democracy."

In the face of this situation, and as the following paragraphs will point out, the privately-owned, non-state, alternative media in Africa play a significant role in trying to uphold a public sphere. For this purpose, some operate from beyond the borders of their home country, employ new forms of media such as the Internet and thereby create a transnational public sphere. While this allows them to channel news and information and to express and exchange views and opinions despite restrictions imposed by their governments, some – given the circumstances under which their operate – become political actors themselves and undermine journalistic ethics, which again can become counter-productive in the creation of an inclusive public sphere. The following paragraphs will discuss these points in more detail while section 3, 4 and 5 will then elaborate on this with regard to the specific Zimbabwean case.

iii.   The public sphere(s) and state-monopolisation in African contexts

In Zimbabwe as well as in other African countries, democratic communication is undermined by authoritarian practices and the public space is dominated by the state-media creating a 'government sphere' which leaves little space for the participation of the civil society, the opposition and the private or alternative media

and hence, neither for democratic political discourses, discussions and opinion formation processes:

> "political rivals are not given visibility in such [state-owned] media. Since these media sources have the most extensive coverage in terms of circulation and territorial coverage, the vast majority of citizens are denied the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the opposition's ideas, views and plans. These parties, therefore, find themselves in a situation where they cannot compete with the government as far as reaching the public is concerned" (Tettey 2001:21).

While the mass media have been a significant element in the democratisation process in Western societies - not least though their role as watchdogs over the activities of the ruling elites - in many African states they have historically served political propaganda purposes. Here the privately-owned media faces difficulties to perform this monitoring function, to expose corruption and abuse of power by members of the government and to hold them accountable for their actions without legal and extra-legal consequences for editors, journalists and publishing houses: "Among the hindrances to press freedom are the maintenance of anachronistic laws on libel and sedition, censorship, physical harassment of journalists and the

violation of their premises and equipment, denying them access to inputs and audiences, debilitating media laws etc." (Tettey 2001:11).

Nevertheless, the privately-owned, non-state media have increasingly become important in African democratisation processes (see Hydén et al. 2002) and constitute "forums [that] have provided opportunities for voices that had been silenced by the state-owned media and the repressive apparatus of the state to make their views known and to rally support for their course" (Tettey 2001:9). As such, the non-state media in (authoritarian) African states have often taken on an oppositional position critical towards the ruling political elite or, as Tettey (2001:7) puts it: "Under these circumstances, the private media have assumed the role as the critical space for democratic expression". For Sandbrook (1996:81) the privately-owned media in Africa provides not only a forum for alternative information and debates, but they even act as a replacement for opposition parties where these are not able to perform their functions. This applies also to the Zimbabwean case as will be shown below.

iv.   Non-state alternative media

This interrelation between smaller alternative media and alternative political practices and activism has also been stressed by other scholars in the field of alternative media (see Vatikiotis 2004, Scott 2004, Kavada 2004). Alternative media practices have been approached in a variety of ways under different notions and

perspectives such as community media, participatory media, radical media and new media projects (see Vatikiotis 2004) highlighting the diversity and heterogeneity of social actors and forms of alternative media. While some have been seen as "agencies of resistance" and as "counterbalancing unequal distribution of communication resources" others have been analysed under the aspects of "mobilisation, representation and participation of different social actors/groups" (ibid:10). Downing for example - drawing on Gramsci's notion of counter-hegemony - sees the role of radical media as "to challenge dominant ideological frameworks and to supplant them with a radical alternative vision" (Downing 2001:15 cit. in Vatikiotis 2004:10).[15] Established in opposition and resistance to a dominant, repressive political environment radical media "have a mission not only to provide facts to [a] public denied them but to explore fresh ways of developing a questioning perspective on the hegemonic process and increasing the public's sense of confidence in its power to engineer constructive change" (Downing 2001:16 cit. in Vatikiotis 2004:11).[16] As will be shown, this also applies to the

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[15] According to Gramsci (1971) "the crucial aspect of the notion of hegemony is that it operates not by forcing people against their conscious will or better judgment to concede power to the already-powerful, instead, hegemony describes a situation whereby our consent is actively sought for those ways of making sense of the world which 'happen' to fit in with the interests of hegemonic alliance of classes or 'power bloc'. The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas. Members of that class, wishing to perpetuate their survival as the dominant order, would endeavour to persuade the rest of society that continuation of the status quo was in their interest as well (Watts 1997). In Zimbabwe ZANU PF has sought to perpetuate its survival as the dominant order, by what Jowett and O'Donnell (1991) refer to as deliberately and systematically attempting to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers its desired intent, which is to make ZANU PF appear as the only natural party capable of ruling the country.

[16] Similarly, Servaes (1999, cit. in Vatikiotis 2004:13) views participatory media as seeking to empower citizens to counter hegemonic representations and to become agents of change through providing means of interactive communication.

diaspora-based Zimbabwean media, which employ new media technologies to achieve their cause.

v. Alternative media and new communication and information technologies

As described, alternative media are understood as forums that generate political identities and offer space for a more active participation in the political sphere "as their often amateur nature blurs the line between producer and consumer" (Vatikiotis & Kavada 2004:1). This can especially be said for online media projects or the so called new media, which has been credited for playing an "emancipatory role in terms of […] promoting participatory communication" and "advancing democratization of communication, or even encompassing modes of subversive action" (Vatikiotis 2004:4). Drawing on the works of Rheingold (1995), Dahlberg (2001), Downing (2003) and Bennett (2003), Vatikiotis (2004:8) points out that new communication and information technologies have the potential to offer the infrastructure for free and broader social participation as well as political mobilisation and is "a means not only to reach potential supporters and bypass the traditional media filters, but to network with one another, sharing information and resources". As such "new forms of communication create public spaces, arenas for the free engagement of citizens in deliberation and public debate" (ibid.:8) and thus, alternative public sphere(s) where dissenting views can be discussed. One form of

such alternative public sphere(s) are *transnational* public sphere(s), which will be discussed now.

vi. *Transnational political public sphere(s) and African diasporas*

When it comes to Zimbabwe several concepts and narratives are given in respect to the term diaspora, who is, or what is the Zimbabwean diaspora? The general definition would be that this refers to the people who are immigrants from the nation of Zimbabwe. These are people scattered across many countries today, circumstances at home have forced some of them to move and live in other countries as has already been discussed. Some choosing to maintain ties with their homeland/nation; some electing to expurgate those ties, taking up citizenship of their host nations. However, in as much as some have taking up citizenship in foreign lands by choice others have been forced by circumstances to take up dual citizenship.

It is important to note that the Zimbabwean government outlawed dual citizenship, and thus, legally most of these people are no longer Zimbabwean, yet they still class themselves Zimbabwean citizens.

This paper focuses in part on that group specifically those who once they settled in their host countries found ways to analyse and gather news and information about their home country Zimbabwe, and devised ways through new media to

disseminate information back into Zimbabwe to counteract what they viewed as state media "lies".

Historically the media environment in Zimbabwe has never been one that gave a platform for a plurality of views, according to Moyo (2004), broadcasting in Zimbabwe has been the subject of enormous debate since its introduction in the then-colonial Rhodesia in the 1930's. Interestingly, for a nation that fought against colonial power and rule, Zimbabwe inherited and used the same restrictive and oppressive media laws which it previously criticised as unfair in the then Rhodesia. In post-independence Zimbabwe, broadcasting services, both radio and television, remain firmly in the hands of the state. The government still has monopolisation and regulatory powers akin to those held by the pre-independence Rhodesian government, however, slight changes have since been made. The 1957 Rhodesia Broadcasting Act basically remained in force until the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) in 2001.

This paper presupposes the view that new media technologies, notwithstanding, that they are yet to reach the level of importance as old forms of media, they have however, as in the case of Zimbabwe put up a strong challenge to the monopoly of news dissemination once held by the state.

New media such as the Internet have not yet reached the level of importance as mass medium, which the print and broadcast media enjoy in Africa. Few

households on the continent have an online connection. Instead, Internet cafes mainly based in urban areas offer access to online information and email – often still to a relatively high price and without high speed connections. Nevertheless, several studies indicate that Africans abroad are increasingly making use of the World Wide Web to provide and share news and information, to mobilise for their home country or against an authoritarian government from abroad (Bernal 2006, Tynes 2007, Ndangam 2008).

In addition, even though the distribution of new information and communication technologies is still sparse on the African continent, anecdotic evidence suggests that information and news obtained from Short Message Service (SMS) or the internet make their way into the broader community through interpersonal conversations and mouth-to-mouth communication. As pointed out by Moyo (2007:89) these new media technologies have assisted diasporans in establishing 'transnational' or 'diasporic' public spheres, which can be understood as "alternative public spheres that function in opposition, but at the same time having connections to other national and local public spheres". In our example, the transnational character of the Zimbabwean online media and their activities does not only become apparent in the use of the World Wide Web with its global reach but also in the focus and sources (correspondents) of the published news stories and their target readership, which are located 'back home' in Zimbabwe and the diaspora

(see Moyo 2007) as well as in the focus and reach of their advocacy and campaign activities.

vii.   Advocacy journalism and journalistic ethics

As referred to earlier, parts of the private alternative media in Africa actively engage in countering the hegemonic position of their authoritarian governments and the dominant state-controlled media. Consequently, like the opposition, the privately-owned media have been perceived as a threat, challenging the legitimacy of governments, which in turn respond by discrediting the non-state media and "by consistently portraying the private media as unpatriotic elements whose partisan motivations do not take account of national interests, governments portray themselves as defenders of the patriotic order" (Tettey 2001:19). As a result, the non-state media have tended to resort to what can be referred to as advocacy journalism (Chari 2007:52-54, Tettey 2001). Advocacy journalism is generally understood as openly biased and partisan i.e. it clearly takes side in favour of e.g. a certain social or political interest group (see Careless 2000). Characteristic of this kind of journalism is its opinionated reporting, thus, it extends opinion writing beyond separate editorial pieces to ordinary news articles where it often employs a certain tone in writing and selective reporting in support of or opposition to certain viewpoints. Therefore, it is distinctly different from the traditional journalism, which aims to uphold the ideal of neutrality and objectivity. However, and as mentioned

earlier, this ideal is often not met in practice neither by the big mainstream nor the smaller alternative media both of which, to various degrees, engage in socially and politically biased and thus unbalanced, coverage. As Careless (2000:2) points out: "Advocacy journalism does not generally give equal time to opponents, but neither does the mainstream press." Nevertheless, Careless (2000:1) emphasises that "there is good advocacy journalism and there is bad" and that even opinion writing can be valid - and even more credible - criticism and enhance public discourse in a constructive manner if certain journalistic ethics and professional standards such as accuracy and verification of facts are respected.

This has not always been the case within the African private press and has in instances, given governments reason to attack and take measures against 'irresponsible' media activities and their 'subversive' political agendas culminating in the restriction of media freedom (Tettey 2001:21). But it can also result in an erosion of their credibility as a provider of diverse and factual information when members of the media engage in disseminating rumours or even falsehoods about government officials, campaigning for and hate-speaking against certain political interest groups instead of opening up space for justified discussions and debates on economic, social and political issues of concern to the broader public (Chari 2007). Concerns about journalistic ethics have also been raised in the Zimbabwean media context and especially with regard to the non-state media within Zimbabwe (see Moyo 2005, Mano 2005b, Chari 2007) as will be touched upon later in this

article. As this paper will argue these concerns remain valid even after the relocation of the private media into the diaspora.

To summarise, both perspectives on the media discussed above, the domination of Western media in shaping images of global developments in general, and African realities in particular, as well as the role of alternative media in opening up a democratic public sphere have played a significant role in the Zimbabwean context. They are reflected in, on the one side, the narratives of the Zimbabwean government to justify the narrowing down of the political public sphere in the country, and on the other side, in the counter-narratives of opposing voices within civil society, political opposition and the private media in diaspora. The following section will provide a historical background to the media environment in Zimbabwe before we will discuss the diaspora-based media activities and environment.

3. BACKGROUND: MEDIA ON ZIMBABWE; NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF ZIMBABWE

The mass media, both inside and outside the country, played a significant role in constructing images of the crisis in Zimbabwe - on the one hand, the struggle against neo-colonialism and sanctions and for land reform, national sovereignty, non-interference and territorial integrity and, on the other hand, the struggle for

democracy and human rights. "Zimbabwe came to dominate headlines in various UK and global media. Zimbabwe had become such a major global news story at the start of the new millennium, 1999-2005" that a number of scholars found it worthwhile "to critically evaluate and investigate the ways in which local and global mass media were depicting the events in troubled Zimbabwe" (Mano 2005a:1). By examining the coverage of the 'Zimbabwe crisis' by national but also international, in particular Western media, several authors have pointed to the complex politics of the mass media's presentation of events in the country and have highlighted their partisan and instrumental roles (Melber 2004, Chiumbu 2004, Ranger 2005, Waldahl 2005, Ndlela 2005, Willems 2005, Mazango 2005, Chitando 2005, Chari 2007, Moyo 2004, 2005 and 2007, Mano 2005b and 2008).

i. *Western media coverage*

With the exception of some smaller non-Western news agencies the international media covered the Zimbabwean situation in images of economic stagnation, inflation, food-shortages, an escalating politically motivated violence, human rights violations including intimidation, torture, abductions and displacement as well as an increasing breakdown of law and order, which turned the former 'breadbasket of Africa' into a 'failing state'. The country's president, Robert Mugabe, has been depicted as a dictator clinging to power and disrespecting the democratic and human rights of the Zimbabwean people. This has for example been the case with

the coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis in the Norwegian media analysed by Ndlela (2005). He found that the press "reduced the complex Zimbabwean issue into a 'typical African story of tragedy and despair" (ibid.: 89), so dominant in Western media's depictions of Africa. Through an unbalanced reporting on Zimbabwe from a particular angle and a bias in the selection of sources, the situation within the country was portrayed as a race conflict in which white farmers as the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy and food security were victimised while human rights violation, economic collapse and spill-over effects to neighbouring countries like South Africa were the sole responsibility of the country's president, Robert Mugabe (ibid.). Ndlela points out the clear bias of the Norwegian media against the Zimbabwean government, the open sympathising with the opposition and the prevailing view that the country's only solution is a regime change. Very similar results have been found by Willems (2005) analysing British media reporting on Zimbabwe. While media coverage of Zimbabwe both, in broadcast and print media has been extensive, it has - as in the case of the Norwegian media - been simplistic, reducing the complex crisis in Zimbabwe to a racial conflict between black and white. Again, Mugabe is solely made responsible for the degeneration of the once prosperous nation and no attention is paid to external factors contributing to the economic decline such as the structural adjustment programmes implemented in the 1990s or the lack of financial support for the land reform by the

former colonial power, Britain (ibid.:100). Thus, both studies point to the biased coverage of the Zimbabwean domestic situation in European media.

ii. Local private media coverage

The local privately-owned media that included *The Daily Mirror, The Sunday Mirror, The Financial Gazette, The Zimbabwe Standard, The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Daily News* were sympathetic to the opposition, however, to varying degrees. Waldahl (2005) has shown how, on the one side, the existence of privately-owned newspapers around the 2000 Parliamentary Election provided for a more open environment for political discussion as they devoted greater attention to the opposition and helped to question the legitimacy of the election. On the other side, however, they could not really create a space for public debate between the two contesting parties or the general public as the news space was still dominated by the state-owned media, which with its control over radio and television could reach a wider audience with its pro-government and anti-opposition reporting (ibid.).

Apart from this, there existed a certain degree of self-censorship in the privately-owned press where the majority was indeed critical of government policies but expressed themselves in a rather subtle way. *The Daily News*, however, was more outspoken and clearly critical – and it could be argued even hostile – towards not only government policies but also the government as a whole. It openly sympathised with the opposition and consistently blamed the government for the

deteriorating situation in the country, accused it of election fraud and questioned its legitimacy. As such, and as pointed out earlier, it came close to become an opposition itself – trying to maintain a broader coverage of events within the country and thereby upholding a more democratic political public sphere.

iii.   Media in Zimbabwe: responses by the government to the negative news coverage

In the name of protecting sovereignty: legitimising actions against critical media

Thus, while the opposition as a perceived 'government in waiting' has generally received the support of the Western and privately-owned local media, ZANU PF has been covered in a negative framing as an 'illegitimate' government. This narrowed down framing of the Zimbabwean crisis in the international and in particular British media, Willems (2005) argues, has played into the hands of the Zimbabwean government. It allowed President Mugabe to re-define the domestic situation and to legitimise its actions as a fight against a Western media onslaught on Zimbabwe's sovereignty spearheaded by neo-colonial and imperialists British interests to discredit and destabilise the legitimate Zimbabwean government and the country as a whole for having dared to disappropriate white farmers:[17]

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[17] President Mugabe has repeatedly named the former British Prime Minister 'Tony B-Liar' emphasising that the Zimbabwean domestic situation is misrepresented by the Western world.

"the dominance of the white farmer story in the British media assisted the Zimbabwean government in fixing the meaning of the crisis in Zimbabwe as a bilateral problem between Zimbabwe and Britain over land. It allowed President Mugabe to construct Britain as its former colonial power who was using the media in order to discredit and derail Zimbabwe's land reform programme." (ibid.:101)

Considering its national interests as being misrepresented in the Western media and seeing its sovereignty challenged the ZANU PF government banned foreign media (including BBC and CNN) from covering events and developments in Zimbabwe from within its territory:

"We believe that information is a strategic issue which is critical in maintaining a country's sovereignty and you cannot claim to be sovereign if you do not own the means of disseminating information […]. This is why we removed CNN from ZBC […] and we will never have it again as long as we are still around […]. We want to use the media to put across our national views and not those of the United States or Britain or the Voice of America. We wish to put across our views as the Voice of Zimbabwe." (Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, in *The Herald*, 08/04/2004.)

The private local press was seen as having joined the Western campaign to discredit and misrepresent the Zimbabwean government and to question its legitimacy and policies (see e.g. ZimOnline.co.za, 07/08/2007). In the eyes of the government the privately-owned press acted irresponsible, betraying and endangering their own motherland in that they offered the West reasons to attack Zimbabwe, exposed the country to unjustified international criticism and thereby subverted the country's sovereignty. This and giving the opposition, the 'enemy of the state', and the government-critical civil society visibility and space to voice their standpoints made the private press 'terrorists' who divided the nation and destabilised the country. Addressing a press conference in Bulawayo in April 2004, then Minister for Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, warned the local press against collaborating with foreign media agencies and abusing media freedom by disseminating false and misleading information, which were said to endanger state security. He spoke of the media as "enemy" to be dealt with as they "use the pen to lie about this country" and of journalists as "terrorists of the pen" adding that there would be "enough space in Zimbabwe's prisons for journalists caught dealing with foreign media houses" (MISA, 07/05/2004). In fact, after the passing of restrictive laws such as the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) (2001), the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) (2002) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002) the county saw the closure of four privately-owned

newspapers (*The Daily News, The Daily News on Sunday, The Weekly Times* and *The Tribune*) as well as the harassment, intimidation, expelling and imprisoning of local journalists.[18] Those remaining tried to cope with economic decline that affected the financial base of the their readership, restrictions on foreign investment in the Zimbabwean media imposed by the government in the name of protecting national security and sovereignty and in some cases politically caused distribution problems (Moyo 2005). Others resorted to self-censorship or moved from political news to entertainment. As a result of these developments, the democratic space of the media and with it the political public sphere in Zimbabwe shrunk.

iv.   *Patriotic history and the role of the state media*

In contrast, the state-controlled mass media in Zimbabwe became central to propagate what Ranger (2003) has termed 'patriotic history'. As "condensed resistance history" (ibid.:218) it is a narrative characterised by a narrow focus and

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[18] The BSA restricts access to the broadcasting sector for interested parties in such way that the state has remained the only broadcaster in the country. The licensing authority lies with the Ministry of Information and Publicity and thus allows for the control of radio and television broadcasting by the ruling party. Members of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe are appointed by the Minister of Information and Publicity in consultation with the President. The body does not have the authority to issue licenses but only serves the restricted "purpose of advising the Minister on whether or not he should grant the licence" (BSA, Sec. 3, 2c). No private broadcasting station has been licensed to operate from within the country. Under AIPPA the registration of media houses and licensing of (local and foreign) journalists has until recently rested with the Media and Information Commission (MIC) which is appointed by the government. Without registration/accreditation (licensing) any media operation is illegal. Media services can only be registered by a Zimbabwean citizen or a permanent resident in Zimbabwe. With the help of this legislation foreign correspondents were expelled or have been denied reporting from Zimbabwe and local Zimbabwean newspapers were closed down and their journalists arrested. POSA limits freedom of expression, movement and assembly and has severely restricted the public space for civil society and opposition activists, but it has also rendered work for editors and journalists dangerous as critical reporting can be construed as 'publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the State' (Sec. 15) or 'undermining authority of or insulting President' (Sec. 16) which are punishable offences under POSA.

oversimplification, employing notions of Zimbabwean values, heritage, patriotism and national sovereignty. Central in 'educating' the public about the non-white 'unbiased' version of Zimbabwean history has been what Ranger (2005) calls 'patriotic journalism'. Practiced by the Ministry of Information and Publicity under Jonathan Moyo this kind of journalism serves propagandistic purposes and has helped to divide the nation and the world into good and evil - into 'patriots' and 'traitors', 'supporters' and 'imperialists'. 'Patriotic journalism' does not allow for alternative and dissenting views - which it regards not only as opposed and harmful to the national goals and interests but in fact as treason - and consequently neither for public political debate. Instrumental in this education mission has been the political interference in and partisan control over the public media by the state – which Melber (2004:11) refers to as the "full monopolisation of the public sphere and expressed opinion". As Mazango (2005: 42) points out:

"Ownership and control of the largest share of the media market has allowed the government to dominate space in public communication and to control an important instrument of veto … [as well as] to sidetrack criticism that allege poor governance and human rights abuses by placing land and economic empowerment as the central issue for national debate."[19]

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[19] For the latter see also Robert Mugabe's address to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002, available at: http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0000039/Mugabe_WSSD.pdf [accessed: 20.03.09].

Since 2000 the media environment in Zimbabwe has undergone considerable restructurings, which "have given the ruling party broad powers of repression and control and have shrunk the political and democratic space for all forms of alternative and oppositional discourses" (Chiumbu 2004:31). These reforms included the reorganisation of the Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications into the Department of Information and Publicity which was placed in the President's Office and the appointment of the then new Minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, in 2000. Under Jonathan Moyo Zimbabwe saw the introduction of BSA, POSA, AIPPA; a personnel restructuring in public media institutions and the launching of the then Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's Vision 30, which led to the formalisation of the three-quarter local content quota provided for in the Broadcasting Services Act and, consequently, to a replacement of foreign programmes by documentaries about land and the liberation war to promote the government's 'national interests' (see Chiumbu 2004, Mazango 2005).

v.   *Broadcasting*

As central mass medium reaching the remote areas of a country, broadcasting, i.e. radio and television, can be very influential in the process of political opinion

formation and is vital to political developments due to its mobilisation potential.[20]

Hence, keeping control over broadcasting serves the purpose of controlling the

populace and securing legitimacy and hegemony. As such, the government of

Zimbabwe keeps access to the Zimbabwean broadcasting sector restricted – once

again in the name of national interest and the country's sovereignty:

"It (broadcasting spectrum) is finite, therefore it's a national resource, and

whoever has access to it must use it in a way that coheres with the national

interest. You cannot use a national resource to undermine the nation. But you

have an obligation to use the national resource to further the national interest

(…). Whether doing it for the benefit of Zanu PF amounts to pushing the

national interest, that's a different matter but we start from the premise that

when the Zimbabwean sovereignty is under assault, then necessarily it must

muster all its resources." (Senior government official cited by Moyo 2004:22-

23)

Broadcasting in Zimbabwe has been crucial as an instrument to vindicate state

policy and in particular the land reform programme and has helped the ZANU PF

government to dominate the political space in the country and to stay in power (see

Mazango 2005, Mano 2008). During the liberation struggle Zimbabwean forces

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[20] Especially, radio has proven to serve as an effective tool of propaganda and political mobilisation as the examples of the Rwandan genocide and Nazi Germany have shown.

fighting the Rhodesian Front made use of radio stations based in Tanzania and Mozambique to counter state propaganda and mobilise support for their cause. According to Moyo (2004:18) "post-independence broadcasting was expected to further extend the role that broadcasting played during the liberation struggle, namely to mobilise the masses to support its programmes." However, the history of Zimbabwean broadcasting characterised by control and instrumentalisation of radio and television – but also of the print media – for political purposes long predates the post-independence government of ZANU PF as several scholars have shown (see e.g. Windrich 1981, Frederikse 1982, Rønning & Kupe 2000, Zaffiro 2002, Moyo 2004). As Moyo (2004:12) puts it:

"the ruling elite has always used broadcasting as a tool for political control and manipulation of the masses. In the name of 'national interest', 'national security', and 'national sovereignty', broadcasting, from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, has been characterised by two salient features: first, its legal status as a state monopoly, and secondly, its location under the Ministry of Information which rendered it a political tool in the hands of the government of the day."

And:

"The exclusion of opposition or dissent of any kind from the state broadcaster; the appointment of party loyalists to the board of governors of the state

broadcaster; the direct control of the Corporation from the department of information; the enactment of restrictive media laws; and the maintenance of state monopoly broadcasting are common features of both regimes." (ibid.:28)

These remarkable parallels and continuities in the history of broadcasting in the Southern African country can not only be seen in the use of broadcasting as a tool of propaganda and manipulation, but also in the (partly unchanged) adoption and application of various former Rhodesian laws and strategies to control the flow of information and to prosecute critical voices in the media by the ZANU PF government (Moyo 2004).[21] Still, other scholars (see e.g. Chitando 2002 and Ranger 2005) see a qualitative change in the media environment with the intensification of propaganda and the rise of 'patriotic journalism' since the start of the new millennium which was not necessary during the first years after independence when ideology and policy were convinced enough: "It [the Zanu PF government] did not need to fall back on patriotism as a 'last refuge'. It could offer socialism, education, welfare'. By 2000, it was in a very different position. Socialism had been abandoned. Education and welfare undermined. It was time once again

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[21] The application of anachronistic laws is not confined to Zimbabwe, indeed "several years after independence, a lot of African countries continue to retain colonial laws which were used to intimidate anti-colonial activists, including some of the current leaders of these countries. These anachronistic laws have stayed on the books because they now serve the political purpose of the post-colonial ruling elite. They have been employed, under the guise of the rule of law and state security, to undermine press freedom and free expression, as well as to intimidate journalist" (Tettey 2001: 15).

for the last resort of patriotic journalism" (Ranger 2005:12). Similarly, Chitando (2002:221) remarks that:

"At a time when other African countries like Kenya, Uganda and South Africa were liberalizing the airwaves, Zimbabwe moved to control the dissemination of information. It sought to silence views that supported the opposition and embarked on a systematic campaign to present itself as a sacrificial victim in the fight against imperialism."

This monopoly over radio and television guaranteed a free space for the government to promote its programmes and policies and at the same time demonise the political opposition and discredit civil society organisations. Being the only public service broadcaster in the country the *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings* has not only controlled the flow of information to its audience but also the access of opposition groups to the state-owned media, and in particular air time, to voice alternative views. This biased coverage - which did not devote a lot of space to the opposition and, if it did, gave the MDC negative publicity - was especially observed during election time including the 2008 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections.[22] Depicting the opposition as seeking power not in the interest of the black Zimbabwean majority but the white minority and the UK government and thus as

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[22] See Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe elections reports, available at:
http://www.mmpz.org/default.cfm?pid=19 [accessed: 20.03.09].

favouring neo-colonial rule, the state-owned media questioned the opposition's patriotism and thus its legitimacy as a contesting party:

"The pro-government media […] proclaimed very clearly that only ZANU PF as the trustees of the liberation heritage were worthy to rule the country. Only politicians with a background in the liberation struggle had a legitimate place in Zimbabwean politics, and any enemy of ZANU PF was an enemy of a free Zimbabwe." (Waldahl 2005:28)

"Britain in particular was also seen as an active supporter of the opposition party MDC. The fact that the MDC was generally supported by the international community and that some of its members were white was considered by the ruling party ZANU PF as proof that Zimbabwe would be a colony again if the MDC would get into power. MDC was presented as an inauthentic, non-Zimbabwean party, full of Rhodesian interests, its members having no legitimacy to rule Zimbabwe because they had not participated in the liberation struggle." (Willems 2005:101)

In addition, the fact that part of the opposition supported the idea of intervention and sanctions – for the ZANU PF government a clear interference in its domestic

affairs - and held the government responsible for Zimbabwe's economic decline, has played into the governments hands as it seemed to prove its rhetoric.

vi.   Consequences for the Zimbabwean media environment

As presented, this narrowly defined media environment and news reporting by the state-owned media did not allow for public discussions and a critical evaluation of political standpoints and positions in order to form a well-informed and deliberate opinion. In the name of protecting independence, national values and interests against a suspected British regime change agenda in which white farmers, the political opposition and the private 'unpatriotic' press were assumed to play a central, conspiring role, the government and the state media declared critical voices to be a 'threat' and 'enemies of the state' fighting the guardian of the nation and the country's sovereignty.[23] A variety of measures and regulations, which allow for a tight control and restriction of media and communicative spaces have been implemented as a "Zimbabwean attempt to restore 'communication sovereignty' – i.e. the state's exercise of authority over flows of information inside its territory" (Moyo 2004: 27). In addition, the state-owned media played a crucial role in shaping the images of the political environment within the country or as Waldahl

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[23] Even though this article concentrates on the developments during the past decade, it is worth mentioning that declaring the opposition a threat to the country has not been a recently employed strategy of the ZANU PF government. Indeed, a television advertisement during the 1990 General Election used the slogan „AIDS kills. So does ZUM [Zimbabwe Unity Movement, the then main opposition party]. Vote ZANU PF." (Jonathan Moyo cit. in Mano 2008: 512).

(2005:29) puts it: "In this way ZANU PF was free to carry on its political activities in the knowledge that the country's largest media would ensure that its policies were presented to the voters in a favourable light". The introduction of new media laws followed by the closure of privately owned newspapers, which 'lacked patriotism' meant a silencing of government-critical media, which had so far provided the opposition with a space to voice its political agenda and allowed the public to receive a broader range of information.

It is worth noting that these measures, including the banning of foreign and especially Western correspondents from Zimbabwe, have also contributed to reinforcing the negative image of the country's government as pointed out by Ndlela (2005) in his analysis of the coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis in the Norwegian media. Ndlela (2005:80) notes that

"the expulsion of foreign reporters from Zimbabwe, refusal of accreditations, and hostility towards foreign media, made it difficult for the few remaining foreign journalists to interview primary sources in government. Consequently, news of the Zimbabwean crisis filtered into the Norwegian mainstream media mainly through secondary sources, such as few remaining international news correspondents, freelancers, non-governmental organisations and the independent media."

In sum, the shrinking down of the freedoms of press and expression, and the public sphere within Zimbabwe in general has led to a greater polarisation of the contrasting media coverage of the domestic situation in Zimbabwe.

While the Zimbabwean state has effectively managed to shape the domestic media environment and to control media activity, reporting and information outlet – and thus political space - within its national territory, it has been less successful in preventing the spreading of news, information and messages affecting opinion formation outside its borders. Circumventing the harsh regulatory conditions and intolerant media environment editors, journalist and activists now in diaspora have relocated the private media with them and have increasingly made use of new media technologies to continue with their work from abroad.

4. MEDIA IN THE DIASPORA: PROPAGANDA AND COUNTER PROPAGANDA OR AN INCLUSIVE POLITICAL PUBLIC SPHERE ABROAD?

i.   *Beyond news reporting*

In contrast to the accusation of being unpatriotic many Zimbabweans in diaspora are actually proud of their nationality and committed to their home country. While

some remain rather passive by merely observing the political developments, others try to play a very active part in the social and political affairs of their home country by engaging in political activism (see Pasura forthcoming). Again, others can be located between these two poles such as the Zimbabwean diaspora-based online media. In his article on 'patriotic history' Ranger (2003: 234) notes that "ZANU-PF controls all television and radio; […] it commands virtually all the press; and it is able to determine what kind of history is taught in schools. It is virtually impossible for critics to develop a counter-narrative in any systematic way." However, during the past six years editors, journalists and government critics in the civil society and political opposition based in the diaspora have made extensive use of new communication technologies. These have allowed them to circumvent the environment of limited freedom of opinion, expression, movement and assembly, to develop alternative narratives and to let information trickle into Zimbabwe. While the government of Zimbabwe has tightened control over the classical forms of mass media such as radio, television and print media and, thus, over the flow of news and information within its borders, the activities and the use of new media by (exiled) Zimbabweans in the diaspora is virtually (though not completely) beyond the state's control.

A number of news websites and online radios have been established by diasporans mainly in the UK and North America to provide alternative views on the economic, humanitarian and political situation in Zimbabwe in an effort to counter

the government's dominant narrative.[24] These alternative media are heterogeneous in terms of social actors involved, their social and political experiences, their involvement in political activities and also in their experiences in the field of journalism and media in general. In his analysis of diaspora-based news websites Moyo (2007) noticed that the level of professionalism, financial basis and the degree of institutionalisation, visibility, interactivity between the websites and their readership as well as the editorial positions with regard to the depiction of the domestic situation in Zimbabwe vary greatly. He identifies two kinds of news websites. There are sites that only collect selected news stories from other sources whereas others produce their own news stories, however, sometimes combining them with stories from international news agencies such as Reuters or AFP and opinion pieces of readers and columnists.

Even though predominantly in English and not in Shona or Ndebele, online newspapers and radios appear to be directed at a Zimbabwean and not an international audience. Yet, also non-Zimbabweans inform themselves through Zimbabwean diaspora-based online media. However, some of these news websites' and online radio stations' activities go beyond classic news reporting and the media's watchdog-function by engaging in political campaigning and new media protest activism exposing the ruling party's abuse of power, corruption and

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[24] e.g. *NewZimbabwe.com* (UK), *ZimbabweSituation.com* (Australia), *ZimDaily.com* (UK), *ZimbabweTimes.com* (USA), *SW Radio Africa* (UK), *TheZimbabwean.co.uk* (UK), *TalkZimbabwe.com* (*The Zimbabwe Guardian*) (UK), *ZimOnline.co.za* (South Africa), *ZimbabweMetro.com* (Botswana/Canada), *Sokwanele.com* (USA) as well as *AfroSoundsFM.com* (UK), *Radio Voice of the People* (VOP) (South Africa) and *Voice of America* (VOA) *Studio 7* (USA), which is owned by the US government but mainly run by Zimbabweans.

injustices. Three examples of such online media activities, those of the (online) radio station *SW Radio Africa*, the news website *Zimdaily.com* and a collective campaign by various diaspora-based editors and journalists will be discussed in the following to clarify this point. All three cases were chosen as these activities are telling examples of Zimbabwean diasporic new media activities that take part in the United Kingdom. In addition, *SW Radio Africa* and *Zimdaily.com* are two of the most visited UK-based Zimbabwean news websites and as such, they and their activities reach a wide audience and contribute to the creation of a transnational public sphere and to public debates among Zimbabweans across borders.[25] The examples will be structured in a way that first, the background (origin, staff, nature) of the respective news websites will be given before the kinds of diasporic new media activities, their effect and their impact on the creation of a transnational political public sphere will be analysed. Each example will end with concluding remarks, however, an overall conclusion will be given in section 5.

ii.   SW Radio Africa: Diaspora-based advocacy journalism

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[25] According to Alexa.com web traffic rankings of 22nd March 2009 *ZimDaily.com* is the second and *SWRadioAfrica.com* the third most visited UK-based Zimbabwean website with a world traffic rank of 65,716 and 122,319 respectively. The most visited UK-based Zimbabwean website is *NewZimbabe.com* with a traffic rank of 21.405 [source: www.alexa.com, accessed: 22.03.09]. According to Statbrain.com website statistics of 22nd of March 2009 *Zimdaily.com* had 6,385 visits per day while *SWRadio.com* had 6,295 [source: www.statbrain.com, accessed: 22.03.09]. The percentage of the share of *ZimDaily.com*'s and *SWRadioAfrica.com*'s readership is as followed: For ZimDaily.com: United Kingdom 31.0%, Zimbabwe 28.3.%, South Africa 12.6%, Namibia 8.3% and Sweden 5.7%; for SWRadioAfrica.com: United Kingdom 37.7%, SouthAfrica 23.4%, Zimbabwe 16.6%, Sweden 12.3% and United States 3.4% [source: www.alexa.com, accessed: 22.03.09].

In 2000, the privately-run *Capital Radio* challenged the government's monopoly over the airwaves in the Zimbabwean High Court which ruled in favour of the claimant – and thus of a more pluralistic broadcasting environment – by declaring the state monopoly unconstitutional. The radio station was established by a former ZBC freelancer, Jerry Jackson, who had lost her job for allowing listeners to voice their criticism over and unhappiness with government policies and police brutality on air. However, the station was raided and closed down shortly after the ruling. Under the name *Short Wave Radio Africa* (short: *SW Radio Africa*) the station was relocated to the UK in 2001. Here it employs (other former ZBC) journalists and radio DJs, a film producer, an engineer and a webmaster and continues to provide regularly updated news on its website and broadcasting from London on shortwave.

The station perceives itself as a voice for those who cannot speak out in Zimbabwe. As a combination of a pro-democracy group and a news agency it informs people in and outside the country about developments in Zimbabwe and actively supports civil society and pro-democracy groups that try to achieve social and political change in the country.[26] As such *SW Radio Africa* provides links on its website and advertises the activities of the London-based Zimbabwe Vigil Coalition which holds weekly protest gatherings in front of the Zimbabwean embassy since October 2002, the MDC Central London Forum and the pro-democracy campaign and civic action support group Sokwanele as well as activities of other such groups,

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[26] Interview with *SW Radio Africa* journalists and broadcasters Lance Guma, 25 March 2008, and Tererai Karimakwenda, 30 March 2008.

protest demonstrations and meetings in the diaspora. The latter are seen as an important democratic force, or as one *SW Radio Africa* journalist put it: "We've really taken an interest in the diaspora because we think they are a key constituency in trying to achieve change back home."

However, one of the main purposes of the station's existence is to broadcast news programmes into Zimbabwe. *SW Radio Africa* is a good example of how new media technologies have allowed the classical audio and print media to merge online. Nevertheless, while online news and broadcasting are easily accessible for the diaspora, it cannot substitute or do without classical forms of media as these reach the people in Zimbabwe better than new technologies such as the internet which, given regular electricity cuts, high costs and slow internet connections is out of reach for the majority of people inside Zimbabwe. Commenting on the *SW Radio Africa* news web site Jerry Jackson (2007:71-2) explained, "The web site was created with the knowledge that hardly anyone in Zimbabwe has broadband and connections are extremely slow". Radio remains the major way to reach the majority of people in Zimbabwe and as such *SW Radio Africa* has continued to broadcast into Zimbabwe even under difficult circumstances. The station did not get permission from Zimbabwe's neighbouring countries to use their transmitters to broadcast into Zimbabwe; therefore, its signal is beamed from a location in Europe directly into Zimbabwe.

The station runs a number of programmes such as 'Hot Seat' and 'Behind the Headlines' aimed at exposing and highlighting human rights violations and corrupt practices of the Zimbabwean government and those whom it deals with. An example of this was a scandal about the plundering of Zimbabwe's natural resources which involved the family of Vice-President Joyce Mujuru. Joyce Mujuru was accused of trying to sell millions of dollars in gold nuggets and diamonds in defiance of international sanctions imposed on the ZANU PF elite. According to The Times Online (25/02/2009) Mrs Mujuru's daughter and Spanish son-in-law, Nyasha and Pedro Del Campo, offered to sell 3,700kg of gold for US$90 million to the metal dealer Firstar Europe Ltd... This scandal exposed that at a time when the majority of Zimbabwe's population has to cope with almost abject poverty due to the economic crisis, part of the ZANU PF elite lives a life of opulence. Under the title 'Gold and the General's daughter' *SW Radio Africa* provided a link on its website to a number of international press articles, radio interviews, videos and other information on the scandal, while it's 'Hot Seat' programme broadcasted information on the scandal into Zimbabwe.

In addition, the station has regularly offered government-critical civil society organisations such as the Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and the political opposition, in particular the MDC-Tsvangirai faction, a platform to voice their views. As their reach and influence inside Zimbabwe was gaining ground the government

reacted by jamming the station's shortwave signal. The station believes that this happened with the help of Chinese technology:

"In 2005, we had our first problem with our short wave broadcasts, courtesy of Mugabe's friends the Chinese. They supplied him with rather expensive jamming equipment and we believe personnel were sent to China for training. It effectively blew us completely out of the water. But the jamming is focused on the main cities. We are still clearly heard in many rural areas." (Jackson 2007:72)

"The ruling party got some equipment from China and they started jamming our signals and people would hear this buzzing sound next to our thing. It was just annoying, nobody would listen that way. We begged around and found some more funds and we started broadcasting on multiple frequencies and we got around the problem for a while because, you know, when they were jamming one or two frequencies we would have two others open. At one point we had five frequencies going. That was at the peak of our jamming, we had five frequencies going."[27]

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[27] Interview with Tererai Karimakwenda, 30 March 2008.

The station experienced a further jamming of its radio signals in 2006 when a strong buzzing signal interfered with its medium wave broadcast around the Zimbabwean capital Harare (SWRadioAfrica.com, 27/06/2006). In order to circumvent these kinds of attack on its news distribution efforts *SW Radio Africa* began to take two measures. It expanded its signal transmission to medium wave and a number of shortwave channels during election times to ensure its broadcasting would reach people in Zimbabwe. In addition, it began to employ other new media technologies and to offer a new service by sending news headlines into Zimbabwe and to Zimbabweans in South Africa via SMS. In July 2008 the station sent 25,000 SMS daily while a further 1,000 people a week asked to be added to the list of receivers (The Independent, 21/07/2008).[28] By March 2009 the number of receivers had increased to 30,000 people who got SMS three times a week which forced the station to stop adding new numbers to their SMS news headline service.[29] By offering this text message service as well as broadcasting - not only online but also on multi shortwave frequencies - into Zimbabwe, *SW Radio Africa* distinguishes itself from other Zimbabwean diaspora

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[28] The use of text messages plays an important role as medium of communication among the Zimbabweans in the UK in that it is 'the medium through which they make political and social jokes about the homeland's fast collapsing economy […] [and] convey messages about meetings, appointments, and social events in the diaspora' (Pasura 2006: 11).

[29] On 22 March 2009 *SW Radio Africa* announced on its website that "We are receiving many requests to be added to our SMS news headline service. We very much regret that we are unable to add any more numbers. We send to 30,000 people, three times a week, and do not have the funds to expand this. If you know someone who already receives our news, please try and get them to forward to you. Our sincere apologies to the many people who are emailing in."

radio stations in the UK (e.g. *Zonet, Zimnet, AfroSound FM*) that purely broadcast via internet which allows for less operation costs and fewer legislative hurdles.

Broadcasting on multiple shortwave frequencies and the text message service are expensive activities for *SW Radio Africa* which cannot raise funds through advertisements since it is registered as a non-profit organisation. While the station is believed to be funded by Western donors such as the US international development agency's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) (The Guardian (Online), 24/01/2002) and the British government it insists that the station only receives financial assistance from non-governmental organisations promoting democratic governance, human rights and media freedom such as the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OASIS) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).[30] The allegations of being 'Western-founded' have besides the jamming activities triggered other responses by the Zimbabwean government. The station has repeatedly been attacked by *The Herald*, which has published cartoons of its editor, Jerry Jackson.[31] Another problem for *SW Radio Africa* has been the rapid economic decline and inflation within Zimbabwe as it made batteries for radios unaffordable for the citizens. Regular electricity problems which allowed people in Zimbabwe to access electricity only around midnight have hampered *SW Radio Africa*'s ability to reach people as they broadcast two hours in the evening from 5 to 7 pm UK time

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[30] Interview with Lance Guma, 25 March 2008, and Tererai Karimakwenda, 30 March 2008.
[31] Interview with Lance Guma, 25 March 2008.

only. However, for Jackson (2007:72) "the moral of the story is to try absolutely everything possible to circumvent the censors and not give up".

While *SW Radio Africa* has extensively covered the violation of human rights in Zimbabwe and has offered a platform for government critical voices and thus an *alternative* public space, it does not provide for an *open* space for and the representation of a variety of voices in terms of political affiliation and opinion. As its editorial stance is an anti-government one, government-supportive or opposition-critical voices are not featured online or on air. The fact that *SW Radio Africa* does not broadcast live but operates with pre-recorded call-in interviews allows for the 'editing out' and selective presentation of political opinions. Whereas the leading figures of WOZA and the spokesperson of the MDC-Tsvangirai faction, Nelson Chamisa, are regularly interviewed, government representatives or opposition supporters are not. While this bias partly owns to the fact that government officials have denied to give interviews to the station due to its advocacy journalism,[32] it does not explain why the opposition-critical voices of 'ordinary' Zimbabweans are never presented.

In sum, the station has created a public space for alternative views, however, it has not done so for the exchange and broad discussion of divergent viewpoints. Its operation reveals a certain degree of censorship and selective broadcasting of pro-opposition and anti-government voices. Nevertheless, it has been successful in

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[32] Ibid.

exposing and bringing corruption and human rights violations committed by the ruling party and its supporters not only to the attention of the Zimbabwean public but also of the international community. As a news radio station *SW Radio Africa* engages in advocacy journalism but not directly or openly in campaign activities as such.[33] However, this is done by the news website *ZimDaily.com* as the next example will illustrate.

iii. *ZimDaily.com's 'Fair Deal' campaign: Diaspora-based campaign journalism*

A more radical approach that went beyond advocacy and rather has to be referred to as campaign journalism was pursued by the diaspora-based Zimbabwean-run news website *ZimDaily.com*. Since it was launched in July 2004 by three Zimbabweans based in Britain, Canada and the United States respectively, it has been critical of the Zimbabwean government. Directed transnationally, *ZimDaily.com* is registered and managed in Britain and funded by its owners and through advertisement revenues; it pays four correspondents in Zimbabwe and makes use of voluntary contributors from the diaspora for its news reporting, however, its founders have no background in journalism (personal communication, 29 March 2009, see also Moyo 2007:94-96). The site also runs an entertainment

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[33] However, this does not mean that its individual journalists do not engage in such activities to a certain degree as will be shown below.

internet radio station, *ZimNET Radio*. The site is very interactive in that it offers a number of discussion and feedback options to its readers including discussion forums and space for comments on all published stories, which allows the readers to actively participate in public discussions. However, *ZimDaily.com* has provided its readers with more than just the option to become active in political discussions. In 2006 it started a several months-long campaign on its website called 'Fair Deal'. The campaign aimed at the extension of travel sanctions imposed upon members of the Zimbabwean ruling elite by Western states to include their children who enjoyed education in these countries. The website argued that the immediate relatives of the ZANU PF elite did not deserve the luxury of being educated in democratic countries while their parents were responsible for a political situation in Zimbabwe that denied the citizens basic democratic rights and freedoms and for a failing economy accompanied by the breakdown of the national education system as thousands of teachers were forced to leave their jobs due to deteriorating living standards and poor salaries. The campaign aimed at exposing the 'hypocrisy' of the ZANU PF government which had attacked Western countries for their interference into domestic affairs and for being imperialistic but yet sent their children into these states for education: "If you do not want to have anything to do with the West, why not cut ties with everything western?" the campaign coordinator Munamato Maiswa commented in an Interview with the Australia Broadcasting Corporation while on *ZimDaily.com* he added "We want those causing the suffering of millions to have

their kids enjoy the *Paradise* they have created for everyone" [34]
(dniinoi.wordpress.com, 07/09/2007).

ZimDaily.com asked readers of the news website to expose the names and
locations of the children of senior ZANU PF government officials studying outside
Zimbabwe in order to lobby the respective countries, in particular the UK, the US,
Canada and Australia, to deport the identified students back to Zimbabwe. Under
the catch phrase 'Send the little devils home' the campaign attracted the attention
of a large part of the Zimbabwean diaspora worldwide and the website received
tremendous feedback. Names and pictures in some cases even passport numbers
and addresses of the targeted students were supplied and their names published
on the website. In August 2007, Australia's then Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander
Downer announced his decision to deport eight Zimbabwean students whose
parents were part of the repressive regime in Harare. Among those were the
children of Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono, Economic Planning Minister
Sylvester Nguni, Science and Technology Minister Olivia Muchena, Local
Government Minister Ignatius Chombo, Harare Provincial Governor David
Karimanzira, Rural Affairs Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa and Police
Commissioner Augustine Chihuri. It was only Australia that responded positively to
the 'Fair Deal' campaign, however, the plight of the millions of Zimbabwean children
who were and are affected by the decline in education standards was

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[34] Emphasis in original.

internationalised by this campaign and as such there was success albeit limited. However, the campaign did not only receive support but also criticism as the question was raised whether the children of ZANU PF officials should be held accountable for the actions of their parents. Voices critical of the campaign and of those affected appeared on *ZimDaily.com* itself and other online news websites such as *The Zimbabwe Guardian* (formerly *TalkZimbabwe.com*) which appeared rather sympathetic to those affected by the campaign. In fact, the latter gave a UK-based Zimbabwean a platform to respond to an article posted on *ZimDaily.com* alleging that he was the son of Midlands governor and resident minister Cephas Msipa (see TalkZimbabwe.com, 18/09/2007). The angered Zimbabwean, a London-based immigration lawyer, took legal action against *ZimDaily.com*'s service provider which, it is believed, led to the website temporally going offline (NehandaRadio.com, 29/10/2007). Nevertheless, the campaign was approved by other diaspora-based journalists such as the editor of The Zimbabwean online newspaper:

"The wires burned as Zimbabweans around the globe responded to the challenge to identify the whereabouts of these offspring. A brisk exchange of views ensued about whether the children should be punished for the sins of their fathers. But the evidence of the destruction of the education system by the ruling elite, and the consequent condemnation of millions of young

Zimbabweans to a life of ignorance and poverty, has triumphed."
(TheZimbabwean.co.uk, 06/09/2007)

In July 2008 the 'Fair Deal' campaign was re-launched in an even more radical tone under the slogan 'Mwana We Nyoka I Nyoka, Umntwana We Nyoka yi Nyoka' (A Baby Snake Is a Snake). Appealing to the "[d]isenfranchised Zimbabweans in the diaspora [who] have limited options of tackling the regime" *ZimDaily.com* emphasised that "the time for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to play their part in applying pressure to the thugs masquerading [sic] as Heads of State in Zimbabwe is now" by assisting in the "deportations of their children from their western comfort zones." Once again the website called upon its readers to provide information in order for the "the spoilt beneficiaries of our misery to be tracked down and sent back to their parents who are not only stealing to finance the luxury of their siblings in scarce forex while our children languish in a country without basic day to day survival needs but are hanging on to power through hook and crook." *ZimDaily.com* appealed to the collective conscience of those in diaspora that "all these children are being financed by forex that the Zanu PF chefs have stolen from our fiscus and as a good citizen you have a duty to stop the bleeding of our county's economy by these people who deny us our basic rights" yet their children are "enjoying the western democracy and everything that comes with it while our brothers and sisters are tortured, maimed, starved and made to go through an appalling education

system" (ZimDaily.com, 15/07/2008). However, this time the campaign was not successful.[35]

The radical and emotional tone of this campaign indicates the anger of some diasporans about the developments in their home country. However, in contrast to the activities of *SW Radio Africa* whose advocacy journalism is directed at offering space for alternative political discourses and achieving social and political change in Zimbabwe, the *ZimDaily.com* campaign was meant as a direct attack on the ruling elite by showing its potential in retaliating upon the government for its actions.

While the transnational character of the campaign and its success in Australia helped in raising awareness on an international level about the crisis in Zimbabwe in general, and the deteriorating education system in particular, its style of campaigning raises concern. The campaign negatively affected the reputations of a number of people wrongly accused of benefiting from the corrupt practices of members of the ruling elite. In addition, by publishing personal information including passport numbers and in some cases falsehoods about particular individuals on their website, *ZimDaily.com* engaged in defamation and possibly violated various laws of its host countries such as the British Data Protection Act which restricts the unauthorised circulation of personal information or details about individuals.

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[35] In the spirit of the 'fail deal' campaign the "Bring Bona Mugabe back to Zimbabwe" campaign was launched in January 2009 by The Zimbabwe National Students Union (Zinasu) in Zimbabwe to pressure the Chinese government to deport the daughter of President Mugabe, Bona, from Hong Kong where she is studying. Also this campaign has been assisted by a number of Zimbabwean diaspora-based online news web pages including *ZimDaily.com* that have been running the campaign on their websites and *SW Radio Africa* which provided a link to it. However, this particular campaign does not seem to have gathered as much momentum as the 'fair deal' campaign.

However, the news website has not only been criticised for its 'Fair Deal' campaign but also for its sometimes inaccurate news reporting as well as the failure to crosscheck and verify facts, thereby infringing basic professional journalistic ethics. [36] In sum, while *Zimdaily.com* generated international attention to the situation in Zimbabwe with its online campaign, it also violated certain journalistic ethical standards. As shown, especially the re-launch of the 'Fair Deal' campaign served less an open public debate in an inclusive public sphere than rather a 'hate campaign' initiated by a group of individuals in the diaspora.

iv. *By Zimbabweans against Zimbabweans: Calls for the deportation of Diaspora-based journalists believed to be supportive of the government*

While the advocacy journalism of *SW Radio Africa* focuses on developments within Zimbabwe, the campaign activities of *ZimDaily.com* – even though they meant to attack the ruling elite in Zimbabwe – were directed at family members of ruling party officials living abroad. Following the 'Fair Deal' campaign other media campaigns have expanded the calls for deportations to alleged government-supporting voices within the diaspora, i.e. specific individuals who are viewed by some Zimbabwean

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[36] *ZimDaily.com* received enormous criticism for an article that it published reporting that the soldiers involved in the failed coup d'etat in Zimbabwe in 2007 that aimed at removing Robert Mugabe from power had been immediately executed. However, this turned out to be untrue.

diaspora-based media organisations as being 'too pro-Mugabe' or 'too pro- ZANU PF'.

An example is Reason Wafawarova, an Australia-based government-supportive blogger and newspaper columnist for a number of Zimbabwean online news publications, who was targeted by a number of Zimbabwean diaspora online publications (e.g. *ZimbabweMetro.com, ZimDaily.com, ChangeZimbabwe.com*). These campaigned to have him expelled from Australia for his anti-Western and pro-ZANU PF stance and accused him of being a 'former director of the National Youth Service and key Mugabe surrogate' (ZimbabweMetro.com, 04/09/2008 and 06/09/2008). [37] Those who called for his deportation accused Wafawarova of being 'hypocritical' and ignorant in that his views were supportive of Robert Mugabe and his government while he was living in exile away from the rough conditions faced by those under Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe. However, the campaign received criticism from some Zimbabwean journalists who, though disagreeing with Wafawarova's views, regarded these calls for deportation as a violation of professional journalistic standards and the right to free speech (see e.g. TheZimbabweTimes.com, 05/09/2008).

Likewise, Itayi Garande, the editor of the diaspora-based online newspaper *The Zimbabwe Guardian* was made the target of a campaign that called for his deportation from Britain as his publication was perceived as being supportive of the

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[37] The National Youth Service of Zimbabwe, and in particular the so-called Green Bombers have been used by the government to violently attack opposition supporters especially during election times.

ZANU PF government (see The Observer, 14/12/2008; NehandaRadio.com, 19/12/08; ChangeZimbabwe.com, 26/12/2008). In 2006, Garande, a lawyer by profession, established *TalkZimbabwe.com*, which he renamed *The Zimbabwe Guardian* in September 2007, with the aim to provide "hard facts and good news" which he believed to be lacking in the diaspora-based media at the time; Garande considered the news that he was obtaining from existing online newspapers to be "activist propaganda".[38] As editor of *The Zimbabwe Guardian* he had journalists based in the UK and Zimbabwe - mainly Zimbabwean but also Kenyan and British - to contribute to the online paper and he financed the website through personal funds and advertisement revenues.[39] Before the calls for deportation Garande was a regular guest at *SW Radio Africa*'s 'Reporters' Forum' which discussed current affairs and also worked together with journalist from other online newspapers such as *TheZimbabweTimes.com* and *NewZimbabwe.com* despite their different editorial stances.[40] However, in contrast to many other Zimbabwean diaspora-based online publications *The Zimbabwe Guardian* also used government sources for its news reporting which it would directly contact for information.[41] Referring to the freedom of opinion and denying that his publication was funded by or supportive of the Zimbabwean government[42] Garande nevertheless became the target of suspicion

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[38] Interview with Itayi Garande, 14 March 2008.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid. See also Itayi Garande 'Garande responds to growing deportation calls', Nehanda Radio, 19 December 2008, available at http://www.nehandaradio.com/zimbabwe/media/garande/garande-responds191208.html [accessed: 22.03.09].

and was attacked for his editorial stance. He was accused of selective reporting and deliberately ignoring negative news about the government and Zimbabwe as a whole. The fact that *The Zimbabwe Guardian* did not extensively focus on human rights abuses, corruption, violence and the opposition and did not publish articles strongly critical of the Zimbabwean government had led some diaspora-based journalists to accuse the paper of "running one-sided stories that focus on what is good about the government" and as having "taken the position to support Mugabe and Zanu PF and [to] run stories that will never portray Mugabe in a negative light".[43] The fact that Garande as the editor of *The Zimbabwe Guardian* did not run "any anti-government stories" was equated with him being supportive of the government, which for some qualified him for deportation:

"[…] you don't run any anti-government stories […] so that translates into support, because if you are not running anything that is not remotely critical of the government that really amounts to supporting the government […] A lot of people are saying in view of targeted sanctions that target people who are said to be aiding and abetting the regime and Mugabe, you qualify under that criteria, because you are supporting the regime from here in the United Kingdom and as a result you should be deported."[44]

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[43] *SW Radio Africa* presenter Lance Guma in a 'Reporters' Forum' interview with Itayi Garande, 22 December 2008, available at: http://changezimbabwe.com/index.php?Itemid=2&id=1855&option=com_ content &task=view [accessed: 22.03.09]
[44] Ibid.

In February 2009 Garande officially left his position as the editor of *The Zimbabwe Guardian* with the following words:

"We were blamed for brandishing our non-conformity with certain lines of thought [...] having become inured to pain and abuse because of the alternative that we offered – that opportunity to explore, and see things differently. We were quite puritanical about our desire to delve into the reasons for why and how certain political events were occurring. There was always plenty of elbow room to explore alternative ways of tackling the Zimbabwean question, and we could not understand why many of our critics expected us to remain within their acceptable parameters." (TalkZimbabwe.com, 26/02/2009)

What these campaigns reveal is the intention of some diaspora-based Zimbabwean media practitioners to create a media environment in the diaspora free of (alleged) government and ZANU PF-supportive views. It appears that only 'anti-government' or at least government-critical reporting is legitimate writing that should find its way into the public domain. However, this raises the question of whether, under these circumstances, an open debate between divergent views is possible in the diaspora, and in this case the United Kingdom – apparently a more democratic

space for the expression of political opinions. The last example as well as the other two examples presented above rather suggest that Zimbabwean new media activities and campaigns have not only divided the Zimbabwean diaspora and the online media in particular, but have also extended the polarisation of the media that was found within Zimbabwe to places outside the borders of the country. It exposes a culture of intolerance towards different viewpoints even from those who are purporting to be fighting for media freedom in Zimbabwe. In that, some Zimbabwean journalists have not only taken the private and alternative media with them into the diaspora but also the polarised media environment that does not offer space for divergent, but only for alternative, for government-critical views.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES TO ZIMBABWEAN MEDIA ACTIVISM

As shown in this paper, the last decade has posed economic, political and legislative challenges for the private media within Zimbabwe. Just as the foreign media, the local private press had been accused by the ruling party of publishing and spreading falsehoods to discredit the Zimbabwean government not only within the country but also outside its borders. As a result the country has experienced the establishment of rigid laws and regulations leading to arrests of journalists and the

closure of private newspapers which in turn forced some media practitioners to either give up their profession, work as foreign correspondents for international news organisations such as Reuters or Agence France Press (AFP) or go into (self-) exile (Mano 2005b).

Having been faced with laws that impair fundamental rights including restrictive media and security legislation severely curtailing political, civil society as well as media activities, opposing and critical voices in the diaspora have established alternative means of information and communication mainly using new media technologies such as the internet or short message service.

i. *Opportunities*

Due to the lack of Zimbabwean print media in the UK, online publications serve as a source of information.[45] Consequently, diaspora-based media and especially news reporting play an important role in disseminating information and thereby in

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[45] *The Zimbabwean* and *New Zimbabwe* are the only Zimbabwean diaspora newspaper published as hard copies in the UK. Both are also available online.

providing a media space, which offers a different view to the state-controlled media within Zimbabwe. The virtual Zimbabwean community provides current news on Zimbabwe, links to relevant web pages and space for discussion in online forums and comments on news articles. Online newspapers and internet radio stations are relatively widely read and listened to by Zimbabweans in the UK.[46] As such, diaspora-based online media contribute towards opinion-formation among diasporans and those still in Zimbabwe and could be considered the biggest challenge to the homeland government as will be referred to shortly.

Facing restrictions at home, new media have provided the Zimbabwean media activists with a tool to network, mobilise and to publish without censorship by the government as well as to expand their collective and individual activism and advocacy to a global level by reaching out to the international community. New media allow Zimbabwean media activists in the diaspora to present alternative views and to organise civil society grassroots protest against a government made responsible for a severe crisis at a time when domestic civic and political resistance is repressed. As such, it allows them to represent and speak for those not in a position to do so. However, besides enabling the development of broader networks on the international level, it has, to a certain degree, also facilitated the interaction between the diaspora and the local civil society and opposition on the ground –

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[46] Nevertheless, many Zimbabweans also use international media providers like BBC World or Sky News.

thus, connecting the local and the global protest against human rights abuses and political intolerance.

The transnational media activities of those in the diaspora have not only challenged the government's authority but have brought international attention and focus on Zimbabwe. Diaspora media activities have helped to expose the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe and the violation of human rights, not reported on in the state-controlled media. This has led part of the international community to call for sanctions to pressure the Zimbabwean government to uphold fundamental rights for its citizens. Zimbabwean run media organizations have conducted a number of campaigns through which they tried to internationalize the 'Zimbabwean crisis'. Some of these campaigns are still ongoing and some have enjoyed moderate success. Other online news websites combine a number of new media technologies not only to promote the many campaigns exposing corruption in the country but also to channel news and information into Zimbabwe. Email, SMS and the Internet have been used but also 'mature' forms of media such as broadcasting on shortwave have been used to compliment these new forms of media. As such, the diaspora-based news websites have contributed to the broadening of the Zimbabwean public sphere beyond the borders of the state and to the formation of a transnational public sphere spanning the home country and the host countries of Zimbabweans across continents. However, while they have contributed to the creation of a transnational public sphere, the question remains whether this

transnational public sphere is an open, democratic and inclusive one. This question will be discussed in the remaining paragraphs.

ii.   Challenges

Issues surrounding the distribution of and access to information through new communication and information technologies are central when looking into the potential effects of diaspora-based media activities for people and developments in the home country.

iii.   Reaching people on the ground: a question of access

The question that Berger (2002:40) raises relating to African journalism using new media technologies – namely "whether African journalists find viable ways to ensure a global two-way flow between 'information rich' and 'information poor' in an extended chain of media reaching from broadband Internet on one end, to civil society rural village meetings at the other" – is also of concern to the Zimbabwean diaspora media activists. The question of whether or not the latter can reach the people on the ground in Zimbabwe and contribute to a democratisation process is an issue of access, which is hampered by financial, geographical, language and technological infrastructure-related barriers. As has been shown, due to the serious economic crisis within Zimbabwe financial barriers have rendered it almost

impossible for the majority of readers and listeners to access electronic, audio and print media. Radio batteries or newspapers are unaffordable for most of the ordinary citizens. In addition, private newspapers imported from South Africa or the UK are primarily sold in the cities.[47] The same holds true for cyber cafés, which are mostly located in the urban areas and seldom offer broadband connections. In the face of the chronic shortage of foreign currency, which has resulted in the country's inability to pay for electricity imports and to maintain its own power-generating infrastructure even those Zimbabweans who have access to computers and the internet are at the mercy of the inconsistent electricity supplies. In addition, due to the failure of paying fees to its Internet Service Providers, Zimbabwe has repeatedly been cut off from the international platform (NewZimbabwe.com, 15/03/2009). In short, even were telecommunications are in place, part of the population is excluded from accessing new media due to the unavailability of simple things like electricity but also by other factors like illiteracy or lack of computer skills.

Assessing the extent to which the diaspora-based online media can reach and influence its fellow citizens on the ground is a difficult exercise. However, ongoing research and preliminary findings by the author of this paper suggest that the impact of Zimbabwean online media in terms of reaching the majority of people and

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[47] However, according to the editor of *The Zimbabwean*, which is offered in Zimbabwe to a heavily reduced price the newspaper is circulated and passed on in Zimbabwe to an extent that each copy is read by an average of 17 people while it is only read be two in the UK (Interview with Wilf Mbanga, 29 April 2008).

trying to incorporate them into a transnational or alternative public sphere via new forms of media is limited due to problems such as those just mentioned.

iv. *Whose public opinion? Representation and participation in online media activities*

These findings raise further questions and in particular the following: If the diaspora-based media with its news, debates and activism rather reaches the Western-based diaspora while the majority of Zimbabweans cannot take part in the exchange of political opinions, then how representative are those views and perceptions by diasporans, which reach the international online audience and the international community, for the general Zimbabwean population?

v. *The government's response: jamming and interferences*

While the reach of diaspora-based Zimbabwean media (print and online newspapers as well as shortwave and internet radio) may be limited, it nevertheless offered an alternative view for some, tired of the one-sided government rhetoric, and did not go unnoticed by the government as indicated earlier. News, information and opinions trickling down into Zimbabwe have caused the government to react and take measures:

"The intense propaganda by the state [...] failed to persuade most urban voters. Many viewers and listeners regarded the ZBC as thoroughly biased, with some critics referring to it as the 'Zimbabwe Boring Corporation', and suggesting that 'television' in Zimbabwe meant 'terror vision'. Many people tuned in to foreign radio stations that featured programmes on Zimbabwe, such as Voice of America/Studio 7 (from Botswana), SW Radio Africa (from the United Kingdom) and Voice of the People (from the Netherlands). As was the case in the 1970s when the white minority regime had to contend with radio stations based outside the country, Mugabe's government sought to undermine these external broadcasters. It portrayed them as instruments of imperialists bent on challenging Zimbabwe's sovereignty." (Chitando 2002:235)

As discussed above, just like the Rhodesian Front government who employed periodic jamming of shortwave radio frequencies of the liberation movement (Mosia et al. 1994:16), the ZANU PF government used the same tactics to interfere with the broadcasting of *SW Radio Africa* or VOA's *Studio 7*. However, besides the control of radio frequency allocation and the airwaves in general, there have been other attempts of political control by the ruling elite. The fact that *SW Radio Africa* and other stations such as VOA *Studio 7* and *Voice of the People* were jammed by the Zimbabwean government (VOANews.com, 28/02/2007; SWRadio.com,

01/03/07); that a truck with 60,000 copies of *The Zimbabwean on Sunday* was burnt in May 2008 when it entered Zimbabwe (TheZimbabwean.co.uk, 26/05/2008); and that the government ordered Zimbabweans to take down their satellite dishes under Operation Dzikisai Madhishi (Shona for 'Pull down your satellite dishes') in mid-2008, suggests that the influence of the media activities of the diaspora are feared by the homeland government.

Through legislation concerning telecommunication and Internet service provision the government has tried to restrict the access of people in Zimbabwe to receive and the diaspora media to disseminate information (see Mavhunga 2008). It has attempted to force Internet Service Providers to censor and report 'malicious messages' i.e. email with political government-critical content (VOANews.com, 02/06/2004; SWRadioAfrica.com, 22/06/2006); and it has arrested people distributing 'anti-government' protest emails (Reuters, 21/11/2003). Initially declared unconstitutional by the Zimbabwean Supreme Court in 2004, the interception of mail, telephone conversation and internet-based communication such as email became 'legal' with the Interception of Communications Act of 2007. In the name of protecting national interests and security the act was justified as a fight against cybercrime such as child pornography, terrorism, money laundering and hacking. To comply with the law Internet Service Providers and mobile phone companies installed surveillance equipment; however, diaspora-based news websites advised their readers – as they had done earlier – to use non-Zimbabwean domains (.net,

.com, .co.za, .co.uk instead of .zw) as the government could only interfere with locally registered domains (see NewZimbabwe.com, 02/06/2004; SWRadioAfrica.com, 06/08/2007 and 07/09/2007). In addition, they emphasised that the government did not have the capacities for broad surveillance activities but rather used the 'fear factor' to intimidate users.

In August 2007 the government blacklisted 41 websites including many run by Zimbabweans in exile (see Zimbabwe Independent, 10/08/2007),[48] while it tried to run its own online TV, *Jump TV*, and attempted to set up its own shortwave radio, *Voice of Zimbabwe*, to provide "factual information about the reality on the ground in Zimbabwe" (NewZimbabwe.com, 17/07/2007; Media Network, 25/05/2007). However, the radio station never went on air and the TV station was not a success.

What these examples show, are that the Zimbabwean government views the diasporic new media activities of Zimbabweans abroad as a threat. By taking measures to counter the influence of these media activists the government challenges the expansion of the Zimbabwean political public sphere beyond its borders and tries to restrict the release of news and information and the reception of the latter to Zimbabwe alone. However, the formation of a more democratic, open and inclusive transnational public sphere is not only undermined by the Zimbabwean government but also by the nature of the Zimbabwean diasporic new media activism itself.

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[48] These included e.g. *NewZimbabwe.com, ZimbabweSituation.com, ZWNews.com, ZimOnline.co.za, ZimDaily.com, TheZimbabweTimes.com, ChangeZimbabwe.com* and *TheZimbabwean.co.uk*.

Dangers

vi.   Polarisation and media ethics

While it is legitimate journalistic practice to use the media to articulate one's own version of the crisis in Zimbabwe, it is not legitimate to neglect journalistic codes of conduct. Before the closure of the privately-owned press, the media environment in Zimbabwe was heavily polarised between the pro-government state-owned media and the private media. Even though the private press under attack in Zimbabwe received support and sympathy from abroad, not only the role of the state media but also that of the private media has to be considered critically. As Mano (2005b:67) rightly points out:

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

Whereas the state media reporting was clearly biased with regard to issues on national elections and the land reform programmes, some of the private media

practiced self-censorship by paying little attention to the intra-party violence within the MDC or the quality of the opposition party's political programmes or leadership. This media environment left little space for fair, objective, balanced, accountable and responsible media news coverage. Both sides of the media in Zimbabwe have been operating at the expense of their credibility as sources of information. While the private media helped to expose and criticise corruption, political intolerance, violence, inconsistencies during election processes and human rights violations committed by the government and its supporters, and also opened up public and democratic space in Zimbabwe, they have not succeeded in creating responsible and accountable journalism committed to ethical standards as they themselves, just as the state media, undermined the principles of professionalism and press freedom (Moyo 2005, Mano 2005b, Chari 2007). In fact, Mano (2005b:56) argues that the political, economic and professional problems that have hit journalism within Zimbabwe have led to a situation in which "public and private media owners have created 'regimes' that undermine professional and ethical roles of journalists" and have become an "anti-democratic force":

"Both the state-controlled and privately-owned media presented journalists with constrained work environments. Independent investigative journalism was next to impossible…In both cases, professionalism that is journalism in the service of the public interest, is seriously undermined… [G]iven the

plethora of challenges faced by Zimbabwean journalists (especially, low pay, dismissals and victimisation), it is very difficult for them, and the media on the whole, to play meaningful roles in the country's democratic process." (ibid.:69)

Similarly, Chari (2007:39) argues that a lack of professional and ethical journalism in Zimbabwean "has seriously compromised the informational role of the media" resulting not only in a poor quality of information but also "in the erosion of the public's trust in the media". Chari identifies several challenges to a professional journalism in Zimbabwe which include sensationalism, a lack of accuracy or even the publishing of falsehoods (due to failure to crosscheck facts or to verify the authenticity of sensitive stories), self-censorship, the use of commentaries or opinion columns rather than news reporting as well as partisan reporting which openly declares support for political parties and is especially visible during election times.

While the state media can get away with most of these points including the publication of inaccurate stories about the MDC or opposition-friendly civil society group, in the case of the private media, the writing of false stories played into the government's hand offering it an excuse and the legitimation to tighten media regulations (ibid.:48-49).

According to Moyo (2005), the private press in Zimbabwe has, instead of merely offering an alternative view to the state media, rather acted as an activist or

opposition press focussing on criticising the government and promoting political change. Reporting has been biased and sometimes inaccurate. This tendency of antagonism and polarisation along political lines, of propaganda and counter-propaganda and of campaign and advocacy journalism has continued after the relocation of the private media to places in the diaspora restricting space for 'political opinions in the grey zones'.

As referred to earlier, campaign or advocacy journalism can take various forms and can, as Careless (2000) mentiones, be 'good' and 'bad'. According to Careless (2000) a partisan advocacy journalist can still practice professional journalism if he or she respects certain ethical norms. Speaking at the Canadian Association of Journalists annual conference in Halifax, 2000, she remarked the following principles:

"Being an advocate journalist is not the same as being an activist. No matter how dear a cause is to journalist's heart, there are lines which should never be crossed by a professional journalist. If you only spout slogans and clichés, and rant and rave then you are not doing honest journalism. You need to articulate complex issues clearly and carefully. If you are only a polemicist, you won't educate or persuade anyone [...] they will not learn the most current information they need to engage in effective debate in the public square. Slogans alone won't cut it in public discourse. [...] A journalist writing for the

advocacy press should practice the same skills as any journalist. You don't fabricate or falsify. If you do you will destroy the credibility of both yourself as a working journalist and the cause you care so much about. News should never be propaganda. You don't fudge or suppress vital facts or present half-truths. You shouldn't take something wildly out of context or treat an extremely nuanced subject as a sound bite. There must be a general fairness and thoroughness. Verify your facts and quotes. [...] A good journalist must play devil's advocate. You must argue against your own convictions. In an interview, you still have to ask the hard questions of possible heroes, the tough questions, even of the people you admire. [...] You will be far more credible if you write with a critical edge. You cannot view your cause or community through rose-coloured glasses."

However, as indicated, not all editors and journalists within the diaspora-based Zimbabwean media have professional journalistic training which in some cases has resulted in sensational rather than factual reporting. In addition, the common use of pseudonyms – employed as a response to a perceived threat to personal security – is undermining professional principles of journalistic writing as it has been used to published "unbalanced, unsubstantiated and often highly opinionated stories that are passed as journalistic writing" (Moyo 2007: 91). Besides the use of pseudonyms and of opinion pieces instead of factual reporting part of the

Zimbabwean diaspora-based online newspapers engage in a kind of journalism in which the editors and journalists clearly take side with the political opposition parties and government-critical civil society. Whatever the good intentions behind such advocacy, it needs to be pointed out that ignoring, selecting or distorting facts leads to misinformation. As such, diasporic new media activism can increase democratic space, on the one side, but there is also a danger that it can become 'just another biased source of information', on the other.

vii. Democratisation of the transnational alternative public sphere:

As discussed earlier, new media are perceived by some scholars to provide an open transnational public sphere allowing for more democratic participation in political dialogue. However, as indicated by the case studies in this paper, it can also be an instrument used for the opposite and for the monopolisation of the transnational alternative public sphere outside the home country. While the diaspora-based media has criticised the Zimbabwean government for its repressive use of the media, the case studies above have raised concerns whether the diaspora-based media itself has been successful in developing a more emancipatory use of the media

The media campaigns to have (perceived) government-supportive editors and journalists expelled from their Western host countries raised questions about – to use Berger's (2002:33) words – "the extent to which government [and government-

supportive] media can be said to be part of a public sphere". However, as Berger (2002:33-34) rightly points out:

"A public sphere implies a diversity of voices […] a broad societal public sphere classically encompasses […] also a highly partisan private media (pro- and anti-government). One could also argue therefore that, as long as the public sphere entails free expression and as long as government voices do not drown out other voices, even government mouthpieces have a place at the table […] taken in their totality, and not individually on their own, partisan voices (whether representing government or other interests, and whether state or privately owned), have a place in constituting a pluralistic public sphere."

Thus, if the diaspora-based Zimbabwean media is to assist democratic processes, it is vital to avoid one-sidedness and to allow for a pluralistic media environment within the public sphere.

viii. *Serving the public interest: no history of a free and tolerant media but is there a future for it?*

The history of partisan media in Zimbabwe and the lack of democratic experience and culture within this field has been traced since the development of the media in

Zimbabwe and pointed out by scholars on Zimbabwean media. This is also reflected now in times of cyber media. As such, it appears that the technology might have changed, but the partisan culture in the media has not. Taking into account these continuities and the question whether the Zimbabwean media has ever been democratic, it remains to be seen whether both sides of the media can fulfil a public service role respecting the principles of pluralism and diversity that give their audience the option to choose by accessing distinct political information and to give feedback, in short, to involve and empower their public audience (readership, listenership and viewers) and thus to allow for the active participation of the Zimbabwean population to strengthen democratic development. It will remain to be seen whether, on the one hand, the state-owned media will be able to transform themselves into real public media in the future that serves the public, not the ruling elite, and thus assist in the development of a democratic political sphere, which allows the public to participate and be part of a policy formulation process and to respond publicly to government actions – in short, to be active participants in the affairs of the Zimbabwean state. Similarly, on the other hand, the diaspora-based online media have created an alternative public space during a period of crisis, but having been established in protest against an authoritarian government it will also need to be seen whether the privately-owned media – online or not – can transform themselves from protest spaces into inclusive forums for democratic participation and expression in a future Zimbabwe – more balanced and respecting professional

journalistic codes of conduct. Zimbabwe will need both in the future, the democratisation of the political arena and that of the media environment, or – to borrow Vatikiotis and Kavada's (2004:3) words – a "double democratization" of politics and communication".

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