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Responsible Media in a Situation of Social Unrest and the Struggle for Democracy. The African Experience.

Presentation at The Annual Conference of The Finnish Media Research Association Conference. 30 – 31. January, 2004.

Journalism in Africa is faced with many problems and obstacles. The most serious are threats to journalists' safety, and attempts to curb the freedom of the press. There are daily reports coming out of the continent on journalists being arrested, beaten up and even killed both by governments and by criminals.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2003 report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) about 180 journalists were detained in Africa during 2002, and more than 80 news media were censored in Africa during 2002.<sup>2</sup> Some parts of the continent are worse than others. The situation on the Horn of Africa is particularly difficult. In Eritrea journalists are detained continuously. The Committee to Protect Journalists<sup>3</sup> has singled out the country as one of ten worst places in the world to be a journalist. But it also applies to the situation in Ethiopia and Somalia. In other parts of the continent the situation in Zimbabwe is of special concern.<sup>4</sup> Here journalists are arrested regularly. The government constantly attacks the independent press, and the country's only independent daily *The Daily News* was banned in September 2003, it was allowed to publish again in January 2004 after a lengthy undecided court case, to the vehement protests of government.

In the parts of the continent where there are civil wars and armed conflicts journalists are constantly under threat and several have been killed. This is the case for among others Liberia. And in The Ivory Coast two journalists were killed in 2003 – one Ivorian, one French. Particularly worrying is that the situation has deteriorated in countries that for many

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<sup>1</sup> For a running report on political and social issues from Africa including media and freedom of expression see: <http://www.pambazuka.org/>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.rsf.org/>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.cpj.org/> among others: [http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2003/Joshua/war\\_words.html](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2003/Joshua/war_words.html)

<sup>4</sup> The media situation in Zimbabwe is being monitored and reported on by The Zimbabwe Media Monitoring Project. See: <http://www.mmpz.org.zw>

years were free of interventions and threats to press freedom – examples of this are Senegal<sup>5</sup> and Niger<sup>6</sup>, and also to a certain degree Botswana<sup>7</sup> and Namibia<sup>8</sup>, where new restrictive media laws are in the process of being implemented.

The situation outlined here may be seen as result of what one of the veterans of African journalism the Ghanaian journalist and professor Paul A. V. Ansah (1938 – 1993) identified in 1991 as three major crises of the media in Africa, namely the crisis of power; the crisis of ownership; and the crisis of resources.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis of power has two sides. One is related to the weakness of the African states and the other is related to the weakness of the media themselves. Weak states are particularly suspicious of media as these are seen as tools for the sowing of dissent, and consequently perceived as a threat to the survival of the government as well as the cohesion of the state. The result is that states have tried to control the media with the help of a variety of techniques ranging from outright censorship and oppression to more subtle means, which often combine state ownership of the media with a system of economic awards to journalists who tow the line, and reprisals against those who do not. African states are by and large characterised by having low legitimacy, and the state apparatus is often dependent on various forms of clientelism often combined with authoritarian practices to uphold social cohesion. This contrasts fundamentally with the practice of democratic states with strong legitimacy where political and social cohesion is being upheld through consensus building. In these processes independent media play a central role by *mediating* between views and opinions. This way of using the media contrasts with the manner often employed in societies with weak states, where the media are linked directly to the state apparatus, and where they often are used to promote various forms of personality cults of the head of state and other prominent politicians.

It is particularly in the state broadcasters that this form of journalism is prevalent. The consequence of this is that public radio and television are seen as a means to spread government policy to the exclusion of the interests of civil society interests, and the agenda of the state is merged with that of the ruling regime. The interests of government are presented as being the same as public interest. Thus the ruling party and its president becomes synonymous with the state and opinions or events that may be seen oppose the government

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<sup>5</sup> see: <http://www.cpj.org/attacks02/africa02/senegal.html>

<sup>6</sup> see: <http://www.cpj.org/attacks02/africa02/niger.html>

<sup>7</sup> see: <http://www.cpj.org/attacks02/africa02/botswana.html>

<sup>8</sup> see: [http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2002/Namibia\\_oct02/Namibia\\_oct02.html](http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2002/Namibia_oct02/Namibia_oct02.html)

<sup>9</sup>.Ansah, Paul A.V (1991): “Blueprint for Freedom”. *Index on Censorship* 9. 1991.

are not reported, as this is assumed not to be in the interest of the public. This form of journalism consists of endless news reports in all media of all occasions where the president is present, regardless of how insignificant these events are. It is needless to say that these reports often border on the sycophantic. An outspoken veteran of African journalism the Zimbabwean Willie Musarurwa (1927 – 1990) once characterised this form of journalism as “minister and sunshine journalism” typified by the following formula: “The sun was shining and the minister spoke”.

The clearest expression of this form of reporting can be witnessed in the way elections are being covered by African state broadcasters. The many reports on media coverage of elections on the continent testify to this. But in countries where the state also controls a sizeable portion of the print media, the same pattern is found there. The ruling party and its candidates are given wall-to-wall coverage, and everything good that happens is attributed to them. The opposition on the other hand are excluded from or allocated the minimum coverage possible, and its views are often misrepresented. Even paid or sponsored election campaign advertisements are not guaranteed airtime and have been considered subversive. One of the worst examples of this form of election reporting was found in Zimbabwe in the parliamentary elections in 2000 and the presidential elections in 2002.<sup>10</sup> Combined with widespread election rigging this ensured the victory of ZANU (PF) and President Mugabe in spite of the fact that independent observers are certain there is little doubt that the opposition otherwise would have won. The same media scenario though less blatantly was played out in Zambia in December 2001 and in the Kenyan elections in December 2002. In the last case, however, the opposition nevertheless managed to win after having twice before tried to unseat the government, but lost in fraudulent elections. This situation typifies how journalism often functions as a form of propaganda rather than critical coverage, and furthermore it is indicative of the close relationship between politics and media in Africa, where state media are stronger than private media, not least because the state controls the national broadcasters, which are the most important news media. It is also over the control of public broadcasters that the fiercest struggle between the ministries of information and the independent media interests take place. In the reforms to the Zambian media laws that were passed in 2003, the state kept the control of ZNBC, and did not transform it into a proper public broadcaster. The result of this situation is that journalists in government media often act more like state information officers than proper journalists.

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<sup>10</sup> See: Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (2004): *Media under Siege. Report on the media coverage of the 2002 Presidential and Mayoral Elections*. Harare.

The difficult relationship to the state is one indication of the crisis of African media, the other is that the press is weak compared to the national broadcasters due to low penetration of society in that newspapers only reach a small proportion of the population. Particularly the independent press finds itself in a more or less permanent crisis because the market it serves is small. This is due to a number of factors. One is economic in that the majority of the population in general cannot afford to be regular newspaper readers. Another has to do with lack of education and illiteracy. A third has to do with underdeveloped infrastructures and distribution systems, which means that newspapers are urban, and in addition reaches communities along the main highways. The independent press thus has little ability to present its case in times of crises as there are few parallel media outlets, and they cannot count on support from the state media in their struggle for independence and professional standards, which would be the case in societies with a fully developed media structure. In addition the professional press organisations are weak.

The crisis of ownership has two aspects. One is that the media in Africa, as discussed above, to a large degree in some way or other are owned or economically controlled by the state. This is the case also in many of the new multiparty states that have come into existence since the democratisation process started in the early 1990s. The second is that what one in other parts of the world may regard as professional owners or media investors are few. The exception is South Africa where there is a concentration of power in five newspaper groups: Independent Newspapers, Johnnic Publishing, Nasionale Media, New Africa Publications and CTP/Caxton. The country's newspapers, however, are based mainly on separate control of the editorial and management departments, and thus are run according to international professional standards. In other parts of the continent the role of regional conglomerates is the exception. One of them is The Nation Group in Kenya, which has cross media ownership interests in East Africa. It has been claimed that the most important non-government newspaper in Uganda – *The Monitor* – has become less critical of the Museveni government after the Nation Group bought it.

African newspapers and private media are in general owned by indigenous business ventures, which often are undercapitalised and constantly in dire straits economically. In addition because of a weak financial basis they are often unable to withstand onslaughts in the form legal or economic attacks. The so called alternative media are often owned by small trusts which again are controlled by a small group of allies and friends, or are totally dependent on one person's dedication. They are faced both with being economically weak due both to low penetration and in that they cater for special interests, have little access to

advertising and lack proper distribution systems. In addition they may to a certain degree be dependent on donor funding from foreign sources, such as religious organisations, international NGOs, and donors.

In these cases the relationship between the local media and their international backers may raise serious issues regarding the question of independence and whose agendas are being put forward. The case of religious media is maybe the most clear-cut, but also here there are different scenarios. Many of the non-state radio stations, and not an insignificant number of publications in Africa are linked to powerful international religious movements, many of them of a fundamentalist kind - both Christian and Muslim. They range from radio stations with a clear and aggressive message such as that brought forward in radio and TV-stations run by the originally Brazilian sect Igreja Universal do Rei Deus in Mozambique, to the publications and radios run by the Catholic Church, which in many cases have been important in the democratic struggles on the continent.

The international NGOs are of many kinds and they want their message and point of views and interests brought forward in the media they partly support and to a certain extent exercise control over. Here the agendas of the international NGOs may come into conflict with the interests of the local groups. The problematic in this context is linked to donor funding for media. Many Northern donors have as part of the interest in furthering democracy and transparency provided substantial support to African media. This raises at least two problems. It may create donor dependency for the media in question, basically as regards the question of sustainability, but also in relation to the question of influence on editorial policy. Donor countries may have a different agenda than the media they support, they may for instance want a more cautious line in the criticising the authorities, in order not to hazard the relationships between the donor country and the African government. Secondly because media as a rule also are businesses, to support them raises the question of donor support for national business ventures as such.

The influence of the donor community on the press in Africa's new multiparty states is based on the understanding that liberal democracy demands that the press should play the role of the Fourth Estate and act as the classical watchdog. The main driving force behind the influence of NGOs, opposition parties as well as governments over the media is itself traceable to the donor support these organisations get. For NGOs, oppositional groups, and governments are in different forms beneficiaries of external funds, and are influenced by donors' ideas about what the press in a multiparty democracy should do and be. These ideas again form the background for demands for press reform. Particularly the NGOs are even

given funds by the donors, which are specifically meant to directly or indirectly influence the philosophy and approach of the press.<sup>11</sup>

This situation does not serve as an incentive for efforts to be economically viable, and on the other hand it makes the press vulnerable both to shifts in donor policies and economic and political changes which the media have no possibilities of controlling nor influencing. Furthermore such a situation is no encouragement to developing an independent and critical journalism. On the contrary it often leads to a form of journalistic coverage that plays up to the interests of advertisers and economic and political forces that may secure the finances of the enterprise in a short perspective. There have also been quite a few cases of journalists accepting bribes for giving favourable coverage to companies and politicians. This has particularly been reported to be the case in West Africa – Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon. And in 2003 there were charges brought against senior journalists in South Africa for plagiarism.

This is a type of conflict that arises over and over and again, in particular in relation to the precarious balance between state control and independence. One area where this is the case is in relation to the many elaborate media laws that are designed to regulate among other things ethical standards, and that have been used to suppress the press – among others as a pretext for banning *The Daily News* in Zimbabwe. And it has also led to serious conflicts around proposals to set up press councils, which often have been proposed to function as a form of semi state-civil society institution. This is the case in Zimbabwe, where the council has served as a willing tool for the Minister of Information. Many governments, also those who uphold democratic principles, are sceptical about the establishment of voluntary media councils. The official position seems to be that such councils amount to creating a situation where journalists become a law unto themselves. While governments have been suspicious of the setting up of voluntary and independent councils, there have been several suggestions for the creation of official organs to ensure that the media uphold ethical standards, e.g. in Zambia and Tanzania. These proposals have often consisted of creating a kind of fused organs with members appointed by press-organs as well as by government and civil society. What may be said in favour of such a system is that government approval gives the council a form of official legitimacy, but on the other hand it may be argued against this set up that it also implies an undermining of the independence of the idea of an ethical council. An example of this is that in 1997 the national assembly in Senegal passed a law that instituted a press code that

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<sup>11</sup> This issue has been discussed at length by the late Zambian Professor Francis Kasoma in his inaugural lecture at The University of Zambia “The Neo-Multiparty Theory of the Press: Donor and Other Influences on the Media in Africa”, in Kasoma, Francis P., (2000): *The Press and Multiparty Politics in Africa*. Tampere (University of Tampere).

emphasises ethics and responsibility, while requiring publishers to report print-runs. This code has been used to attack the press for breaking ethical rules, when it in reality has been conducting perfectly acceptable political and economic reporting. Thus the Senegalese experience is a good example of how ethical codes passed by the state may serve as a pretext for curtailing press freedom.

The crisis of resources pertains to all levels of the media. The experience and education of media personnel in Africa are by and large low by international standards, thus the professionalism of the products cannot compete with international products. This is particularly problematic when it comes to areas where international competition is strong such as the electronic media. But it is also a problem as regards journalistic competence and self-assurance, which again make the press more susceptible to pressure. The generally low competence, the low wages experienced by journalists in general and the lack of economic resources have an impact on the ethical standard of reporting in many parts of Africa. In order to create high immediate circulation figures there are many examples of sensationalist stories being printed that often are based on nothing but rumours, and in other cases are closer to fiction than truth. Many such stories involve the reporting of witchcraft, sorcery and non-natural phenomena.

One example was that in relation to the solar eclipse in Southern Africa in 2002 there were newspaper stories all over the region (also in serious papers) about how this phenomenon could cause all sorts of disasters and unnatural phenomena, like babies born with two heads. The practice of checking and double-checking a story and trying to obtain different sources is hampered by costs and time pressure as well as by the reluctance of sources to come forward, partly because they are afraid of being revealed at a later stage.

There is a general shortage of material resources, which hamper the development of the media but also make them vulnerable to political and economic pressure. Even if new information technologies are being developed in Africa to a substantial degree they are still very much a minority phenomenon and while many African newspapers now have electronic editions, this does not mean that they reach beyond a very limited part of the population. There are also an increasing number of online newspapers being established. Nevertheless the openness to the possibilities that new technologies have is a positive sign that will contribute to increased media pluralism on the continent, and all 54 African countries now have Internet accessibility. Nevertheless the information and media gap between the information strong and information weak parts of the world are not going to disappear despite optimistic

pronouncements of the Internet creating a new era of democratic communication in the near future, also in Africa.

On the one hand the emergence of a global information society, may be a powerful democratising force. Yet on the other hand there are tendencies that threaten the very public space of dialogue that the media open up. This is linked to the struggle over control of the media between authoritarian states on the one hand and civil society on the other, and there are dire warnings in many parts of Africa that governments want to control the Internet, and thus also control independent critical journalism reaching international audiences. The right to privacy of Internet users is being attacked for different reasons in Africa: in each case governments claim to be acting in the interests of protecting their citizens from “moral corruption”, “terrorism” or “cybercrime”. This is achieved through the constant surveillance and registration of Internet users, the banning of Internet publications, the use of Internet filters and/or the imprisonment of publishers. Governments often use old provisions such as law and order maintenance acts to survey and censor Internet use. In some countries, such as Zimbabwe, repressive media laws are being developed by authoritarian governments to attack individuals who publish their content on the Internet.

With the exception of the very big papers (particularly in South Africa), newspapers in Africa suffer from lack of fully developed modern production and editorial technology, and the printing presses often produce very poor quality material. This varies tremendously from country and country, and between the papers within one country. But in general it is fair to say that the technological situation in African journalism is below what is found in other parts of the world. And this is an additional challenge to the many others that face journalism in Africa.

The small markets served by the media constitute another serious problem. Newspapers and television cater mainly to an urban and middle class audience, whereas the majority of the population lives in the rural areas. With widespread poverty, few outside the elite can afford to regularly purchase a newspaper. There exists widespread illiteracy, even if this varies from country to country. It has been pointed out that those who are literate may act as channels of communication to others, and that it is not the size of the readership, which decides the influence of the press. However, growth in literacy rates does appear to be associated with increased demand for newspapers. Because of the uneven development and bifurcation of the African societies the rural population will have access only to a very limited variety of media. It has been maintained that the economically poor only will find themselves in the media when they do bizarre things- such as rape, murder and other crimes.



The implication is that the interests of the African poor who constitute a vast majority of the population, is not treated as other than exceptional stories, not as legitimate social and political concerns. Even when newspapers want to report on the grievances of the poor they are often constrained by their size and lack of professional staff to report for them. The achievements and interests of the elite are on the other hand significantly highlighted.

The private press to an even higher degree than the official tend to be more urban in their audience and driven by advertising and therefore not aimed at the poorest. The result of these serious social contradictions may funnel conflicts between elites and the masses, and particularly in situations of social anomy threaten the common identity of belonging to a greater community of citizens, and have an inherent possibility of the falling back on primary identities. In several instances this has been utilised by irresponsible media to create conditions of widespread violence and genocide. Obviously the most serious example is in Rwanda and the activities of Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM).<sup>12</sup> But also during the civil war in The Ivory Cost the broadcasting media and the press have been guilty of inciting hatred.

Journalistic media in Africa are politically vulnerable because of the weak basis they often have in a wider society, and this is of particular importance in relation to the safety of journalists. When journalists really uphold their watchdog role, they may be in real danger of their lives, as reported by the international NGOs that supervise violations of press freedom. Politicians everywhere have power but usually not wealth. They are therefore often tempted to translate the one into the other. Given the power-wealth gap in Africa, it might be argued that - and hence the temptations - are even greater than usual on this continent than elsewhere. This politics of corruption increasingly characterises politics in Africa. Neither government nor opposition bothers to pretend that significant principles are at stake in their debates. This situation encourages a growing reliance on those in power to decide on issues, which should be left to democratic political contestation, and a passive relationship between the governed and the governing develops. And it fails to deal with the difficult business of building political alternatives to government policies.

This is the situation that often is the outcome of what has been dubbed the victory of illiberal democracy in apparently relatively free elections. Many experiences in Africa show

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<sup>12</sup> See among others: Berry, John A, & Berry, Carol Pott (eds) (1999): *Genocide in Rwanda. A Collective Memory*. Washington DC. (Howard University Press), and Prunier, Gérard (1995, 1997): *The Rwanda Crisis. History of a Genocide*. London. (Hurst), and Carver, Richard (2000): "Broadcasting & Political Transition. Rwanda & Beyond." In Fardon, Richard & Furniss, Graham (eds) (2000): *African Broadcast Cultures. Radio in Transition*. Oxford. (James Currey)

that elections do not guarantee democracy based on transparency and a real development of political alternatives. The opposition won the elections in Kenya 2002, but the victorious alliance consisted of many former politicians from the previous ruling elite. And in a many of countries previous military rulers and one-party presidents were returned in democratic elections. The game of politics and wealth has not really changed. There are no strong opposition parties to provide a voice for the angry and alienated, or to suggest political, economic or social alternatives to the problems of society. Unsurprisingly, many people have become cynical. They are ready to put the knife into those who are seen to have responsibility for the mess in which ordinary people have to live. In many countries the crusade against corruption has transformed the political landscape. The reputation of politics can no longer merely be restored by a change of government. In the absence of genuine political differences, personal morality becomes the only basis on which politicians can be tried. In such a situation the press may be the voice of those who want change and feel disenfranchised. Through campaigns around issues of corruption and personal rectitude the media may change the nature of politics. The importance and dangers of such journalism in Africa may be illustrated by the role played by the Mozambican journalist Carlos Cardoso in uncovering corruption and oppression.

Cardoso was assassinated on 22 November 2000, while he was investigating the theft of fourteen million dollars from Mozambique's largest bank Banco Comercial de Moçambique (BCM). The fraud was a result of the privatisation of the banking sector in the country. In 1996 and 1997 the two state owned commercial banks BCM and Banco Popular de Desenvolvimento (BDP) (later renamed Banco Austral) were sold to private investors, without any proper due diligence audit undertaken. And the history of the two banks since they were privatised is one long series of events involving fraud, corruption, and murder. The case has many ramifications and is so full of complicated details that this is not the place to go into them. The full story of it reads like crime fiction, though it is brutal fact.<sup>13</sup> In many parts of the continent the structural adjustment programmes and the liberalisation politics that involved the selling off of public property increased the corruption of African political and economic elites. These politics that the IMF and the World Bank imposed on the majority of sub-Saharan African countries since the early eighties consisted of privatisation and an attack

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<sup>13</sup> For a full account of the case and of the life and role of Carlos Cardoso in Mozambican society, press and politics see: Fauvet, Paul and Mosse, Marcelo (2003): *É proibido pôr algemas nas palavras. Carlos Cardoso e a Revolução Moçambicana*. Maputo. (Ndjira). English version: *Carlos Cardoso. Telling the Truth in Mozambique*. Cape Town 2003. (Double Storey Books).

on state spending. Given the high level of dependence of the African elite upon the state, this further frustrated their advancement. Western obsession with good governance, conducted in the name of anti-corruption, was a frontal assault upon the networks that were necessary for the ruling elite to rule.

What Carlos Cardoso did, was to diligently follow up the story of the two banks and try to find out who were responsible for the corruption and the fraud, and putting this in the wider context of the politics of structural adjustment. When Cardoso took on the case of BCM it was consistent with his whole journalistic career, but it is also an exemplary history that can illustrate one side of the relationship between journalism and politics in Africa, and this is the heroic side. Carlos Cardoso became a journalist just after the Mozambican revolution in 1975. He was a strong, but also critical supporter of the ruling party Frelimo. He had studied in South Africa and had been expelled from the apartheid state, and came back to Mozambique when most Mozambicans of Portuguese descent, including his own family, were leaving the country. He started his journalistic career in the weekly newsmagazine *Tempo*, which was the most independent minded and journalistic alive medium in the early Frelimo-years. From there he moved to the national news agency, where he served as director for a period. He was arrested once during those years – in 1982- allegedly for having published an article, which the government perceived as breaking rules of comparing the situation in Angola and Mozambique. Both countries were involved in a civil war. He was released after a while. But the situation for independent minded journalists in the eighties was not easy. There were conflicts between the journalists and the party.

After Samora Machel's death in 1986 and the intensification of the civil war, Cardoso became ever more dissatisfied with the way Mozambican journalism functioned, as well as with the deteriorating moral fabric of the country. He knew that everywhere in the country people were speaking about the war, but this was not reflected in the media, which downplayed the seriousness of the situation. In the late eighties many Mozambicans started campaigning for a change in the media climate. And in 1990 162 journalists signed a petition demanding full press freedom. In July 1991 the new press law was passed, and it contained virtually everything the petitioners had asked for. Early in 1992 Carlos Cardoso was one of the founding members of a journalists' cooperative whose first operation was to start a fax newspaper *Mediafax*, and later in 1994 a weekly newspaper *Savana*. But *Mediafax* was Cardoso's paper, and he ran it based on a formula of critical independent investigate journalism particularly focusing on corruption and abuse of power, and critical of the IMF's and World Bank's restructuring policies in the country.

During this period Carlos Cardoso made many enemies among the powerful in Mozambique, but he also was highly respected because his stories were well researched and sourced, and he could not be accused of any form of corrupt practices, something that was not uncommon also among journalists. In 1997 there was a serious conflict over principles in *Mediacoop* and Carlos Cardoso left both the cooperative and *Mediafax*, and in June 1997 he started a new fax newspaper called *Metical* (the name of the Mozambican currency) and specially dedicated to critical economic and political journalism with a particular focus on corruption. In so doing he attacked very powerful people in Mozambican society including the President's family, ministers, high officials, wealthy businessmen with international connections, the World Bank.

Cardoso's journalism was always marked by high ethical standards and outspoken opinions. There was never any doubt about his integrity. He also had a very deep understanding of the society that he was part of, and he argued that the importance of critical journalism and in any society, but particularly in Mozambique must be based on credibility. That resulted in that many whistleblowers turned to Cardoso with their stories, and he protected their anonymity and checked and double-checked the stories. Thus he also contributed to breaking to a small degree a culture of secrecy and fears of reprisals. But that also led to his death. When he was killed ordinary people in the streets of Maputo said: "Who is now going to speak up for us?"

On 31 of January 2003 six people who were found guilty of conspiring to murder Cardoso were sentenced to long prison terms. There is little doubt that the accused expected to get away with murder because of being well connected in Mozambican society. But there was an international campaign and heavy pressure on the authorities for solving the case, and there was also a rift in the party over the case. It is, however, not closed and the hunt for others who may be involved in the conspiracy continues, and among those who have been mentioned in the case is the son of President Chissano. The street in Maputo where Carlos Cardoso was gunned down is still marked by flowers.

The story of Carlos Cardoso is an example of how one journalist working together with other dedicated people can at great risk take on the politically and economically powerful in a society, and contribute to a certain degree to more openness and honesty. But it is also a story of the dangers of challenging the political and economic elite in an African country. And even if there is more openness in Mozambique now, the culture of secrecy, corruption and fear is still strong. The relationship between the independent journalists and the government continues to be uneasy.

It is difficult and dangerous for journalists in Africa to challenge political and economic power, and it is the journalists who in general are weak and the politicians who are strong. There are many cases on the continent where journalists are being threatened particularly when they step too closely to the sensitive combination of political and economic corruption. Intimidation of journalists is widespread, and the role of being a watchdog is a difficult one. As the alerts posted by the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters sans frontiers testify journalism remains a difficult profession on the continent, with adverse government policies, widespread intimidation both from politicians and corrupt businesses. There are many other examples of African journalists who have been murdered because of their investigations into corruption and power abuse, let me just mention two: the Nigerian editor and journalist Dele Giwa who was bombed 1986, and the Burkinabe journalist Norbert Zongo who was assassinated in 1998.

The situation of journalism in the official press in Mozambique's neighbour Zimbabwe may be used as a contrasting example the role of Carlos Cardoso. Here the journalists in the government controlled newspapers and broadcasting do not undertake independent journalistic activities, but follow the government line in all their political reporting. There are many reasons for this. One is the strict control that government ownership through The Zimbabwe Mass media Trust implies, which means that journalists and editors run a constant risk of being sacked – something that has happened frequently. Another aspect is the way that news stories and opinions are being vetted inside the media organisations that are closely linked to the office of the Minister of Information. A third is the serious political crisis in the country, which has led to the closure of the main independent daily, arrests of independent journalists and editors, and a climate of confrontation between the remaining independent press and the government media. More than anything this situation has resulted in widespread practice of self-censorship among journalists in government media. This is not unique to Zimbabwe, but prevalent in many parts of Africa.

The situation in Zimbabwe in 2004 is extreme, but my many discussions with practising journalists in Africa have convinced me that there is a widespread assumption that there exist far more stringent limitations to what may be written, than what really is the case, and that the media-organisations themselves have found that this is an easy way out of the dilemmas actually raised by modern hard hitting critical journalism. It is not the political powers that be that restrict so much of African journalism and makes it fall back on "ministerial speech reporting"; it is rather internalised assumptions of what is expected of the media. It is of course also a far simpler form of journalism to practice than proper reporting.

This again is linked to the poor training, which many journalists have received and their often low social standing. By this I am not indicating that self-censorship may not often be based on a very real fear of reprisals from government and other powers, as may be the case in Zimbabwe. The intention is to illustrate how self-imposed regulations emanating from real or imagined threats often function as efficiently as formalised forms of censorship. Also in this perspective the example of Carlos Cardoso's destiny is revealing. On the one hand his courage was remarkable, on the other his death may also have served as warning to others who dared to step to close to the interests of the powerful.

Now what an independent press entails has in the current debate in Africa come to mean only independence from the government. Thus the problem of whether it is possible for any media to be truly independent of interest groups and be objective, has vanished in the background. The distinction between independence and impartiality has only to a limited degree been brought up. Thus both sides in the debate concentrate on the concept of independence. The government maintains that the non-government press is oppositional, and consequently not independent, because it chooses a different angle or position than the one found in the government-controlled press. The independent press claims that it is independent because it is not associated with government or political parties. But both the government controlled and the independent press are of course partial in their reporting. It is the discovery that the press in Africa may hold other opinions than those of the ruling party, which has led to the attacks on the non-government press for being oppositional. However, using Kenya as an example, the private media have been able to carry divergent views across the political divide. The government media often portray criticism in the independent press of the way affairs are conducted as sabotage, but the public is able to read between the lines and see the implications. This came out clearly in the Kenyan election campaign in 2002. The mainstream newspapers did dedicate space for news covering rural, political, social and economic concerns. The worrying aspect of these attacks by governments on the independent press is not so much that they are accused of sabotaging the politics of the government, what is really worrying is that this is often done in the form more or less direct threats against the principle of the freedom of expression.

There are a number of reasons behind the concern in Africa for the role of the media in relation to the democratic process and for the interest in the issue of the relationship between the state and the media. The problem with the debate over the role of the media in the democratic process in Africa over the past years is that too much emphasis has been put on the role of the state, and the solution to state control has invariably been seen as

privatisation and a complete opening up to market forces. This is again a result of many years of strict government control with the media, often in the form of direct ownership. Thus the problematic role of the market in relation to the media has been underplayed, and consequently too little attention has been paid to a discussion of media in relation to citizens' rights. It is not surprising that this has been the case. The really big players in the international media scene have not yet really entered Africa, and the continent has not been seen as a viable market for the strongly commercialised international media.

African critics of the official media have felt that strong state control only can be met by introducing market forces, and in this strong international interests and trends have supported them. The arguments for free market media are strong in a situation where the state exercises direct or indirect control with the media. On the other hand governments who see their influence of their media threatened and fear that they will lose control over the flow of information have had a tendency to regard all forms of independent media, be they commercial or alternative, as mouthpieces for a political opposition.

In the transition phase to democracy in the early 90s the media responded to the new democratic openings and opportunities. In the consolidation phase, the challenges to the media lay in expanding their democratic role by maintaining their critical and independent role both in relation to the new government and the new market liberalism. Even if democratic change has taken place, experience from new democracies in many parts of the world show that fears about lingering authoritarianism are not unfounded. In the realm of the media this is particularly pronounced in relation to the broadcast media. Governments are often reluctant to yield control over broadcasting, or to permit alternative radio and television stations. It is a clear feature of this process that the broadcasting companies have been the last media organisations to open up, and also the ones that have been least likely to provide alternative information. The task of opening up the publicly funded broadcasting networks is going to be one of the most difficult and essential struggles for the creation of democratic forms of communication, and here the question is not so much of allowing commercial broadcasting as creating the basis for true public service broadcasting particularly as regards news and current affairs reporting. This is the reason why the Southern African regional independent media organisation The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has made the freeing of the airwaves a primary objective of its advocacy campaigns calling for the

establishment of a three tier broadcasting structure consisting of editorially independent public broadcasters, private broadcasters and community broadcasting.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between the state and the media is the central concern for a discussion of the media and democracy for MISA since its foundation in 1992. There seems to be mutual antagonism between governments, both as regards newly elected and old ones, and the independent press. The new Kenyan government has already started to act in a repressive manner to the alternative press in the country, arresting journalists and preventing the street sale of papers. To a lesser and larger degree ministers, officials and even presidents condemn the press for what they perceive as and call misrepresentations, irresponsible reporting, sensationalism, and outright lies. The accusations from government sources tend to centre on reports regarding issues pertaining to the activities of government, and often there are veiled threats in the attacks, sometimes the threats are even put into practice. The relationship between the press and government should ideally be one of critical distance, but not necessarily of hostility. At the moment, it seems as if in many African countries there is a situation where the official media, maintain a too close and uncritical relationship with government, while the independent press often has a tendency to be sensationalist and rumour mongering.

Maybe a fitting conclusion to this analysis is that there are no truly independent media, but there are degrees of dependence, and that at the core of a democratic society is the presence of a public debate about the distribution and execution of power. This is something that is essential to all forms of democratic theory. This has to do with the principle that choices made by the power holders are to be publicly scrutinised and contested. The public examination of decisions that affect the political, social and cultural life of a community is essential to the development of society. For their physical survival people need certain basics such as food, shelter, health-care, and social welfare that are part of the social dimension of human rights. Human dignity is dependent on principles that are intrinsic to true democracy. Freedom of expression and conscience, based on reason, responsibility, and mutual respect are unthinkable without mediated forms of communication. A prerequisite for democracy and respect for human rights is the democratisation of communication, broad access to representative media, which in turn requires the empowerment of both a variety of interest groups and the individual citizen. Africa is a long way from achieving this, but the

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<sup>14</sup> See: "African Charter on Broadcasting." <http://www.misa.org/oldsite/>



continent's many brave journalists make a contribution against very difficult odds to realise this ideal.