

## Chapter Four<sup>1</sup>

### Mediating the ‘First’ Transition

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines patterns of media framing of national elections in the context of the relationship between the press, state and capital in the first decade of Zimbabwe’s independence. It is divided into two major sections. The first section discusses media policy and regulatory mechanisms inherited and adopted by the state in the postcolony as an attempt at media reform and transformation. This section also explores the role of capital—in particular funding and financing—in influencing the functions of the press.

The second section focuses on media products themselves as sites where the state-press-capital interface is played out. The coverage of the first post-independence elections of 1985 and the debate about the one-party state by selected newspapers is analysed. The relationship of the press, state and capital in Zimbabwe is not viewed as a linear one; rather it comes out as a complex dialectic that is conditioned by factors which sometimes are located outside these institutions, and which shifts in time and space. However, a consistent pattern—comprising a systematic combination of both coercion and coaxing—emerges from this analysis as a predominant feature of particularly the state-press relations. This pattern is inherited from the colonial state, and is carried over in the postcolony with cosmetic modification.

#### 4.1 The Zimbabwe Transition

The interface between the press, state and capital, which we explore through investigating trends or patterns of media policy and regulation, ownership/financing and control, as well as media representation of selected issues, should be located in

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this chapter was published in my book chapter titled: “Limiting or Liberating the Public Sphere? Media Policy and the Zimbabwe Transition, 1980-2004”. In Raftopoulos, B. & Savage, T. 2004. Eds, *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

the context of the political economy of the transition in Zimbabwe. Although the intention of the chapter is not to give a very detailed account of the numerous facets of the Zimbabwe transition, it is important to pay attention to the basic frameworks of the process in an attempt to locate the constraints and opportunities that partially or wholly defined the relationship of the press, state and capital.

Zimbabwe in 1980 experienced what Rozumilowicz (2002:19) terms an “externally-pacted transition” after seven years of armed liberation struggle and failed attempts at negotiating an acceptable internal political settlement. The transition to majority rule and democracy formally ended close to a century of British colonial rule characterised by political and economic disenfranchisement of the colonised black majority. The politico-racial-economic hostilities that had defined coloniser-colonised relations and been sustained over generations, were therefore in 1980 in principle finally expected to be replaced by the creation of a multiracial society and a democratic state.

In the negotiation process, the fact that none of the warring parties had actually achieved outright victory on the battlefield made the ensuing political settlement a curious blend of elements of both the *ancien regime* and the new democratic government (Mandaza, 1987; Herbst, 1990; Darbon, 1992). In other words, the Lancaster House agreement, which finally ended the war and provided a constitutional framework within which the new government would operate, was a tremendous compromise by the black nationalist leadership and the white minority regime, both of whom were under considerable local and international pressure to stop the costly war.

The Zimbabwean transition—emerging as it did from what appeared to be patently irreconcilable social programmes and agendas from warring parties—was therefore from the beginning bound to be contradictory and tension-ridden. Among some of the contentious issues in the transition were questions of the distribution of power within the new state, the issue of land reform as well as economic and social policy. The predominantly liberal constitution entrenched significant rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression and the right to private property including land. In addition to the right to private property, provisions such as the 10-year moratorium on

comprehensive land reform, the reservation of 20 white seats for the then bicameral parliament, among others ensured there was a great deal of continuity of the old regime within the new postcolony.

Most of the policies adopted by the new ruling elite in the immediate post-1980 era reflected a sense of uncertainty and inconsistency. The government, for example, played the rhetoric of socialist transformation, while in practice the Rhodesian economy, characterised by both free market enterprise and selective state intervention in sectors of agriculture, mining and manufacturing—designed originally to cushion a small white elite—remained intact. Policies such as the “Growth with Equity” plan under which government drastically increased social spending on health, education and housing, were executed within a predominantly capitalist economy largely controlled by local white, South African and multinational capital.

Herbst (1990) notes that Zanu (PF) in 1980

...did not gain control over a weak colonial state that had been hurriedly improved for Independence and on which they could quickly put their imprimatur...instead, the black government took over a bruised, but not defeated settler state which contained powerful anachronistic elements that were hostile to the political project of the new regime” (p.30).

The task of remodelling that state without upsetting the fragile peace accord, not least inviting the wrath of apartheid South Africa which had been a key Rhodesian ally, was perhaps as difficult as it was almost inevitable.

Factors such as the creation of a government of national unity in 1980 and the adoption of the much-lauded reconciliation policy arguably informed the impulses and tensions that characterised the domain of policymaking in the new Zimbabwean state. The attempt to strike an even balance between a nationalist political project premised on socialist values and addressing the often narrow interests of local and international capital, also defined the policy arena for many years into the transition.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the incoming majority government in 1980 and beyond faced the task of reforming a minority-oriented social infrastructure that had, for close to a century, served white interests. In a process that entailed sustaining an intricate balancing act between forces of continuity and forces of change, policy reform was characterised by what Herbst describes as a contest between the ideological and technocratic wings of the ruling Zanu PF, a contest that could also be viewed as a manifestation of the tensions attendant to the transition itself. In this contest, argues Herbst, the technocratic wing wielded control over economic, health, education and other “specialised” sectors while the ideological wing retained control of more “non-specialised” portfolios such as foreign policy. Approaching the arena of media policy from this perspective of intra-party contest can help illuminate some of the contradictions inherent in postcolonial press-state-capital relations.

Media reform and ‘transformation’ in Zimbabwe should be viewed in relation to reform in other institutions in the new nation. Generally, this was characterised by attempts to expand service provision in line with the new political dispensation of majority rule, but also a cautious attempt not to upset the prevailing set of arrangements in view of the political programme of reconciliation as well as economic and other geopolitical factors. The fear of white skills exodus and capital flight was also a cause for policy caution within the new leadership.

The political agenda of increasing access to resources and services for the majority of the population—including enhanced access to the media—was also rendered difficult by the nature of the inherited state itself. White Rhodesia was founded and operated on extravagance (see Herbst, 1990). Although the country was never rich enough to support the Western lifestyles that most whites led from as early as mid-1950s when the country was only beginning to industrialise, the state’s deliberate policies to protect local capital from both foreign and local black competition ensured the existence of a ‘First World’ in Rhodesia (Herbst, 1990). Against this background, the post-colonial government’s entire economic and political strategy came to be more or less “a series of responses to the dilemmas inherent in establishing socialism-for-blacks in an economy designed solely to provide a very small segment of the population with a Western standard of living” (Herbst, 1990: 228).

## 4.2 Media Reform: Opportunities and Constraints

Like a host of other inherited social institutions, the mainstream media in Zimbabwe in 1980 was tailored to serve the interests of a minority state experiencing a costly war at home and economic sanctions abroad (Windrich, 1981). At independence, South African-based Argus Press enjoyed a monopoly of the press in Zimbabwe through its subsidiary Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company (RPP), which operated two dailies and three weeklies. The dailies were *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, while the weeklies included the *Sunday Mail*, the *Sunday News* and *Manica Post*. According to Shamuyarira (1981), publications from this stable were “designed from the outset to promote the cause of white settler colonialism and business interests in South Africa” (quoted in Windrich, 1981:5).

Alternative publications which made efforts to provide platforms for blacks or liberal whites had been closed down under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act and a litany of other security laws during the twilight years of the colonial regime. Some of the casualties of the restrictive legislation included the *African Daily News*, *Umbowo* and *Moto* magazine among a few other irregular but highly critical publications (Windrich, 1981).

Apart from the RPP publications, the print media landscape in 1980 also consisted of the respected financial weekly *Financial Gazette*, launched in 1969 and which largely survived censorship during the repressive era of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by staying off political controversy. There was also the famed popular monthly magazine *Parade*. Both the financial weekly and *Parade* were owned by local white capital, with the former targeted at the business sector readership while the latter targeted black readers and operated along the lines of South Africa’s *Drum* magazine (Kupe, 1997). The banned *Moto* magazine returned to the streets soon after independence, and operated as a monthly. There were also a few other journals such as *Read On*, *Social Change and Development* and *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly*, all of which appeared in the first decade of independence, but had very low circulation, were poorly funded and appeared irregularly. An array of trade and specialised publications operated by Munn

Publications also characterised the private print media scene in the post-independence era in Zimbabwe.

The inherited broadcasting status quo was, like the mainstream press but in a much more pronounced fashion, geared towards serving the propaganda needs of the besieged colonial state, especially in dealing with public opinion at home and abroad in the wake of a brutal war and economic sanctions. The powerful Rhodesian state controlled, through the Ministry of Information, all information made available to the public by the broadcasting station for the 15 years of UDI. With the help of apartheid South Africa—which included provision of no-nonsense, crack senior staffers—the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation managed to shut out even those liberal voices within the white community (Windrich, 1981). Official paranoia was betrayed by the overplayed notion of “Know your Enemy.” Captured in a book with the same title by the regime’s propaganda chief Ivor Benson, this notion sought to align local political dissent with foreign, imagined communist enemies. As discussion in the later chapters of this thesis shows, the notion of imagined foreign enemies trying to unseat a “democratically elected” government through local opposition and sections of the media was not confined to the Rhodesian state. In the new millennium, the discourse of anti-imperialism—a fitting parallel of anti-communism—would be replayed *ad nauseam* by the postcolonial state in the face of waning political legitimacy and fierce opposition.

In 1980, the new government sought to transform the media in two fundamental, yet problematic ways. With regard to broadcasting, the Rhodesian-style full state control was implemented soon after independence. Nathan Shamuyarira, the new regime’s Minister of Information and Tourism, wrote that the rationale for the new policy on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) was “to transform the state broadcasting corporation into an agency reflecting the realities of democratic rule” (quoted in Windrich, *Ibid*:5). Most of the newly-recruited staffers at the ZBC were former Zanu (PF) guerrilla fighters who had operated the propaganda *Voice of Zimbabwe* nationalist radio station from Mozambique and Tanzania. This ensured strict Zanu PF hegemonic control over broadcasting from the outset. It is important to note that for both the UDI and Zanu PF regimes, broadcasting—in particular radio—was a critical medium because of its pervasive reach in the country compared to other

mediums like the printed press. Zimbabwe is a predominantly rural country where only about 70 percent of the population live in cities. Because of undeveloped infrastructure and low circulating newspapers, radio remains the most accessible medium for the rural people, who have since 1980 been the bedrock of Zanu PF support at election time. Moyo (2004) has noted that both the colonial and postcolonial governments used broadcasting for hegemonic purposes, although this was disguised as ‘national interest’, national security’ and ‘national sovereignty’. In reality, however, broadcasting has always been “rendered...a political tool in the hands of the government of the day” (Moyo, 2004:12).

Within the arena of the press, transformation occurred largely at the level of ownership, staffing and editorial re-orientation. The new government, with Nigerian aid, bought off the Argus Press shares in RPP and, now with a controlling stake, renamed it Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd. The new company was to be operated by a trust, the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which was in principle autonomous, democratically constituted and tasked with transforming and rolling out the press. The Trust was to take charge of broad policy guidelines and issues while individual media concerns under it would retain editorial autonomy. Against a background where the press had largely served narrow but powerful hegemonic interests of colonial minority rule, expanding the reach and orientation of the press was in principle a critical aspect of the transformation project. The rolling out process also entailed the inclusion of rural communities, who constitute about 70 percent of the country, within the reach of the press. Immediately after assuming majority ownership of the Zimbabwe Newspapers group (Zimpapers), the government, through the ZMMT, began a process of ‘indigenising’ the individual newspapers. This was done through appointing black journalists to senior editorial positions and, in some cases, insisting on editorial policies geared towards reflecting ‘developmental’ programmes of a multi-racial, ‘democratic’ nation in the making.

#### **4.3 Public Press and State: The Coercive Mating Dance**

The process of media reform and transformation in the postcolony was beset by contradictory impulses of democracy and authoritarianism. The replacement of colonial ownership models in both the press and broadcasting by a non-profit trust model for the public press and a direct state control model for broadcasting

manifested the Janus-faced nature of not just media reform but also, as argued earlier in this chapter, the character of the broad transformation project in post-1980 Zimbabwe. Given the centrality of the press as a subject of this inquiry, it is important to examine aspects of its relations with the state from the point of view of policy and representation much more closely.

One of the most visible changes in the new Zimbabwe government's Ministry of Information and Tourism (later renamed Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications) was the redeployment of the 13 press censors whose job, for a decade and half previously, had been to chop off newspaper material deemed offensive to the colonial Rhodesian Front government before publication. The infamous overt censorship had been sustained with such dexterity—what with support from both Information and Justice ministries—that significant sections of the Rhodesian public actually bought into the myth of the impossibility of black majority rule, “not in a thousand years” as the Rhodesian Premier Ian Smith famously said (see Windrich, 1981). The feeble mainstream press initially ran blank, white spaces to show that censors had descended on copy, but this practice was soon outlawed as well. Official censorship, whose legal basis was provided by the Emergency Powers (Censorship of Publications) Order introduced simultaneously with the UDI on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1965, was justified on the basis that society was under threat and therefore public communication of any nature had to be approved by the state.

The discontinuation of official censorship and the redeployment of press censors in the new ministry was therefore a political step that, in principle, was symbolic of the new relationship between the state and the press in the postcolonial nation. In an interview with Swedish magazine *Contact* in 1980, the then Zimbabwe's Prime Minister Robert Mugabe was asked whether his new government would allow “an open, critical press as in the Western democracies”. He replied: “Yes, sure. This you will see, quite a lot of open criticism in the press. I'm for the freedom of the press, really, freedom of expression” (Quoted in the *Financial Gazette*, 19/09/1980). Information Minister Shamuyarira at the time wrote that the new government had introduced a policy regime which ensured that, “not only will the media be genuinely free in independent Zimbabwe; they will also be responsible and responsive to the will of the majority” (Windrich, 1981: 6). He painted a sordid picture of a past, “when

the media were exclusively preoccupied with the narrow interests of a settler minority”, contrasting this sharply with a future where the media would serve as “a vital link between government and people and as a vanguard in the continuing struggle for social transformation and mental decolonisation” (1981: 6).

Besides official assurances about a somewhat rosy impending media policy dispensation, the Lancaster House constitution also provided, albeit rather vaguely, for media freedom as an extension of freedom of expression. Chapter 20 (1) of the constitution makes reference to “freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, and freedom from interference with (the citizen’s) correspondence”.

Yet, official rhetoric and constitutional provisions notwithstanding, the most vivid illustration of the new government’s double-edged policy approach to the press, was the retention—for two full postcolonial decades—of the inherited colonial legal arsenal that had been effectively used to muzzle the press by the previous regime. In addition to the State of Emergency (which was only lifted in July 1990), the new government in 1980 retained without amendment draconian laws such as the Official Secrets Act (Chapter 11:09) and the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (Chapter 11:07). Other pieces of legislation including the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act, the Privileges, Immunities and Powers of Parliament Act as well as skewed defamation law, were also inherited, kept intact and applied in relation to the press at different phases of the country’s transition (see Ndlela, 2003). At the heart of the contradictory state- press relations therefore from the outset lay a curious political attempt to blend ostensibly progressive and democratic values of a popularly elected government with the remnants of authoritarian and minority-oriented principles of an illegitimate state whose survival largely relied on sustained repression of dissent.

At the same time, it is also important to raise the issue of whether in reality the new political establishment was actually committed to the values that it preached. This could then lead to the question of whether the retention of the colonial legal edifice was a mere administrative compromise occasioned by Lancaster House or a strategic coalescence of old and new elite interests in a new polity flirting with non-racial democracy and reconciliation. There is no easy answer to this, although it is highly

arguable that the problem was a mixture of both. As observed in Chapter Two, proponents of the “elite transition” thesis such as Astrow (1983) would most certainly argue in favour of the latter assertion. Yet others within the “official” school would perhaps insist on the transformative agenda of the new elite while also decrying certain limitations (to change) imposed by the Lancaster House settlement. In fact, the problem was not peculiarly Zimbabwean. Ronning and Kupe (2000) argue that in general media policies pursued by new African governments that grew out of liberation movements after independence tended to reflect the tension between a democratic and authoritarian impetus. This “dual legacy” of the fight for independence and egalitarian values but on the basis of partly authoritarian Marxist-Leninist values therefore manifested itself in the arena of policy reform.

The ZMMT, created in 1981 as an articulation of the new government’s media policy, was in principle driven by a conviction that the press should be free, non-partisan, mass oriented, accessible and responsible for the national interest (see Saunders, 1991; Ronning and Kupe, 2000). The Trust’s monumental task was to manage the transforming press and expand the reach of the media in line with the government’s developmental agenda. In principle “an autonomous body of independent and distinguished Zimbabweans” (Shamuyarira, 1981: 5), it was to manage a huge spectrum of media that ranged from media training to media production. Under its control was the Zimpapers newspaper group, the newly-renamed Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency (ZIANA), as well the Zimbabwe Institute of Mass Communication (ZIMCO), which the Trust was tasked with launching. Also to be shouldered by the Trust was the task of expanding the reach of the press to cover rural areas. In principle and as a policy initiative the ZMMT was a laudable ‘unique’ experiment that would ensure the creation of media personnel, media products and in general a public print media system that could contribute to both development and democracy in the transforming nation state.

The formation and operation of ZMMT was, however, beset by contradictions. According to Saunders (1991), the Trust faced a host of problems; from its financial reliance on the Ministry of Information, to the non-representativeness of its composition. If the government anticipated that the Trust could sustain itself financially—perhaps on account of the fact that its inherited portfolio namely

Zimpapers and ZIANA were not loss-making at the time—then it was proved wrong not so long after the launch of the Trust. Another argument, which Saunders (1991) implicitly suggests is that perhaps the ruling elite knew the Trust would inevitably be forced to fall on the Ministry of Information for financial support, and therefore become vulnerable to Zanu PF’s hegemonic control. If this line of argument is pursued further, then the creation of the Trust in the first place could be viewed as a ‘window dressing’ political statement to the outside world about the evolution of democratic institutions in the new state. This would be convenient in light of the international spotlight the country’s transition received, the political economy of donor funding and foreign direct investment as well as the domestic politics of national reconciliation. The motive(s) behind the establishment of ZMMT aside, however, the organisation was from the beginning financially incapable of expanding the public sphere in the letter and spirit of its Notarial Deed of Donations and Trust. It scrounged for basic operational finances such as salaries from donor agencies and the state, and from the beginning its real control over both Ziana and Zimpapers was questionable (see Saunders, 1991; Rusike, 1990; Saidi, 2004). Eventually it gave up control over ZIMCO to the Ministry of Manpower Training and Development.

Besides the question of poor funding, it has been argued that the composition of the Board of Trustees was not representative of the social and political interest groups in Zimbabwe. Shamuyarira’s statement that the board members were distinguished Zimbabweans was correct, but that was just about all. The founding trustees were seven professionals associated in one way or the other with the ruling Zanu PF. These included a prominent medical doctor, Dr Davison Sadza, who chaired the board; the University of Zimbabwe Vice Chancellor, Professor Walter Kamba; a prominent lawyer, Honour Mkushi; Dr. Grace Todd, a retired schoolteacher and wife of the liberal former Rhodesian Prime Minister Garfield Todd; Bulawayo City deputy Town Treasurer, Mike Ndubiwa; and a Mr. J. Hillis, identified by the *Herald* as “a leading Harare businessman and industrialist”(31/01/1981). Hillis deputised for Dr. Sadza. In its policy document No.21 (1988), the Ministry of Information noted that the chairperson of the Trust was “not a politician, but enjoys the confidence of the ruling party” (p.4). What was conspicuously lacking in the Trust board—just like the Media and Information Commission formed 20 years later by the same government—was the representation of media professionals themselves as well other social groupings

within civil society such as trade unionists, women's groups and minorities. The combination of a predominantly middle-class board with no solid policy constituency outside the ruling party, as well as the crisis of funding rendered the ZMMT incapable of maintaining the kind of independence and autonomy it was expected to enjoy.

That the ZMMT would in no time be subjected to the whims of the Zanu PF government through the Ministry of Information was therefore inevitable. Also, the fact that there was no institutional framework outside the state to support ZMMT could be interpreted to mean the ruling elite actually envisaged eventual control of the Trust after all.

One of the ZMMT's pet projects, the community media roll-out programme spearheaded by the Community Newspaper Group (CNG) got to a weak financial footing, and by the late 1990s was showing signs of excessive stress. Regional newspapers launched in the late 1980s and early 1990s including the *Masvingo Provincial Star*, *Chaminuka News*, the *Telegraph*, the *Gweru Times*, among others, faced the twin problems of under-capitalisation and inadequate advertising support revenue from their regional constituencies. This was compounded by the fact that the envisaged donor support for such projects was short-lived. It dried up in the early 90's against the background of the proliferation of local non-governmental organisations preoccupied with poverty alleviation following the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (EASP) in 1991 (see Moyo, Makumbe & Raftopoulos, 2000). As a result of poor capitalisation and improper and uncreative management, the scope and quality of news coverage in the community news media was generally poor. Given that the circulation of national newspapers in the country has remained limited to major urban centres, the only source of information for people in rural, semi-urban and farming communities was state radio. Whether this was the state's ultimate hegemonic desire, given that the bulk of voters for the ruling party are in the rural areas, is debatable.

The state's approach to the roll-out of the rural press was a factor in the stunted growth and expansion of that medium. Local state functionaries, including District and Provincial Administrators and local Zanu PF party structures were all key stakeholders in the programme, which was initially partly funded by Western donor

agencies. Among the most active donors for this project were the Friedrich Naumann Foundation of (then) West Germany and the Canadian International Development Agency. The latter funded the first rural newspaper, the *Murehwa News*, in May 1983. The state had no budget for the rural newspaper roll-out project.

Although the rural papers were expected to become commercially viable in the long term, the exclusion of local capital in the conception and implementation of their expansion programme was a critical oversight on the part of the state. According to a 1986 ZMMT report prepared by Edward Mamutse, then a senior officer in the Ministry of Information, the task of assessing need and subsequently establishing rural newspapers was the prerogative of the local political leadership. Local business was to be brought in later only for purposes of advertiser support. The state's conceptual distrust for capital was reflected in the case of Masvingo, where the local leadership wrestled off the *Masvingo Star* from a private company and converted it into a rural newspaper. Part of the state's displeasure with the hitherto privately owned paper was that it had "an editorial policy quite independent of any provincial representation whether Zimbabwe Information Service, the governor's office, the PA's office or any outside member of the public" (Mamutse, 1986: 24). The ZMMT envisaged a rural press controlled by a political "command structure" with checks and balances to ensure "reasonable editorial autonomy." This structure, according to the ZMMT, had to safeguard the press against ambitious "prestige-mongering bourgeois aspirants" (Mamutse, 1986: 47).

The conceptual and strategic weaknesses of ZMMT throughout its existence enabled the Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications to be the central player in public information policy (Rusike, 1990). For example, the Ministry was responsible for appointing the Zimpapers Board, and also directed the daily formulation of editorial decisions. Although throughout the first decade of independence various personalities were appointed to head the Ministry, there was a degree of consistency in the way the incumbent ministers or directors of information interfered with editorial matters at Zimpapers publications. One such form of interference was the hiring and firing of editors at Zimpapers, which was in principle supposed to be the prerogative of the Zimpapers Board in consultation with the Trust.

The state's policy towards Zimpapers took two related forms, namely strong interference with and frustration of independent-minded editors as well as appointing 'malleable' editors who shared the state's broad political and social vision<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the first decade of independence, criticism of state policies could easily cost an editor his/her job, and replacements by 'patriotic' editors were often swift. A great deal of self-censorship was inculcated in Zimpapers editors and writers following not only swift action taken on those who failed to toe the official line, but also threats of disciplinary action on Zimpapers journalists by government officials purporting to speak on behalf of the ruling party.

In December 1981, Zanu PF official and Minister of Housing and National Construction Eddison Zvobgo publicly warned Zimpapers that the ruling party would "rout" and "thoroughly get rid of" the company's "pseudo-editorial professors" who, besides not having participated in the liberation struggle, were working as "imperialist agents" (*Sunday Mail*, 13/12/1981). Seven years later, the Minister of Defence, Enos Nkala, ordered—although without success—the editor of the Zimpapers-owned *Chronicle* to drop an investigative story or risk having the army deployed to cart him off to jail. The investigative series, which probed the involvement of senior government officials and their business colleagues in illegal acquisition of scarce new motor vehicles at a discount and reselling them at above market rates, became a celebrated watershed in Zimbabwean journalism and was christened the "Willowgate" scandal (see Nyarota, 2006). It should be noted, however, that Willowgate was an exception rather than a norm in the history of the public press in Zimbabwe.

A few examples would suffice to illustrate the state's attitude towards the public press throughout the first decade of independence. As early as September 1981, Jean-Maitland Stuart, then editor of the *Manica Post*, was forced to resign after both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information reprimanded her for an article criticising the use of North Koreans to train the Zimbabwe National Army's crack Fifth Brigade, which was later to be deployed to quell dissident activities in the Midlands and Matebeleland provinces (see Nyahunzvi, 2001). As it later emerged, the army committed shocking atrocities among civilian communities in the three

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Bill Saidi, April 2004.

provinces (CCJP & LRF Report, 1997). In 1985, Willie Musarurwa, the first black editor of the *Sunday Mail*, was fired after reporting on a financial scandal at the state-owned national airline, Air Zimbabwe. There are other versions of Musarurwa's sacking. Besides the Air Zimbabwe story, another version has it that Musarurwa, an ex-guerrilla fighter and member of the then opposition liberation movement PF-Zapu, was fired for belonging to the wrong party at the wrong time. He was also alleged to have been sympathetic to the South African liberation movement, the African National Congress (ANC), as opposed to the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), which was a close ally of the ruling Zanu PF.<sup>3</sup> An illustration of the extent to which the state aligned critical journalism within the press with political opposition were the contents of Musarurwa's letter of dismissal. According to Elias Rusike, then General Manager of Zimpapers, and the author of the letter under the directive of the Minister of Information, the letter simply stated that the editor had to be relieved of his duties because, "under (his) editorship, the *Sunday Mail* acted like an opposition newspaper."<sup>4</sup>

Musarurwa's successor, Henry Muradzikwa, who had in 1980 helped campaign for the ruling party in the Midlands Province, was fired two years later after carrying a story claiming that 60 Zimbabwean students had been deported from Cuba for unspecified "health reasons", which many people associated with HIV/AIDS. The story was embarrassing to the government as it was published at a time when a Cuban government official who was visiting, denied it. Responding to the story, then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe apologised to the Cuban official and, promising to deal with the journalist in charge of the story "personally," said the *Sunday Mail* appeared to have been

...infiltrated by the (capitalist) enemy and is proving to be quite reactionary...We cannot have a reactionary press in this country especially one which seeks to destroy the friendship between us and those countries which extend their hand of assistance to us (Quoted in the *Herald*, 21/04/1987).

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Saidi, Interview, April 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Elias Rusike, Interview, April 2004.

Perhaps the most spectacular sacking—albeit disguised as a promotion—was that of *Chronicle* editor Geoffrey Nyarota and his deputy Davison Maruziva, who were relocated from Bulawayo to the *Herald* in Harare after their exposure of the “Willowgate” scandal. Although Maruziva was reassigned to an assistant editorship, Nyarota was given an administrative post which ensured that he would have nothing to do with active journalism. According to Rusike (1990:86), Nyarota was given the post of public relations executive—a post specifically created for him, but without public relations functions. Meanwhile, as all this happened, the government pretended to the international community that it had left the management of public information to an independent Trust and appealed for donor funding for the Trust (Nyarota, 2006; Saunders, 1999).

As the discussion of media representation of the 1985 elections and elements of the one-party state debate later in this chapter will show, in a skewed press-state relationship, the public press as an institution was, for the first decade of independence, characterised by an uncritical pursuit of the government’s social and political programme. The contradictions inherent in the transition were therefore mirrored in the public press, but largely from the point of view of a powerful constituency in the ruling bloc. As indicated earlier, exceptions were largely confined to newspapers outside Harare, the seat of government. The physical and to an extent symbolic distance between Harare and Bulawayo (home of the *Chronicle*) or Harare and Mutare (home of the *Manica Post*), as well as perhaps the more or less ‘regional’ as opposed to ‘national’ nature of these smaller titles arguably allowed them to exercise, from time to time, varying degrees of editorial autonomy<sup>5</sup>. Taken as a whole, however, ZMMT news media holdings encompassing both Zimpapers and Ziana, were never allowed an autonomous existence that could have enhanced a more rigorous mediation of critical issues in a multifaceted and tension-ridden transition.

The long-term success of the ruling party and government in effectively controlling the public press made possible by the absence of vibrant institutional support systems for journalists as professionals. While the government inherited a ‘strong’ state that had been a critical vehicle for both social cohesion and coercion, journalism as an

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<sup>5</sup> Geoff Nyarota, Interview, May 2004.

institution inherited a weak Rhodesia Guild of Journalists that for the most part played to the gallery (Windrich, 1981). So hopeless had the Guild been in the face of blatant censorship by the UDI regime that in its periodic resolutions it would make token criticisms of official censorship, accompanied by “realisations” that censorship was “in the interest of Rhodesia’s national security” (Ibid: 64). What was inherited in 1980 was therefore a journalists’ union that was more or less an extension of the state and, given the race and class composition of the Guild, an institution that broadly shared the colonial state’s vision.

The replacement of the Guild by the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) did not alter the prevailing state-media relations. The new coterie of black journalists and editors in the public press, a good many of whom naturally had to be aligned to the ruling party agenda to survive, found little difficulty dovetailing their professional agenda into the ruling party’s political and social programme. This had with far-reaching implications for their role as journalists and employees. Further, the fact that ZUJ was a member of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), itself an organisation the ruling bloc had successfully brought under its ambit in 1981, did not help matters. Throughout its history, ZUJ had successive presidents from within the public press although it ‘represented’ all journalists in the country, including those in the private media. The continued dominance of the public media in ZUJ had to with the ‘democratic’ politics of majority rule. The public media in Zimbabwe has always been the biggest employer of journalists and therefore the largest catchment area for ZUJ membership, most of whom were likely to vote their workmates into positions of authority within the union.

The state’s relative success in constructing its hegemony in the public press was not established entirely by coercion. In broad terms, coaxing as a method and the changed context of journalism practice in the postcolony made their contributions as well. Firstly, in appointing black editors who in one way or the other had close political ties with the liberation movements, the state ensured the ‘transformed’ public press would embrace the broad government and party agenda.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Among the first black editors at Zimpapers, Willie Musarurwa had been the PF Zapu spokesman up to the Lancaster House talks, Henry Muradzikwa had actively campaigned for Zanu PF in the Midlands during the 1980 elections, Geoffrey Nyarota was a card-carrying member of Zanu PF who in 1981 was

From a sociology of journalism perspective, it could be argued that most black journalists in the immediate post-independence era viewed themselves as key accomplices to the new state's developmental agenda. Having endured racial injustices and limited professional opportunities during the colonial era, a coterie of black journalists who assumed responsibilities at Zimpapers and ZBC viewed their roles as those of articulating the concerns and aspirations of the majority of the population in a postcolonial democratic dispensation.<sup>7</sup> Most of the black journalists who assumed senior posts in the public media in the aftermath of the wholesale departure of white journalists had trained and practised mostly in Zambia and the United Kingdom. Having lived in exile and finally come back home, they viewed themselves as agents of the social reconstruction programme being spearheaded by the state.

It was not only senior, formerly self-exiled journalists who identified by and large with the state's socio-economic programme. The dozens of junior reporters trained by the government after independence were arguably even more 'loyal' to the ruling party. The first post-independence training programme was a six-month crash course on basic journalism run by the Ministry of Information in 1980 and was sponsored by the International Press Institute (IPI) and Africa Educational Trust (AET). A group of 24 black journalists went through the course and were mostly deployed to the Zimbabwe Information Service (ZIS)—a subsidiary of the ZMMT—Zimpapers or absorbed in other government departments. Simba Chabarika, one of the pioneers in the 1980 training programme and who later worked for the public press, captured the relationship between the young journalists and the ruling party and state during the 'first' transition:

During political rallies we as journalists were always introduced to the gatherings. I remember very well (Nathan) Shamuyarira asking me to stand in front of the crowd to introduce me several times in (the small towns of) Chinhoyi, Makonde, Kariba and Kadoma saying to the masses: 'You were used to seeing white journalists here. Now because

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the President's Press Secretary. The possible exception was Bill Saidi who briefly edited the *Sunday News* before being demoted to the largely ceremonial post of "Group Features Editor" [Interview with Bill Saidi, April 2004].

<sup>7</sup> Geoff Nyarota, Interview, May 2004.

of independence we have black journalists who understand the lives of black people. We are honoured to have with us people like Comrade Chabarika'. After this introduction I would be expected to chant the Zanu PF slogan, *Pamberi ne Zanu PF* (Forward with Zanu PF).<sup>8</sup>

In a relationship that amounted to a kind of political intimacy, self censorship dictated that journalists veer away from criticism of the government or ruling party in their reports. The state also made clear to black journalists that criticism—which was often branded an act of ‘counter-revolution’—would be understandable coming from white journalists, but almost unthinkable coming from black reporters. According to Chabarika:

The state expected (journalists) to report what they saw and experienced, and obviously toe the line. There was no room for criticism. Even if you wrote a story that a community was critical of government (which was rare), you had to be careful how you presented it and be prepared to defend it. Otherwise it was risky bothering yourself about critics of government programmes.<sup>9</sup>

The relative complicity of journalists in the public press during the ‘first’ transition made it easier for the state to exercise its hegemonic control over ZMMT and individual journalists without resorting to coercion all the time. When the political leadership directed that the state media reports address members of the ruling party, government and their allies as ‘Comrade,’ shortly after independence, this was easily embraced by all ZMMT publications as well as the ZBC, and persisted well into the ‘third’ transition.

At the same time, as argued earlier in this chapter, the state’s attempts to shape journalism practice in the public press largely succeeded, but it was not simply a smooth, linear process without moments of difficulty and resistance. The sacking of Willie Musarurwa and Henry Muradzikwa as well as the exposure of the Willowgate car scandal were cases in which the state’s authority over public journalism was questioned. In both the ‘second’ and ‘third’ transition the state would occasionally

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<sup>8</sup> Simba Chabarika, Interview, April 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Simba Chabarika, Interview, April 2005.

chastise or fire editors and journalists at the public press for expressing opinions considered inconsistent with those of the predominant bloc of the ruling elite. The purges of journalists climaxed in the immediate post-2000 era with the restructuring of both Zimpapers and the ZBC under the stewardship of Professor Jonathan Moyo, then Minister of Information and Publicity.

#### **4.4 The State and Private Press: Tactical Indifference**

One of the paramount fears of white capital on the eve of independence was nationalisation, a trend that was not uncommon in some of the newly independent African countries. However, along with all sectors of the economy and consistent with the provisions of the Lancaster House Constitution, there was no nationalisation of private property in Zimbabwe, and this included the private press. If the government's policy approach to the public press was clearly expounded and largely bordered on coercion, state-private press relations were characterised by indifference on the part of the former, punctuated occasionally by state accusations that the private press was reluctant to transform (Saunders, 1991).

The following personal story illustrates the differences between the state's policy towards the public and private press during the first decade of independence: Former Zimpapers Chief Executive, Elias Rusike, remembered two different early morning phone calls that occasionally disrupted his sleep at home in the '80s while he was still in the employ of Zimpapers. Whenever his phone rang at around 4 a.m., it was likely to be from the printing factory informing him of a machine breakdown and the possibility of late distribution of the newspapers. "But if the call came just after 6 a.m.," said Rusike, "I knew it was Minister Shamuyarira complaining about a story in the paper". The Minister would complain about every story deemed likely to embarrass the government and instruct the CEO to "take action" against individual editors.<sup>10</sup> Eventually the ministerial dawn phone calls stopped—but only after Rusike had left Zimpapers in 1989 and bought Modus Publications, publishers of the largest private weekly, the *Financial Gazette*. In fact, he claims, a year after assuming the ownership of the *Financial Gazette*, the new Minister of Information, Victoria

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<sup>10</sup> Elias Rusike, Interview, April 2004.

Chitepo, summoned him to congratulate him for the acquisition and gave the following assurance:

It is not my task to tell you what to publish and not to publish. That is your responsibility as a publisher and editor; but what I say to you is that now that the *Financial Gazette* is owned by black Zimbabweans, we should hope that, in the national interest, your reporters would check with us certain stories of a sensitive security nature before they are published (Rusike, 1990: 103)

Despite the *Financial Gazette*'s generally critical editorial line in relation to the state, especially in the early 1990s, Rusike claims that he was not put under pressure by government officials. There are versions, however, that contest this view. One such version cites Rusike's editorial policy announcement in the *Financial Gazette* stating his commitment to President Mugabe and his assurance that his newly acquired publication would not embarrass the government (see Rusike, 1990:93). Before this, Rusike had in his resignation letter from Zimpapers assured the Minister of Information that: "whatever I shall be doing, my primary objective will be to support the President, the Party and the general thrust of the Government".<sup>11</sup> The contradictions inherent in Rusike's personal versions of his experiences notwithstanding, it can be argued that the state's approach to the private press during the 'first' and partly 'second' transition was rather cautious, and differed in great deal from its approach to the public press.

In 1980, as stated earlier in this chapter, an array of privately owned publications circulated in Zimbabwe. Of these, the *Financial Gazette*, *Moto* and *Parade* were the few which had a 'national' outlook in terms of circulation. The government's approach to the private press—if indeed it constitutes a policy position—was one of tactical indifference. The time was perhaps simply not ripe for confrontation. Save for Catholic-owned *Moto* magazine, the private press was for the first decade of independence almost exclusively owned by white capital, and largely retained its pre-independence outlook. *Moto* also retained its cutting edge popular journalism tinged with a Christian missionary flavour. Popular magazine *Parade*, was owned by

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<sup>11</sup> Quote from Rusike's resignation letter, dated 28 September, 1989

Thompson Publications, which was majority-owned by Alex Thompson. Other investors in Thompson Publications were Electronics Pvt (Ltd) and Isis (Pvt) Ltd, which were controlled by two white Zimbabwean directors of the London Rhodesia Group (Lonrho) (Kupe, 1997). After 1980, *Parade* remained in its 1950s mould: a platform for aspirant black lower middle class, township-dwellers interested in popular genres of sports, short stories and music (Kupe, Ibid).

The *Financial Gazette*, owned by white liberals Clive Murphy, Clive Wilson and Nigel Butler, remained an exclusively upmarket business publication with little interest in politics. The weekly paper's circulation in 1980 was just above 4000, but rose to over 20 000 by the end of the first decade of independence. At the same time in 1980, the paper was a thin, 18-page publication carrying predominantly mainstream white business and an occasional sprinkling of aspirant black businesses (mostly liquor store, small-scale farming or butchery businesses) in rural and peri-urban areas. Ahead of the 1980 democratic elections, the paper was highly critical of Zanu PF and its leader Robert Mugabe, but after elections adopted a moderate, if often supportive stance on the new regime. In the weeks following the 1980 elections, the paper ran a series of congratulatory profiles of the new black cabinet ministers and consistently called for "moderation" across the ideological spectrum of capitalism and communism. At the same time the paper also sought to allay white fears of post-election violent retribution and wholesale nationalisation of private property (See, among others, *Financial Gazette* issues of 25/01/80; 15/2/80; 19/09/80).

Although in the second decade of Zimbabwe's independence the expanded private press would constitute a critical terrain through which anti-hegemonic struggles would be launched by popular social groups, this press posed no real threat to the ruling party's political security during the first decade of independence. It fared rather poorly in comparison to the public press in terms of circulation and market share, which also perhaps explains the state's swift seizure of editorial autonomy away from the public media. As the predominant voice of white capital during the first decade of independence, the state tolerated the private press just as it did white capital itself as the mainstay of the transforming economy, but on the condition that fundamental threats were not posed to its expansion programme within and outside the media.

Outside the occasional official denials (of published stories) and accusations of negating the “gains of independence” and the process of national reconciliation, the government largely left the private press to its devices. Saunders (1991) attributes this policy attitude to the state’s professed commitment to “media freedom” against the backdrop of reconciliation efforts as well as the political economy of international donor funding. With the *Financial Gazette*, for example, it was arguably out of pragmatism that the state avoided—or rather, *postponed*—direct confrontation with the paper in spite of its occasional criticism of (state) policies especially in the late 1980s.

#### **4.5 The Press and Capital**

While press-state relations in Zimbabwe were for most of the period under study manifested through both codified and incremental state policy, the influence of capital and its relations with the press was largely subtle and complex, particularly during the first decade of independence. The relationship was to a great extent intricately linked to the broader relations between state and capital. The analysis of capital-press relations focuses on media funding and financing through both ownership and advertising.

Within the arena of the press, two models of ownership existed, namely private and public ownership. As stated earlier in this chapter, the public press was owned by a Trust that was *de facto* controlled by the state in terms of management and editorial orientation. What was striking, however, was that Zimpapers also operated as a commercial company, competing for advertising capital with private newspapers and capitalising on its developed infrastructure and high circulation to attract that capital. On the other hand, the private press during the ‘first’ transition was almost exclusively owned by local white capital and was limited in circulation when compared to the public press.

Like the rest of the formal economy, the advertising industry in Zimbabwe was for the first decade of independence predominantly owned by white capital. In 1980, the opportunities offered by a new dispensation including the end of sanctions and the

increase in workers wages resulted in the expansion of the advertising industry.<sup>12</sup> At the time, a thriving and largely protected local manufacturing industry also wanted to tap into the increasing spending powers of a rising market of previously economically excluded blacks.

The generally positive growth of the economy in the 1980s meant that the press got considerable advertising support from industry. Zimpapers got the lion's share of this support (about 70 percent) while the *Financial Gazette*, *Parade* and small other specialised, privately owned publications were financed proportionate to their market shares.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that in the low media density context of the 'first' transition, advertisers had limited media choices to make. Zimpapers provided the industry with the preferred media for general goods and consumer products, while the *Financial Gazette* provided the essential medium for middle class audiences. This created a scenario where the politics associated with ownership of both the public and private press did not necessarily affect the selection of news media for advertiser support. Zimpapers newspapers, for example, continued to get the bulk of advertising revenue despite being a propaganda apparatus of a ruling party that was, at least rhetorically, opposed to capitalism. This was largely because of the monopoly the newspaper group enjoyed on the mass market audience in Zimbabwe (Saunders, 1991; Nhema, 2002). The situation was to change somehow in the post-2000 era when the state-capital relations took a nosedive and the press partly became sites where this fallout played itself out.

Within the *Financial Gazette*, the influence and role of ownership was perhaps more pronounced than that of advertisers. The paper was largely a platform for big business and often took sides with the same whenever the state and business appeared headed for collision. Among the many examples to that fact, the paper's response to the Prime Minister's New Year speech in 1985 warrants attention. Robert Mugabe, then Prime Minister, had in his address urged the private sector to be "more purposefully co-ordinated and geared to achieving goods and targets defined by the state" (*Financial Gazette*, 4/1/1985). The paper interpreted this as a veiled threat to business and chided the Prime Minister:

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<sup>12</sup> Liz Linsell, Interview, April 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Liz Linsell, Interview, April 2005.

His remark must have left business to pause and wonder what lies ahead. It was an unfortunate point to make, for business confidence and performance has been improving lately because the government has not introduced any drastic measures nor made unsettling statements...It is hoped that the PM's New Year's resolution does not presage a period of 'direction' that will destroy the hard-won gains of the past six months (*Financial Gazette*, 4/1/1985).

As discussed later in the paper's framing of the 1985 elections, the *Financial Gazette* also took issue with the Minister of Labour for mooted labour legislation that gave significant bargaining and other rights to workers. For these occasional criticisms of the state on the direction of economic policy and reform, the paper was regularly chastised by ruling party and government functionaries for representing the voice of local and global capitalism, which in its socialist rhetoric the state considered abhorrent.

During the first transition, the *Financial Gazette* was not "anti-Zanu PF" in its editorial policy, contrary to what some cabinet ministers, notably Information Minister Nathan Shamuyarira publicly protested on a regular basis. As the discussion of the 1985 election below shows, the paper, in fact, endorsed the candidature of the ruling party in these elections citing its 'competent' management of the economy. However, the paper disagreed with the state whenever the latter raised the pitch of its rhetoric in relation to capital and hinted at increased state involvement in the economy (see discussion of the paper's coverage of the 1985 elections later in this Chapter). It also appears the other site of mutual consternation was apartheid South Africa. At a political level, the state maintained few if any links with the apartheid regime and in fact applied all the rhetoric at its disposal to discredit it. However, as was case with many "Front Line States," Zimbabwe's economy was highly dependent on South Africa, not least because of the latter's possession of vital sea ports for international trade. When, in 1986, the state hinted at imposing sanctions on South Africa, the *Financial Gazette* responded by criticising the state for considering what was almost certainly a costly decision (*Financial Gazette*, 10/10/1986). In response, the state charged that the paper was not necessarily a pragmatic voice of local capital, but "an

agent for ventilating the opinions of some foreign powers, especially the UK, USA and South Africa” (Nathan Shamuyarira, quoted in the *Herald*, 17/10/1986).

The role and influence of capital on the press during the first transition was therefore manifested predominantly through ownership rather than patterns of advertising. This applied to both the *Financial Gazette* and Zimpapers publications where the major shareholders used their powers to define the newspapers’ framing of issues and events in the transforming society. Zimpapers was an interesting case where a *de facto* state controlled public press that routinely pandered to the state’s socialist rhetoric operated profitably and was predominantly funded by advertising capital. As stated earlier, in a context where media choices were somewhat limited, advertisers did not wield any significant influence over patterns of political representation by newspapers.<sup>14</sup> The fact that throughout the first decade of independence the state did not implement any fundamental restructuring of capital could have also contributed to this scenario.

#### **4.6 Framing the Transition: The Press and the 1985 Election**

Having analysed the policy, legislative and funding/financing context within which the press operated in Zimbabwe’s first decade of independence, it is important to take a look at the manner in which the press itself framed or reported a significant political event at the time—the first post-independence elections in 1985. As discussed in Chapter Two, the role of the media in relation to the public sphere consists in its capacity or ability to provide a site for multiple and diverse representations of issues and debates that affect citizens. This study explains the media’s ability or inability to be public spheres in the context of both micro (organisational) and macro (social-political-economic) factors that variously and at different historical phases influence the content and process of reportage. Analysis of the coverage of the elections focuses on selected material published before, during and after the elections. The newspapers under study include *The Herald*, the *Sunday Mail* and *Financial Gazette*. Of the six newspapers the entire study analyses, only the selected three above were in circulation during the first decade of Zimbabwe’s independence.

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<sup>14</sup> Liz Linsell, Interview, April 2005.

#### **4.6.1 Background to the Election**

The first democratic elections in Zimbabwe were conducted in February 1980, ending a brutal war of liberation that had raged for seven years. The elections were held under British supervision, and within the framework of the Lancaster House Constitution, which had been drafted as a ceasefire document by the warring parties. The 1985 general elections, however, were significant in the sense that they were the first to be held in Zimbabwe as a sovereign state. As in the elections of 1979 and 1980, the 1985 elections were held in a multiparty context, with up to six black and two white parties contesting, notwithstanding the suggestions of a one party state by the ruling party (Sithole, 1987).

A variety of issues dominated political debate in the run up to the elections. A key issue was peace in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces where contested versions of the activities of anti-government dissidents and the army characterised political debate within and outside the media. Responding to the discovery in 1982 of arms caches on farms belonging to the opposition PF Zapu, the government had sacked PF Zapu officials from Cabinet, igniting political tension that, although not particularly new in relation to the two parties, threatened to flare up into a conflagration. Around that time armed dissidents—identified largely as disgruntled PF Zapu ex-fighters—were reported to be terrorising civilians in the three provinces. This was followed by the deployment of the army, which accomplished its brief of denying the dissidents a possible base by “scorched earth policies and plain murder of citizens in suspected locales of dissident activity” (Chan, 2003: 24; also see CCJP/LRF Report, 1997). As electioneering began, the battle between Zanu PF and PF Zapu, the two main protagonists in the contest, often bordered on accusations of party-sponsored terrorist activities in relation to both the army and the dissidents. The question of economic policy also constituted a significant debate ahead of the election, with both white parties calling for an unfettered free-market economy as opposed to the government’s blend of both state interventionism and the free market (see Sithole, 1987).

The debate on whether the government should legislate a one-party state also raged in the media and in institutions of higher learning. Both Zanu PF and PF Zapu in principle agreed on the one-party state although each party conceived it within the

context of itself being *the* only party. The media's coverage of this debate within the context of the 1985 elections is analysed in this chapter.

The elections were held over a four-day period between July 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Zanu PF won 64 out of the 80 contested seats; PF Zapu gained 15, while Zanu secured 1. Among the 20 separate white roll seats, the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (CAZ) got the majority, grabbing 15, leaving the opposition Independent Zimbabwe Group (IZG) and an independent candidate with four and one, respectively.

Although the pre-election atmosphere was characterised by peace, the post-election phase witnessed violence in the urban townships, with party supporters of both the ruling Zanu PF and PF Zapu clashing, leading to massive destruction of houses and other infrastructure in the areas.

#### **4.6.2 The Public Press and the 1985 Elections**

##### ***4.6.3 Election as Contest between Traitor and Patriot***

A consistent theme in selected editorials published in both the *Herald* and *Sunday Mail* between January and July 1985 portrayed the election as a battle between a progressive and democratic Zanu PF—complete with liberation credentials—and a loose coalition of treacherous forces of neo-imperialism bent on negating the gains of independence and majority rule. In fact, the coverage by the two papers conformed to Information Minister Nathan Shamuyarira's statement in the *Herald* that the election was “a decisive battle for the development of Zimbabwe, between the progressive forces that brought independence and the reactionary forces wishing to reverse the clock”(*The Herald*, 29/6/1985). Shamuyarira identified both the opposition PF Zapu and the white opposition as the reactionary forces.

In several editorial comments, *The Herald* confirmed the official position. A front page editorial published on the first day of polling reminded voters and readers that their choice was “between parties that have a track record of having fought for freedom and those that fought to maintain white racism and colonialism”(*The Herald*, 1/7/1985). However, that alone was not enough, given that several other contestants

had claims to the anti-colonial struggle. The editorial therefore proceeded to clarify things:

They (voters) can only choose between the betrayers of the revolution and those that waged the struggle—between parties that formed alliances with white racists and built armies that were meant to fight civil wars after independence and those that fought for the people and have pursued clear ideological goals that are meant to entrench our political gains (*The Herald* 1/7/1985).

What is clear from this editorial is the extent to which the public press got sucked into the official hegemonic line in the struggle for political office. Such a struggle inevitably involved recourse to the politics of memory, a struggle to own a heroic past as a way of claiming legitimacy to a political future (see Sylvester, 2003). The contest for memory and control of national history, especially in regard to the liberation struggle, has remained a defining feature of the terrain of electoral politics in Zimbabwe.

The *Sunday Mail* blasted the opposition parties for attempting to create a coalition to contest the election. Major opposition parties PF Zapu, the United African National Congress (UANC) and Zanu had announced their intention to run together under the banner of “United Front”. Not only was this decision denounced by Zanu PF, the public press also took their cue from the ruling party. In an editorial entitled “At it Again”, the *Sunday Mail* argued that the idea of an opposition coalition was “both an affront to the electorate and a veritable indictment of the multi-party system of government” (*Sunday Mail*, 21/2/1985). The paper suggested that the “marriage of convenience” was a possible creation of hostile South Africa, and therefore had to be dismissed contemptuously by the electorate. “It is quite clear,” said the paper, “that the only possible agreement they (coalition members) can reach is the establishment of a neo-colonial state...a negation of everything we fought for and have achieved in the building of a new society” (*Sunday Mail*, 21/2/1985).

A couple of months later, when it had become clear that the opposition coalition had become a flop even before the election, the same paper was less caustic, only cynical. “The plethora of political parties that have come forward to contest the elections should surprise no-one,” argued the editorial entitled “Elections”: “We welcome the

plurality of the parties contesting, despite the dubiousness of some of them, because the party that wins will have reason to congratulate itself on having won a heavily contested election” (*Sunday Mail*, 9/6/1985). This editorial position should be taken in the context of electoral politics in post-independence Zimbabwe. Despite the existence of opposition political parties, Zimbabwe was for close to two decades a *de facto* one-party state. The opposition was largely confined to the political fringes, and fared badly in elections, after which a good many disappeared only to resurface towards the next election (see Moyo, 1992; Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000). That the ruling party would take issue with the formation of an opposition coalition was therefore understandable in the context of a fierce contest resulting in a possible loss of power. At the same time, the token existence of political pluralism gave a semblance of political legitimacy to the ruling Zanu PF in an election, which perhaps explains why, notwithstanding allegations of rigging and electoral fraud, the Zanu PF government held elections consistently since 1980. This was arguably good for both domestic politics of national reconciliation and, perhaps more importantly, the international community.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the fact that the public press would so closely align itself to the ruling party was not an official position of both the government and the ZMMT. In fact, ahead of the election, Zimpapers Managing Director Elias Rusike issued a statement announcing that, “as has always been the case, all political parties are free to advertise with (our) newspapers and to publish their election manifestos and political statements” (*Sunday Mail*, 2/6/1985). Rusike added that his papers would respect political leaders who “ensure that they say nothing that will have the effect of inflaming the emotions of respective party supporters” (Ibid). In practice however, opposition parties either received scant media attention or were portrayed negatively by the public press. In most cases reference was made to them when a ruling party official excoriated them for one alleged offence after the other.

#### ***4.6.4 Political Opposition as Violent***

There is a noticeable consistency in the manner in which political violence was reported by the public press in the run-up to the election. Both *The Herald* and *Sunday Mail* simply took their cue from the ruling party politicians, and argued—not always with evidence—that the ‘other’, namely the opposition, was the violent party. As

stated earlier, the issue of violence in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces occupied significant media attention around election time. However, the one-sidedness of the coverage of the issue could be attributed partly to the government's successful programme of "blacking-out" the real activities of the crack army unit deployed in the three provinces. By introducing curfews and setting no-go areas for journalists in areas of the provinces, while simultaneously briefing Zimpapers editors on what could and could not be published, the government ensured that the conflict was either unreported or covered from the official perspective (Saunders, 1999). Geoff Nyarota, then editor of the *Chronicle*, said with reference to the government ban on unauthorised coverage of the violence:

It was so frustrating sitting in the middle of news but you could not step out of your office to Tsholotsho because of the State of Emergency...The reports that you saw in the newspaper then and what you heard on the radio were basically what the Ministry of Information put out (Quoted in Saunders, 1999:19).

A few weeks before the election, *The Herald* reported the Prime Minister as having said: "The dissidents speak the language of (PF) Zapu and Zapu speaks the language of dissidents" (*The Herald*, 7/6/1985). He was addressing a campaign rally. Like most other stories carried over the campaign period, this was basically a single source story and fitted well into the predominant Zimpapers framing of PF Zapu as the harbinger of violence. Allegations of violence on the part of the opposition were however almost always followed by assurances by both the public press and the ruling party that voters need not worry as the perpetrators would be swiftly dealt with. A *Herald* editorial of June 5<sup>th</sup> 1985, warned "those who are violence prone" that "they should rest assured that the security forces stand ready to descend on them like a hammer." Within the same breath, the editorial added: "Still, it's not too late for the political malcontents and thugs to join the mainstream" (*The Herald*, 5/6/1985). It should be noted that the criminalisation of dissent and opposition was less a media invention than a ruling party political position during the campaign period. The press therefore simply fed from the same political trough.

#### ***4.6.5 The One-Party State as a Positive National Goal***

As in their coverage of other aspects of the election, both *The Herald* and *Sunday Mail* in their editorials portrayed the one-party state debate from the point of view of

mainly sections of the ruling party and packaged it as an important national goal. As early as late 1984, *The Herald* ran an editorial arguing that all Zimbabweans needed to think about was the nature of the one-party state set to be established after the 1985 election. “The question is no longer whether Zimbabwe is to be a one-party state,” read the editorial: “That has already been decided” (*The Herald*, 15/10/1984). The paper went further to state: “What is at stake is what kind of one party state we are talking about. That is what we hope the current debate will help resolve” (Ibid). Not given to critical discussion of party decisions, *The Herald’s* conclusion that the matter of a one-party state had already been finalised was based entirely on the adoption of a resolution to that effect by the Zanu PF congress held in August that same year. The paper therefore sought to take over from where the party had left the terms of the debate—from the question of whether to adopt the system in the first place, to the nature of the system. However, it should be noted that the one-party state debate began in Zimbabwe soon after independence in 1980 and persisted right into the elections of 1990, ultimately ending with Zanu PF’s decision to abandon the idea (see Mandaza & Sachikonye, 1991). Within the public press, the debate took the official ruling party perspective. One of the few times opposition leader Joshua Nkomo was portrayed in a ‘positive’ light was after his appearance on national television supporting the idea of the one party state (*The Herald*, 15/3/1985).

In an earlier editorial, the *Herald* praised the virtues of a one-party state, citing Tanzania which had held “successive elections under its one-party system whose results (had) not culminated in any rancour among the people” (*The Herald*, 14/1/1985). The paper contrasted the Tanzanian example with Nigeria, “whose multiparty elections were condemned by the soldiers who seized power a few weeks later” (Ibid). In the particular case of Zimbabwe, just as ruling party politicians had been quoted in the news pages on the same subject had argued, the *Herald* contended that because the country was poor, “a one party system (had) the virtue of harnessing human resources into more productive pursuits than politics” (*The Herald*, 14/1/1985).

Although the discussion of the one-party state debate is carried over in the next chapter, its framing by the public press remained consistent. As argued earlier, the

public press took the cue from the ruling party and reflected the official version without any modification.

#### **4.7 The *Financial Gazette* and the Elections: A Discussion**

Unlike both *The Herald* and *Sunday Mail*, the *Financial Gazette* took little interest in the 1985 elections. The paper's news pages remained predominantly occupied with mainstream business, and the occasional pieces on elections were largely confined to the paper's editorials. These editorials generally lauded the government's economic policies during the first half decade and endorsed the ruling party's candidature in the elections. The paper differed from the public press in that the former endorsed the ruling party on the basis of its track record on managing the postcolonial economy, while the latter gave prominence to Zanu PF's anti-colonial struggle record. The *Financial Gazette* expressed local capital's optimism at the way in which the state had responded to its initial fears of wholesale nationalisation of the economy.

##### **4.7.1 Support for Economic Policy**

In its editorial of 22 March, 1985, the *Financial Gazette* paid tribute to the government for its continued support for commercial farmers and stabilising the agricultural sector. Under the headline: "Wider lesson to learn from farming success," the paper credited the state for providing individual farmers with "sophisticated support through research, extension and conservation services." These services had resulted in a "highly integrated" agricultural sector which ensured bumper crop production. Where state intervention was in the interest of capital, the paper supported it. In the same editorial, the *Financial Gazette* noted that: "Despite its support of the private sector, this paper has never advocated a laissez faire economy because, like its opposite extreme, it simply does not work" (*Financial Gazette*, 22/3/1985). The paper argued that a sound economic policy had to be "an eclectic approach blending the best of any system" (Ibid).

The state was also lauded in the paper for avoiding confrontation with business and living to its promises of not nationalising or confiscating private property. Where the state had exerted its influence, such as on land redistribution, it had proceeded on the

basis of willing buyer-willing seller, at market rates. The editorial entitled: “Five years on: A success story to confound the sceptics” argued that, thanks to state economic policy, “five years into independence, Zimbabwe is in far better shape than most realists would have forecast in 1980” (*Financial Gazette*, 17/4/1985).

However, it appears the paper was comfortable with the state in so far as it protected the interests of capital, and not labour. In May, 1985, then Minister of Labour, Dr. Frederick Shava, announced that he would push for legislation in parliament providing for a range of workers’ rights. Around the same time, Dr. Bernard Chidzero, the Minister of Finance, had announced an increase in the global sum for foreign currency allocations to industry by 30 percent. The *Financial Gazette’s* response to these official announcements was an editorial entitled “Dr. Shava undoes Dr. Chidzero’s good work” (*Financial Gazette*, 31/5/1985). The paper welcomed the increase in forex allocations to industry in a context of the existing regime of tight controls, but criticised the decision to legislate workers’ rights. The editorial noted: “The creeping socialism that businessmen feared might occur in Zimbabwe seems to be moving at a brisk trot, if Dr. Shava’s intentions truly reflect the mind of the government” (*Financial Gazette*, 31/5/1985). Perhaps to reflect where its sympathies were, the same editorial further stated that although the Minister of Labour occupied a key post in government, it was “not one that is paramount” (Ibid). On the basis of this framing of state economic policy and its contradictions, it can be argued that the *Financial Gazette’s* support of the state was limited to the latter’s policies in relation to business.

#### ***4.7.2 Support for the Ruling Party at Elections***

The *Financial Gazette’s* editorials on economic policy set the tone for the paper’s representation of the elections. Although rather thin on content, the coverage generally conferred legitimacy on the ruling party, on the basis of what the paper viewed as good economic policies in the five years since independence. The paper argued that Zanu PF could easily and justifiably “capitalise on the progress since independence which, in retrospect, (is) a very commendable record” (*Financial Gazette*, 17/5/1985). In an editorial entitled: “The many obligations of the electorate,” the paper epitomised its view of the ruling party and the coming elections:

In all fairness, Zanu PF have done a creditable job, and the benefits of five years experience in office are beginning to show. At this stage of Zimbabwe's development it would probably not be in the interest of the nation to make a change...it must also be admitted that the opposition to Zanu PF does not represent a credible government-in-waiting, and even the most starry-eyed Zanu PF supporter does not seriously anticipate his party gaining power (*Financial Gazette*, 21/6/1985)

The paper's backing of the ruling party's candidature for purposes of continuity and economic policy was in sharp contrast with its vilification of the main opposition PF Zanu. While it remained silent on both other black fringe opposition parties and the two white parties contesting under the separate voters' roll, the *Financial Gazette* dismissed PF Zanu as a non-starter. A few days ahead of the elections, the paper predicted that the opposition's performance would be determined by "its failure to come to terms with its status as a major minority party, and the inept performance of its leader" (*Financial Gazette*, 28/6/1985). The paper also interpreted the opposition's impending electoral defeat in the context of ethnic relations between Shona and Ndebele people. It argued that there were increasing voting populations of Shona people in the traditional PF Zanu strongholds of Matabeleland and Midlands. Its assumption was that the proliferation of Shona voters in these provinces would increase chances of Zanu PF's victory in traditionally PF Zanu strongholds.

In the post-election era, the paper congratulated the ruling Zanu PF for its electoral victory and urged the continuation of the existing economic policies. At the same time, it took a swipe at white voters who had overwhelmingly voted for the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (CAZ) arguing that they had negated the process of reconciliation. In an editorial entitled: "Election results an interruption of reconciliation, not the end," the paper argued that the patterns of white voting were "a slap in the face for Mr Robert Mugabe's policy of reconciliation...he is understandably angry and bitter at election results for which neither he nor the *Financial Gazette* can see any rational explanation" (*Financial Gazette*, 5/7/1985).

The *Financial Gazette*'s editorial support of the ruling party in the elections raises the interesting issue of the role and influence of intra-elite alignment and cohesion, on media representation of events. In the context of Zimbabwe's 'first' transition, the relations between the political and economic elite were mirrored in the financial weekly. While capital did not endorse the ruling party's political programmes and rhetoric around such issues as the one-party state (which the *Financial Gazette* opposed in 1990) and socialism, it was comfortable with existing market friendly economic policies and praised the state for that. The silence of the *Financial Gazette* on the politically sensitive subject of the pogroms in Matabeleland and the Midlands—a subject the public press would also not dare touch—also reflects the rather convenient relationship between capital and state where each would not threaten the other's strategic or hegemonic interests. This set-up changed only in the 'third' transition when the press got sucked up in the state-capital-civil society fierce contest.

#### **4.8 State Policy, Media Funding and the Framing of Elections: A Discussion**

From the perspective of critical political economy, there is a dynamic relationship between state media policy, ownership and financing of the press and the manner in which the same frames political life. The foregoing discussion of the Zimbabwean experience reveals the extent to which the press's framing of the contest for power in 1985 could be explained in terms of the broader press-state-capital relations. What needs to be debated in some length though is the (shifting) degree of control or influence by the political and economic structures on the agent or the press.

Within the public press, the state's policy of strict editorial control and influence during the 'first' transition—itself a site of contradictory impulses and tensions—was related to the matrix of political and economic challenges defining the new nation. The ruling elite sought to use the press for purposes of hegemony construction in a context where the economy remained largely in white minority control and where opposition to its political programme was nascent. To achieve a hegemonic status within the public media, the ruling Zanu PF deployed its ideological wing to the arena of the press, the same way it did to other 'political' and 'non-specialised' portfolios (see earlier reference to Herbst, 1990). The deployment of Nathan Shamuyarira, a

renowned Zanu PF leftist intellectual, to head the Ministry of Information and Tourism was testimony to this.

The public press's unproblematic endorsement of the ruling party's candidature and its consistent bashing of the opposition in the 1985 elections was arguably related to the state's successful taming of Zimpapers. As argued earlier in the chapter, this was a process achieved through a combination of both coercion and coaxing. The intricate process of media policing and regulation in the postcolony was lop-sided from the beginning because it was left to just the emerging ruling elite. The uneven composition of the ZMMT board of trustees, discussed earlier, is just but an illustration of this. The absence of institutional structures to support a 'reformed' media during the first decade of independence also contributed to the eventual usurpation of editorial autonomy at Zimpapers.

It can be argued that where private press was concerned, the state's policy of tolerance towards a limited critical press was less a reflection of its innate inclination towards press freedom than a pragmatic attempt to balance competing interests and forces in the new nation. As long as the Zanu PF hegemony remained unchallenged in fundamental ways—as the general elections of 1985 revealed—there was perhaps no need to crack the whip yet.

Rather than liberate and broaden the public sphere, which at independence was accessible largely to the white elite, the state's policy approach to the public press resulted in a new phenomenon altogether. What emerged was a kind of "representative publicity", which Habermas views as a counterweight to democratic participation (see Habermas, 1992; Peters, 1993). This form of 'public sphere,' rather than being a site for citizen participation through discussion, is a "display of prestige, not critical discussion, spectacle, not debate and appearance before the people, as on stage, not for them" (Peters, 1993:545). The coverage of the 1985 election, extensively and almost exclusively predicated on the official perspective of political reality, testifies to this analysis. The public press assumed by default the role of ruling party press, in the process abandoning the values of editorial autonomy espoused in the concept of the ZMMT.

On the other hand, the role and influence of capital was more manifest on the *Financial Gazette* than on the public press. The paper endorsed the candidature of the ruling party for reasons completely different from those of both the *Herald* and the *Sunday Mail*. Where the public press saw Zanu PF's re-election as an affirmation of the party's revolutionary, developmental and anti-colonial liberation credentials, the *Financial Gazette* endorsed the party because in its first five years in power it had pursued a combination of welfarist and neo-liberal economic policies that had favoured the lot of capital. In the view of the paper, a new mandate for the party was therefore likely to ensure the continuation of the status quo. It could be argued that both the state and the private press maintained *pragmatic* relations with each other. The state tolerated an occasionally critical but generally non-threatening private press to maintain a veneer of press freedom to the local and international community, while the press tolerated the state in so far as it created and maintained fertile conditions for capital to flourish.

An interesting observation about the 1985 elections was that both the private and public press did not give any significant coverage to the opposition except when demeaning it. These patterns of framing the elections arguably reflect the complex influence of both capital and state policy on the press.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the complex interface between the press and centres of political and economic power in the first decade of Zimbabwe's transition to democracy. It has traced and discussed the implementation of the state's 'transformation' project on the media and how from the outset the state conceived the media's role largely in terms of its hegemonic project. The chapter has also examined the press's coverage of the 1985 elections in light of the press-state-capital relations. What emerges from this analysis is that the interface between the press, state and capital—all of which are experiencing a contradictory transition—has significant influence on how the press frames the contest for power in the postcolony. As indicated earlier, the exertion of influence was not a simple linear process swallowed hook, line and sinker by the press. Rather, it was a dialectical one in which both coercion and coaxing were applied. The next chapter explores the same relationship and its influence on reportage during the second decade of Zimbabwe's independence.