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Mediating the transition : The press, state and capital in a changing Zimbabwe, 1980-2004

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Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

This study is a contribution to the debate on the institutional role of the media in societies undergoing transition from colonial minority rule to majority rule, and the constraints or opportunities posed by the state and capital in relation to that role. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part offers a discussion of the main theoretical approaches to the role of the media in democratic change, as well as the interface of the media, state and the market and its implications for media functions. In particular, this part discusses various perspectives on the media as public spheres as well as the critical political economy approach to the study of media.

The second part of the chapter analyses the specific debates and perspectives around the nature of state, civil society as well as the transition in Zimbabwe, and then attempts a discussion of the manner in which the media in that country is implicated in the transition. In this case the media is approached both as an institution that is itself in transition, but also as an institution that frames or reports on other institutions in the same process. In the discussion of Zimbabwe's transition, some selected examples of case studies drawn from other parts of the world that recently experienced or are in the process of transition—including South Africa, Eastern Europe, South East Asia and South America—are applied for comparative analytical purposes.

2.1 Perspectives on the Public Sphere

At the core of this inquiry is an attempt to theorise the role of the press as a forum (or potential forum) for public debate and engagement within the context of a transforming post-colonial society. It proceeds by analysing the press's coverage or representation of selected issues (i.e., elections and related subjects) and also by exploring the interplay between economic and political factors shaping press activity—factors that are located both within and outside the organisational boundaries of the press. How the press mediates public involvement in debate around

and participation in periodic electoral contestation, is a reflection of its role in democratic transition. To allow for a closer scrutiny of both the media's framing of the elections and the socio-political and economic influences on such framing, the study adopts the critical political economy of the media approach because, among others, the approach "draws for its analysis on a critique, a theoretically informed understanding, of the social order in which communications and cultural phenomena are being studied" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:71).

Underpinning the study is the view that the media (of which the print news media, commonly referred to as the press, is part), are of critical importance democracy and how they mediate the range of representations on aspects of democratic life (including elections), can enhance or impede the participation of citizens in democratic life (see Ronning, 1995; Curran, 2000; Kupe, 1997; Murdock, 2000).

Perhaps the most commonly used term in contemporary media scholarship to summarise the media's normative role in democracy is Jurgen Habermas's disputed but pathbreaking concept of the public sphere, which is premised on his seminal inquiry into the rise and decline of a bourgeois participatory democracy centred on critical-rational debate. Habermas (1992) describes the public sphere as:

> …the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (1992:27)

Coffee shops, salons and other public places were the sites for this debate, whose participants gradually constituted a countervailing force to the authoritarian state of early modern Europe. The bourgeois public sphere offered space in which citizens had access to deliberate about their common affairs and articulate broader social interests, and hence became an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction. Fraser interprets the Habermasian public sphere as an arena that was both "conceptually distinct from the state…a site for the production and circulation of discourses that (could) in

principle be critical of the state" was well as "conceptually distinct from the official economy…not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theatre for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling" (1992: 111).

Habermas makes a distinction between the public sphere and what he terms "representative publicness." With the former being a site governed by neither the state nor the market but by public reason, the latter is presented as an ostentatious display of prestige reminiscent of the feudal lord. Peters (1993) describes the Habermasian representative publicity as "the display of prestige, not critical discussion, spectacle, not debate, and appearance before the people, as on a stage, not for them" (p.545). In other words, the medieval representative publicity was tied to personal appearance and a condescending manifestation of elite glory, while the bourgeois public sphere—which is also closely tied to the rise of the modern democratic constitutional state—was in principle predicated on an informed and participatory citizenry.

According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere began to decay and finally disintegrated under conditions of "refeudalisation" during the 20th century. The commercialisation of the press and the rise of advertising agencies and public relations institutions transformed the bourgeoisie public sphere into a mass of consumers, negating its original critical-rational outlook, and consequently its final degeneration. This transformation also came about when private organisations began to increasingly assume public power on the one hand, with the state penetrating the private realm on the other (also see Calhoun 1992: 21).

Notwithstanding its continued prominence as an analytic category in studies of the relationship between media and democratic politics, the original concept of the public sphere has been criticised on several counts, and it is important to briefly reflect on some of the broad criticisms before discussing the reconfigurations that both Habermas and his critics have suggested to the concept. One of the foremost criticisms of Habermas is that he neglects the importance of the "contemporaneous development of a plebeian public sphere alongside and in opposition to the bourgeois public sphere" (Garnham, 1992:359). Although Habermas acknowledges the existence of this public sphere as being "a variant…suppressed in the historical

process (1992:xviii), the general lack of close attention to the functions of the plebeian public sphere is "part of (Habermas's) failure to describe adequately the full field of force impinging on the bourgeois public sphere" (Calhoun, 1992: 39).

Another criticism of Habermas is that his account fails to provide symmetrical treatment of the bourgeois public sphere and its post-transformation successor characterised by 'organised' or 'late' capitalism (Calhoun, Ibid). The 'classical' public sphere is framed as entirely characterised by rational-critical debate, while the transformed one is dismissed as compromised and mediocre. This account, suggests Calhoun, romanticises the bourgeois public sphere while overrating the negative public consequences of the media in the 20th century.

Related to the neglect of the plebian public sphere are critiques of Habermas's treatment of cultural and identity issues, including his neglect of the role of religion as one of the central thematic topics in the early public sphere (Zaret, 1992), the absence of nationalism in Habermas's discussion (Eley, 1992), as well as his neglect of the role of social movements in his account. These absences reflect an "inattention to agency, to the struggles by which both the public sphere and its participants are actively made and remade" (Calhoun, 1992:37). Based on her analysis of the historiography of the public sphere, Fraser (1992), contends that there has always been a plurality of competing publics, not just in the late 19th and 20th centuries as Habermas implies. These public spheres—which she terms "subaltern counterpublics"—contested the "exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative norms of public speech" (p.116). Among the constituents of the counterpublics were marginalised social actors such as workers, women, "people of colour", gays and lesbians, who "invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (Ibid: 123). The gist of the critique here is that the idea of a single, uncontested "classical" public sphere that Habermas implies is ahistorical and ignores the multiple conflicts and struggles that were from the beginning an intricate part of the public sphere.

The model's weaknesses and ambiguities notwithstanding, the public sphere remains a useful analytic category for studying the relationship between media and democratic politics. Fraser (1992) refers to it as an important "conceptual resource" (p.110) while Calhoun sees Habermas's book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* as "an immensely fruitful generator of new research, analysis and theory" (1992:41). As Garnham (1992) has observed, the cogent criticisms of the public sphere have served as "a necessary basis for the development and refinement of Habermas's original approach" (p. 360).

Habermas's original model of the public sphere has been broadened and reshaped by both himself and his critics in order to cope with changes in both society and the media in the late 20th and 21st centuries. In his later works, in particular in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), Habermas adopts a more inclusive and, arguably nuanced conception of the public sphere quite different from the original bourgeois model. He describes the modern public sphere as one characterised by "open, permeable and shifting horizons" (1996:360). In this model, participants in the public sphere are varied, and geographical boundaries, social status, gender and other variables pose no limitations to participation. This reconfigured model of the public sphere represents "a highly complex network that branches out into a multitude of overlapping international, national, regional, local and sub-cultural arenas" (1996:373). Drawn from different walks of life and with different common agendas and thematic foci, participants constitute a differentiated, multi-layered public sphere which is not fixed but mobile and changing in space and time.

Further, the 'reconstituted' Habermasian public sphere is differentiated into levels according to the density of communication, organisational complexity and range; "from the episodic publics found in taverns, coffee houses or streets, through occasional or arranged publics of particular presentations and events…up to abstract public spheres of isolated readers…"(1996:374). Importantly, Habermas acknowledges that even in their different forms and levels, these public spheres are porous and interlock with each other.

In coming up with the inclusive conception of the public sphere, Habermas seems to have been responding to criticism about the exclusive and, to an extent, ahistorical nature of the bourgeoisie public sphere (see discussion above). At least three of his critics, Dahlgren and Sparks (1991), and Keane (1996) share the view of the post-bourgeoisie public sphere as a multilayered and differentiated phenomenon. According to Keane, the 20th century witnessed the development of "a complex mosaic of different-sized, overlapping and interconnected public spheres" which emerged "within differently-sized milieu within the nooks and crannies of civil society and states" (1994: 34). Keane talks of micro, meso and macro public spheres, which are categorised according to the size or scale of public participation. Whereas micro public spheres resemble Habermas's episodic public spheres which comprise small numbers of participants in small locations, meso public spheres are mediated by large-scale newspapers and television and radio broadcasts, while macro public spheres operate at regional and global levels, along the lines of Habermas's "abstract" public spheres.

Dahlgren and Sparks (1991) view the reconfiguration of the 20th century public sphere as a more-or-less inevitable outcome of changes in both media institutions and constellations of social power. They point to the crisis of the nation state as a political entity, the media practice of segmenting audiences, the rise of new political and social movements and the (relative) availability of communication technology to consumers and citizens as factors which have altered the shape and constitution of the post-bourgeoisie public sphere (1991:12). These changes, which in their different stages are being experienced in Africa and across the world today, have necessitated the creation of multiple public spheres, both dominant and oppositional.

It is important to note that proponents of a reconstituted model of the public sphere cited above argue that the flourishing of multiple public spheres is a critical element in democracy. Keane observes that, normatively, "a healthy democratic regime is one in which various types of public spheres are thriving, with no single one of them actually enjoying a monopoly in public disputes about the distribution of power" (1996:47). Dahlgren and Sparks note that viable oppositional or alternative public

spheres “may not be able to flourish in situations where state repression is thorough and systematic” (1991:15). In her critique of Habermas, Fraser (1992) argues in favour of a multiplicity of publics rather than a single public sphere in both democratic and undemocratic societies (p.137). Habermas prefers the term “complex societies”, to describe situations where the multilayered public sphere provides an intermediary structure between the political system on the one hand and the private sector on the other (1996:373).

2.2 The Media as Public Spheres

The multi-layered model of the public sphere and its links to democratic life provides an important entry point—as an analytic category—into a theorisation of the role of the media in a society undergoing a post-colonial transition, such as Zimbabwe. While the bourgeois public sphere existed as an exclusive elite domain, the reconfigured model presents what Herman and Chomsky characterise as “the array of places and forums in which matters important to a democratic community are debated and information relevant to intelligent citizen participation is provided” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002:xviii).

There is general consensus in media scholarship about the desirability of the public sphere an as ideal against which media performance in society can be analysed. However, it is on the definition of the media’s roles—especially when considered in relation to the media’s relationship to the different centres of power, including the state, capital, civil society and various categories of audiences—where there is profound debate. There is also debate on the normative structural organisation of a media system that best approximates the ideal of the public sphere. It is important that we explore key issues in this media/democracy or public sphere debate.

Generally, debate on the media’s public sphere role in democracy and democratic transition has identified three distinct but closely related functions. The first of these, widely popular within liberal pluralist scholarship, is that of watchdog to powerful institutions, especially the state. The second role entails providing citizens with information and education that empower them to participate in political and social

processes as well as entertaining them. The third role is that of representing *all* people—a role commonly described as being the "voices of the voiceless." Each of these assumed roles is linked to broader theory or theories of society (Bennett, 1991). Curran identifies the liberal pluralist and the radical Marxist schools (and their varying strands) as the main theoretical positions that have informed the debate on the media's normative role in society (also see Golding & Murdock, 2000; McChesney, 2000).

The watchdog role of the media, especially the press, is perhaps the most vaunted in contemporary liberal pluralist theory. This role entails critical surveillance of the state, which is viewed as the most important aspect of the democratic functioning of the media (Curran, 2000). The task of monitoring the full range of state activity and fearlessly exposing abuses of official authority is viewed as overriding in importance to all other functions of the media.

The liberal pluralist perspective locates a media system best positioned to perform the watchdog function within a free-market economic set up. Such a media should be owned by private capital and operate within a deregulated environment to ensure maximum independence and autonomy from government and the state. There is also, within the same camp, the argument that professional journalists and media workers, left on their own, can be trusted to exercise full independence in dispensing their roles in providing the audience with what it wants (see C. Edwin Baker, 2002). In other words, as McChesney (2000) observes, the liberal free market perspective "envisages a flowering commercial marketplace of ideas, unencumbered by government censorship or regulation, which should generate the most stimulating democratic political culture possible" (p.2). It is important to note that the watchdog role historically invoked a premise which was widely accepted in relation to the press, then the only medium of mass communication. Newspaper regulation was opposed because it was thought to muzzle criticism of government (Curran, 2000).

Despite its continued prominence in the discourse of liberal democracy, the watchdog view of the media has been the subject of much criticism, especially from the contending Marxist perspective and its numerous variants (see Garnham, 1995; Boyd-Barrett, 1995; Mosco, 1996; McChesney, 2000). The contention of the radical

perspective is that the media tend to be ideological pawns in a power game and much of what they represent is devoted to perpetuating the ideology of the dominant and powerful in society. Like its theoretical and ideological opponent, the radical school's position on the role of the media is an extension of its theory of how society in general should and should not be organised. However, as shall be discussed later in this section, debate on the media/public sphere role has progressed much beyond the traditional confines of the two opposing schools to cope with the changing nature of both the media itself and society as well. This study's discussion of Gramsci's concept of hegemony (later in this chapter) is also an attempt to transcend the traditional polarities referred to above.

The second and third roles of the media in relation to the public sphere pertain to them being sources of information that enhances citizens' participation in socio-political processes as well as representing society in its heterogeneity or being voices of the voiceless. Ideally, a democratic society requires a media system which is coterminous to it and which can "generate discussion of issues of public concern in a way which does not favour partisan interests, whether these be the interests of particular parties, the interests of media bosses or media professionals" (Boyd-Barrett,1995:187). But this is the ideal. Studies of news production processes and analyses of media content have consistently shown that media operations cannot be divorced from both their ownership, financing and organisational structures, and these factors closely influence the range of voices and interpretative frameworks given expression in media content. And it is by no means *all* voices.

2.3 Constraints to the Public Sphere

The public sphere as an analytic category for the study of the media's role in democracy has not been uncontested. There exists profound debate on the question of whether, in light of the increasing commercialisation of the media and the changing conventions of journalism practice, as well as continued state repression in some countries, the modern media can be terrains for unfettered rational-critical debate (the critical political economy approach discussed later in this chapter espouses this view). What emerges from these debates is the fact that any theorising on the role of the contemporary press in relation to the public sphere should operate at more than just one level of analysis, namely media content. There is need to critically examine the

context of media production, both in terms of 'micro' factors such as organisational/institutional dynamics as well as 'macro' factors that include the broader political and economic context in which media operate as institutions. In some cases analysis can also extend to cover the reception (and its context) of media texts. In this regard various approaches including political economy, cultural studies and sociology of news production have been applied to grapple with the complex news production and reception chain (see Shoemaker, 1991; Schudson, 2000). This study applies critical political economy (a variant of political economy) to investigate the media's performance in relation to the public sphere by analysing both selected media texts and the relations between media and political and economic elites, and how the latter influences the constitution of the former. The discussion below focuses at a theoretical level on constraints to the public sphere, and is meant to provide an important explanatory and analytical framework for the research's analysis of the performance of the newspapers under study.

2.3.1 Propaganda and Hegemony-Construction

The role of the media as purveyors of elite propaganda has attracted scholastic attention as an impediment to the public sphere. Arguably the most detailed critique of the propaganda role of the media is the seminal title: *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* by Edward. S. Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988, 2002). The two authors adopt the "propaganda model" as an analytic category to explain the performance of the US media in terms of its institutional structures and its relations with the centres of economic and political power in the country. They argue that:

> …among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy (2002:xi).

As applied to the mainstream American press by the two authors, the "propaganda model" negates the public sphere in the sense in which reportage of key international and foreign policy issues generally corresponds to the views and interests of the US military-industrial complex and its allies in politics. Views not consistent with the

dominant centres of power are often shunned upon by the press, or given marginal attention. Herman and Chomsky explain the media's propaganda role in terms of filters; which include the size, concentrated ownership and profit-orientation of the media, the predominance of advertising as a funding mechanism for the media, the reliance of media on government and business as sources of information, the adoption of "flak" by business and governments as means to discipline and control media content, as well as the residual "anticommunism" discourse[1].

Closely related to the "propaganda model," but arguably more nuanced and less deterministic is what McNair (2003) refers to as the "hegemonic model", normally applied in relation to developed capitalist democracies. This model is applied to explain the role the media play in "reinforcing and reproducing a generalised popular consensus about the inherent viability of the system as a whole" (p.62). The concept of hegemony is traceable to Antonio Gramsci's work. Hegemony attainment is defined as

> …that state of 'total social authority' which, at certain specific conjunctures, a specific class alliance wins, by a combination of 'coercion and consent,' over the whole social formation, and its dominated classes: not only at the economic level, but also at the level of political and ideological leadership, in civil, intellectual, and moral life as well as the material level: and over the terrain of society as well as in and through the condensed relations of the State (Hall, 1980: 331).

[1] See Herman & Chomsky, 2002. The propaganda model has been the subject of criticism for, among others, assuming that audiences respond to media messages passively, making assumptions about media content serving political ends in many ways, but without directly studying these effects, assuming that the ideas of a unified ruling class and ruling class interests may be taken for granted as unproblematic, and implying that media workers are mere cogs in powerful institutional machinery and do not have any meaningful powers of agency (see Klaehn, 2002). Some critics have even described the model as "an almost conspiratorial view of the media" (Holsti and Rosenau, quoted by Klaehn, 2002:148). However, in their defence, Herman and Chomsky argue that the essence of the propaganda model is not to explain 'everything' and in every media and political context, but rather to provide an institutional critique of media performance in advanced capitalist democracies. They employ two methodological techniques to illustrate the workings of the model. These include studying 'paired examples' of historical events during the same period of time, where disparities in coverage or framing by the media forms the basis for interpreting media behaviour; as well as exploring the range of sources and opinions given expression on important topics. Klaehn (2002) finds the propaganda model—its shortcomings notwithstanding—"forceful and convincing" as an institutional critique of media behaviour and journalistic self censorship "in an era in which corporate ownership of media has never been as concentrated, right-wing pressure on public radio and television is increasing…and advertising values dominate the news production process" (p. 173-4).

Gramsci argues that unlike domination, hegemony is won in constant negotiation between competing social, political and ideological forces through which power is contested, shifted or reformed (Gramsci, 1971; also Gledhill, 1997: 348). Far from being a static concept, the Gramscian hegemony is a fluid and continuous creation which, given its massive scale, "is bound to be uneven in the degree of legitimacy it commands and to leave some room for antagonistic cultural expressions to develop" (Adamson, 1980:174).

Gramsci argues that social hegemony, in which "organic" intellectuals—intellectuals who perform tasks essential to the reproduction of a particular society[2]—exercise subaltern functions, comprises two fundamental aspects (1971:12). These include the "spontaneous" consent given by the masses to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group; as well as the apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups which do not consent either actively or passively. While ordinarily powerful states or dominant groups would rather maintain or seek to maintain hegemony through consent, Gramsci contends that the coercive apparatus remains an option reserved "in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed" (1971: 12).

Implied in the foregoing discussion is that hegemony is never a permanent state of affairs, and which is never contested. Marginalised social groups and interests at different times also seek to contest official or 'dominant' hegemony, seeking to present their own alternative hegemony. Adamson prefers to view hegemony as "a mode of rule for the [dominant] bourgeoisie and for the proletarian 'potential' state" (1980:171). The dynamic tensions inherent in oppositional dominant/alternative 'hegemonies' means there will perhaps always be crises of hegemony, states of partial or incomplete hegemony or shifting hegemony (see Hall, 1980:63).

The media are key cultural sites where hegemonic struggles are fought out. In his analysis of press-state-civil society relations during Zimbabwe's first decade of independence, Saunders argues that the print media in particular "stand as a poignant

[2] Gramsci's other category of intellectuals is the "traditional" intellectual. This category views itself (and is also generally viewed by the population at large) as independent or autonomous from the dominant power structures, and whose functions derive from an earlier historical period. The clergy and university professors would fit into this category.

illustration of broad hegemonic struggles, because they are the site for the overlapping of public and private intervention in information production" (1991:17). Through framing or representation, the media can both 'rearticulate' and 'disarticulate' aspects or fragments of commonly accepted 'truths' or norms—in other words, assume the power of definition, which is a major source of hegemony. The simultaneous processes of 'rearticulating' and 'disarticulating' implies that the media can act as 'deputies' in service of the dominant blocs, or as counter-hegemonic apparatuses serving non-dominant or marginalised forces seeking to present an alternative hegemony.

A criticism of both the hegemonic and propaganda models is that although they constrain the public sphere, propaganda and hegemony-construction are not all there is to media functions. As we articulate in the discussion of critical political economy of the media and sociology of news production in this chapter, media professionals can (and sometimes do) exercise their agency powers against the structure to influence patterns of media representation of issues and events. In their articulation of the structure-agency relationship within the media, Croteau and Hoynes (2003) argue that there exists a "dynamic tension between the forces of structure, which shape but do not determine behaviour, and the action of human beings, who make choices but are not fully autonomous" (p.121).

However, notwithstanding their shortcomings, both the propaganda and hegemony models provide invaluable analytic frameworks for the performance of the Zimbabwean press in relation to the public sphere over the period under review.

2.3.2 The Practice of Media Framing

The issue of media framing is a significant problematic in the debate on the role of the media in relation to the public sphere. Sometimes used interchangeably with "representation," framing refers to the way in which news media resort to particular interpretive structures to set particular events within their broader context. The essence of framing is "selection to prioritise some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events" (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003: 11). For Entman (1993) selection and salience are key components of framing. By giving salience to aspects of perceived reality, framing

seeks to promote "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993:53). All media organisations operate on the basis of framing because this enables journalists to place events and issues into specific categories defined in part by how they have covered them in the past and a range of factors that include the media's editorial policy approaches to the subjects in question.

According to Gitlin, frames are composed of "little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (1980:6). Although they are largely unspoken and unacknowledged, media frames—as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation…by which symbol-handlers routinely organise discourse, whether verbal or visual" (Ibid:7)—allow journalists and media organisations to handle myriad complex events in a systematic fashion consistent with defined editorial policies and the established routines and conventions of journalism practice.

Notwithstanding the fact that they are embedded in journalism practice, news frames are normally contested by audiences and critics. As Norris, Kern & Just (2003) argue, there are always puzzles about reasons why one frame rather than another becomes adopted by the media and reinforced as the dominant interpretation of particular issues and events.

Since the 1980s, framing research has been linked to discourse or the social construction of reality through language, postulating that framing interacts with readers' cognitive structures for 'meaning construction' (Dell'Orto, Dong, Moore and Schneeweis, 2004:296). In societies where the media is free from coercive state interference and control, media framing is rarely a conscious propagandistic choice; "it is rather drawn from and reflects shared cultural understandings" (Ibid: 296).Overt propaganda framing is often associated with media that operate under authoritarian state domination, although others, like Herman and Chomsky (1988, 2002) have suggested that propaganda is very much the *raison d'etre* for media in liberal capitalist democracies such as the US.

Scheufele (2000), citing studies in the sociology of news production, argues that journalistic framing of a given issue is influenced by, among others factors, "social

norms and values, organisational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines and ideological or political orientation of journalists" (p.307). Research on framing, he suggests, should focus on both media frames as well as audience frames. While media frames are described above as principles of selection and salience that give meaning to events and processes, audience frames are defined as "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (Entman, 1993:53). As with the case of research on agenda-setting and priming, studies of framing commonly examine one of three distinct processes, which include frame-setting, frame-building and individual-level outcomes of framing (audience frames) (Scheufele, 2000:306).

This study's interest in framing does not extend to analysing audience frames because of factors of conceptual focus as well as well as scope[3]. The predominant focus is on aspects of news frames in selected newspapers during a specific period of Zimbabwe's postcolonial transition. According to Pan & Kosicki (1993:59), there are four types of framing formation in news formation. These include syntactical structures (e.g., headlines, story flow, order of presentation); thematic structures (e.g., causal statements or implied causality, presenting actions in a context in which one may be seen as an antecedent and another as a consequence); rhetorical structures (metaphors, examples, etc.), and script structures (narrative formation) (see also Dell'Orto, Dong, Moore & Schneeweis, 2004:296-7). As chapter 3 observes, this study focuses mainly on thematic structures although it also occasionally draws from aspects of syntactical and rhetorical structures.

The manner in which successive Zimbabwe elections were reported by the selected newspapers should be viewed in light of the conventional norms of framing attendant to media practice, as well as the explanations proffered above. A theory of framing therefore looks at media *representations* as essentially constructed rather than

[3] An audience frame analysis in the context of the present study, while probably desirable, is not feasible given the breadth of this study, including the focus on press-state-capital relations and implications for media framing, the many newspapers and policies under review and the institutional analysis buttressed by in-depth interviews with media workers, representatives of business and policy makers. Further, political economy studies generally tend to be media-centric, as opposed to, say cultural studies approaches, which seriously consider audience frames (see Schudson, 2000; Durham & Kellner, 2001). This inherent weakness notwithstanding, the approach adopted in this study yields significant results as demonstrated in the later chapters of the thesis.

neutrally reflected. Both factors from within the organisations themselves—including norms and values of professional practice and editorial policies—as well as factors outside the organisations, including political and economic elites, contribute in various ways to define the modes of framing. In light of these dynamics, there is continued debate on whether modern, commercially produced media or media operating in hostile socio-political conditions can be accessible and inclusive sites for public participation through objective, balanced and analytical framing of events and issues of the day.

To complicate the debate on the problematic media practice of framing or representation, critical media theorists have drawn important social variables of class, gender, race, ethnicity and other minorities into the framework of media theory in light of their growing significance in the way the media operate and frame 'reality.'

The issue of class and representation or framing of class interests in the media, besides conventional Marxist theorising, continues to attract significant academic debate (see Curran, 1996; Golding & Murdock, 2000; Gandy. Jr, 2000). The central argument in most of these works is that just as the 18th century liberal public sphere excluded serfs, women and plebians from the framework of rational-critical debate, the modern media are largely forums for competing capitalist class fractional interests, especially in the context of global capitalism and increasing social inequalities. In other words, the fact that the primary source of revenue for most modern newspapers world-wide comes from selling readers to advertisers rather than newspapers to readers, means they cannot address all readers or potential readers at the same time and in equal measure. It also means framing of issues is not a neutral process addressing the universal common good. The simple operating logic is that poor audiences are not good markets for any advertiser's product, and this reality pushes the media to target customers within higher Living Standard Measures (C. Edwin Baker, 2002). The issue of audience segmentation—entailing as it does that readers are addressed as consumers rather than as participating citizens—brings to the fore the critical problem of media representation in relation to the public sphere.

An important contribution to the debate on class representation and the media comes from studies in the sociology of news production, which seek to relate media content to a range of institutional and organisational routines, cultures and practices (Shoemaker, 1991; Schudson, 2000). An important variant of these studies is that both media owners and media workers have to be located in a class system with its own struggles and contradictions. To an extent, the role of the media cannot be separated from the identities of those who package media content. Murdock (2000) argues that an analysis of the class position of various groups of cultural (including media) workers, which maps their degrees of "relative autonomy" has "real political consequences" (p.16). He argues that:

> …viable democratic politics depends on a shared commitment to renegotiate not simply individual entitlements but what we mean by the 'common good.' This requires debate and dialogue across class boundaries and class interests. The cultural industries provide the major areas where these encounters now take place. The relative openness of this space and its hospitality to dissent is therefore crucial to sustaining democratic life (2000:16)

Besides class, contemporary approaches to the theory of media also bring the issue of gender and racial participation and representation in media into the sphere of analysis. One of the criticisms of the bourgeois public sphere is that it excluded women of all classes and ethnicities from political participation on the basis of gender status, while both men and women of particular races and ethnicities were excluded on racial grounds (see Fraser, 1992). But then even in the 'reconstituted' multi-tiered or multilayered model of the public sphere which this study applies as an analytic category, there are also problems of marginalisation in terms of participation by certain groups, especially women, because of issues of poverty which impedes access. This applies, although not necessarily in equal measure, to the different layers of mediated communication; from "meso" to "macro" or "abstract" public spheres. Because the media are part of a broader social milieu whose norms of relations are defined by both racial/ethnic and gender factors, among others, theorists have had to grapple with their role in representing these identities, as this is intricately related to democracy (Gandy Jr, 2000). In the context of democratic transition in Zimbabwe, questions of identity (although with specific reference to political identity and the

constitution of the 'other') form an integral component of national debate against a history of legalised racial, gender and political discrimination.

2.3.3 Media as Organisations[4]

As stated above, the key issue of media representation of social variables—and implications thereof for the media's role in relation to the public sphere—has to be analysed at various levels, with one of the most important levels being the media organisation that produces media content. The production of media content is shaped variously by broader socio-political and economic factors, much as media content itself also seeks to shape or influence the same forces in a kind of dynamic relationship.

In his discussion of the representation of race within the press, Teun A. van Dijk argues that the role of the media should be explained "in terms of an account that combines political, cultural, and societal dimensions of media organisations at the macro level with interactional, discursive and cognitive aspects of newsmaking and news reports at the micro level" (1991:23). The relationship between the media organisation and the broader society—or sectional interests within the broader society—has an influential role in the manner in which issues and debates are represented in the media and consequently the extent to which they provide a forum comparable to the public sphere.

The media-society relationship is a dynamic that operates in a structure-agency fashion. Croteau and Hoynes (2003) argue that at most, the broad structural constraints will influence the behaviour of media professionals "by making some choices more attractive, some more dangerous, and some almost unthinkable" (p.121).

[4] This study's analysis of news organisations under review is limited to in-depth interviews and scrutiny of documents/internal correspondence where possible. Many studies on media organisations go further than this, to focus on such aspects as reporter-editor relations, reporter-source relations, mobility aspirations, the gate-keeping process, etc (see Schudson, 2000; Shoemaker, 1997; Breed, 1997). In the context of this study, 'limited' institutional analysis is applied in conjunction with other approaches namely content and discourse analysis as well as policy analysis. This form of triangulation arguably gives a more holistic picture of press-state-capital relations and their implications for the media as institutions of the public sphere in Zimbabwe, which is the focus of this study. It is important also to note that this study's application of organisational approaches is meant to make up for the shortcomings of political economy. As Schudson (2000) argues, there is need for future studies of news production to integrate different approaches (e.g., political economy and organisational approaches or cultural studies) if research is to account for the complex changes sweeping through both the media and contemporary society.

At the same time, as stated earlier on in this chapter, media professionals are not simply cogs in the machine, but individuals and groups who explore opportunities within these constraints and make choices that may not necessarily be determined by the structure.

Studies in the sociology of journalism generally focus on the impact or role of the media in the workings of contemporary societies, as well as on the social determinants of journalistic output, that is, "those features of social life and organisation which shape, influence and constrain its form and content" (McNair, 2002:3). Theoretical sources for the sociology of news have included symbolic interactionism or social constructionist views of society, as well as organisational or bureaucratic theory (Schudson, 2000). Typically, organisational approaches focus on the social organisation of newswork, including reporter-source and reporter-editor relations. Social constructionist studies, including Gaye Tuchman's seminal study, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*, generally operate from the premise that newsmaking is a reality-construction activity governed by elites. Both approaches, their weaknesses notwithstanding, "have greatly advanced our understanding of the media by focusing on specific institutions and the specific processes in those institutions responsible for creating news" (Schudson, 2000: 194)[5].

The complexity of news production renders the task of defining the extent of the media organisation's influence on the product uneasy. Institutional factors such as news routines and conventions and the sheer fact of the existence of professionals with varying worldviews and backgrounds who put together a composite media product regularly mean that such influence is not necessarily deterministic. At the same time, as a unit of analysis, the organisation remains a critical site in shaping the range of representations given to particular issues by the media.

Analyses of both the context of media production and the nature or patterns of media representation complicate, if not challenge, conventional theorising about the role of

[5] In his discussion of organisational, cultural and political economy approaches to news production, Schudson (2000:194) critiques these approaches for being "typically ahistorical," for ignoring the possibilities for change in the nature of news, and for being "indifferent to comparative as well as to historical viewpoints." Murdock and Golding (2000), as discussed later in this chapter, would obviously dispute Schudson's first count of "typical" ahistoricity with regards to critical political economy, which they describe as being both "holistic" and "historical" (p.17).

the media in relation to the public sphere. In a seminal essay entitled 'Rethinking Media and Democracy', Curran (1996) argues for a kind of theoretical review that results in a theory of media which takes into account the changes that the media and society in general have experienced since both the radical and liberal positions were initially framed. In view of the increasing consolidation of capital in the media sector (including the fact that media no longer just report big business but have themselves become big business), commercialisation of media has the danger of giving rise "not to independent watchdogs serving the public interest but corporate mercenaries that adjust their critical scrutiny to suit their private purpose" (Curran, 1996:124).

Given that conventional theorising about the media's role in democratisation was largely framed within the context of its relationship to the leviathan and oppressive state, it can be argued that current realities where there are other centres of power such as the market and, in some cases sections within civil society, require a reformulation of a theory of media which considers its role in relation to these other centres of power. Such approaches could possibly explain, for example, scenarios where corporate media enters into 'non-aggression' pacts with political and bureaucratic authorities for the mutual protection of class interests outside the media.

The media organisation as an institution, along with the practice of news framing and the issues of propaganda and hegemony, all present constraints or potential constraints to the media's role in relation to the public sphere. These constraints, as well as opportunities presented by the demise of colonial rule and the establishment of formal democratic governance, form the broad framework for the analysis of the performance of the selected Zimbabwean press in relation to the public sphere.

2.4 The Critical Political Economy of the Media Approach

The foregoing discussion has touched on the analytic category applied to my study of the performance of the Zimbabwean press, namely the concept of a multilayered public sphere, and the generic constraints to its full realisation in most media and social systems. I apply the public sphere as an analytic category to establish an ideal democratic scenario consisting of participatory parity which is enhanced by multiple spheres. In this scenario the press are key institutions mediating these multiple public spheres. I then apply critical political economy of the media—to which this discussion

now turns—to explore how the Zimbabwean case study fares in relation to the model of the public sphere.

Premised on an analysis of public communications as both commercial enterprises and political and cultural institutions, the political economy approach preoccupies itself with showing "(how) different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:70).

As a tool of analysis, the political economy of the media approach explains media content in terms of both structured and unstructured relationships in and outside media organisations. According to Boyd-Barrett (1995), this approach, with its broadly critical signification, is concerned with "(macro) questions of media ownership and control, interlocking directorships and other factors that bring together media industries with other media and with other industries and with political, economic and social elites" (p.186).

An inquiry into the extent of public involvement or participation in national or local debates through the press in the context of emerging democracies has, of necessity, to face the task of relating the media to broader power structures within the transforming societies. By drawing for its analysis on a critique of the socio-political order in which communications and cultural phenomena are being studied, political economy allows the researcher to locate the performance of the press in relation to the postcolonial public sphere within a broader context[6].

[6] The political economy approach has both an oppositional and (increasingly) complementary relationship with cultural studies approaches. Some 'economistic' political economy analyses, including Herman and Chomsky's 'propaganda model', tend to reduce the meanings and effects of texts to circumscribed ideological functions, denying agency to both the audience and the media. Such approaches have traditionally been at variance with cultural studies' rejection of the notion of a passive and manipulated audience. For cultural studies, contemporary society and culture should be viewed as "contested terrains, and media and cultural forms as spaces in which particular battles over gender, race, sexuality, political ideology and values are fought" (Durham & Kellner, 2001: 21). The adoption of critical political economy, which sheds off the 'deterministic' and 'economistic' character of traditional political economy, by some researchers, point towards a more complementary relationship with cultural studies (see Graham & Murdock, 2000; Lemon, 2001). Critical political economy creates an important and dynamic link between cultural texts and the political and economic context of their production. Durham & Kellner (2001:22) argue that political economy approaches should be combined with more sociologically and culturally oriented approaches to form trans-disciplinary perspectives

It is important to note that analyses of public communications premised on political economy in general are not novel to media studies, nor is there consensus on what form they should take and what aspects to emphasise over others. According to Mosco (1996), this theoretical approach has guided the work of media scholars and researchers for over five decades. Against a background of rapid commercialisation and internationalisation of the media, which in a way signalled the triumph of profit-driven media over the declining public service media, researchers, especially Marxists and other leftists, sought to explore the implications of emerging monopolistic trends for democracy. However, it should be noted that while Marxism formed the intellectual framework for early studies in the political economy of communication, contemporary approaches—which include Golding & Murdock (2000)'s "critical political economy of communications" perspective—transcend the structuralist and deterministic Marxian schema. This applies especially with reference to the latter's "unproblematic acceptance" of the base-superstructure approach which, unargued, simply states that the mass media are ideological tools of ruling class domination either through direct ownership or, as in broadcasting, via ruling class control of the state (Garnham, 1995: 216).

This study adopts the critical political economy perspective. While the Marxist view satisfies itself in the assumption that the structure exercises overwhelming control over the agent, critical political economy looks at both constraints and opportunities at the micro (as in organisational) and macro (as in broader institutional, political and socio-economic) levels. From organisational approaches to media studies, this approach borrows an analysis of shifting and varying relationships between the economic, political and ideological realms during different historical phases as well as the internal power dynamics within media organisations. This approach enables us to critique the editorial positions and reportage of particular events and processes by the press from the point of view of both the internal dynamics of media organisations, as

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which subvert existing 'arbitrary' academic boundaries. These multiple-perspective approaches can enrich research on media and culture. This study adopts the critical political economy approach as the main theoretical framework, but complements it with some cultural studies approaches such as sociology of media production, hegemony and ideology as well as approaches to media representation and framing.

well as the external factors of ownership, financing and politics, including their direct and indirect links to each other (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). The use of both in-depth interviews and qualitative content analysis of primary media texts (as well as policy and document analysis) is therefore consistent with the critical political economy approach.

The critical political economy perspective is also useful for this study because of its 'holistic' nature, that is, its capacity to examine "(the) social whole or the totality of social relations that constitute the economic, political, social and cultural fields" (Boyd-Barrett, 1995: 187). This is important because although the study investigates primarily the role of the press as public forums for political debate, it also pays particular attention to political transition and the attendant economic and social forces shaping it as they constitute an integral background and context for theorising about the role of the press.

Further, critical political economy of the media pays attention to historical processes and how the media are implicated in the structures of society and power in different phases of history (Golding & Murdock, 2000). In the discussion of Zimbabwe, for example, attention is paid to shifting media-state-capital relations within the specific phases of the postcolonial nation, i.e., during the first, second and third decades of independence. This study also benefits from critical political economy's interest in the balance between capitalist enterprise and public intervention, as well as its concern with basic moral questions of social justice, equity and the public good in its critique of media policy and regulation (Golding & Murdock, 2000). This aspect of critical political economy particularly informs my discussion of ideal media policy options for a democratic state that is interested in liberating, rather than limiting the public sphere (see concluding discussion in Chapter Nine). Given that the country under study operates an economy that combines elements of welfarism and neo-liberal capitalism, while at the same time flaunting the rhetoric of Marxist-Leninism, the critical political economy approach also allows us to explore the contradictions at the broader social structure and how they directly and indirectly impact on the role of the press.

As noted above, the research, at the end, discusses scenarios for media reform in Zimbabwe. This includes an exploration of ways of financing, policing and regulating media in a manner that positions them strategically for the kind of public and democratic functions they are supposed to assume. This stems partly from Curran's (1996) argument that a strategy is needed "that defends media from both public and private power, and enables the media to serve the wider public through critical surveillance of all those in authority" (p.127). It is also informed by both McChesney's (2000) concerns about a case where society is cursed with a "rich media" but a "poor democracy," and Robert Entman's concept of "a democracy without citizens" (quoted in McChesney, 2000:2). In the case of Zimbabwe, one can add that the predominant centre of power is the state and hence, unlike in capitalist democracies of the West, it is possible here to talk about a strong authoritarian and predatory state but with a weak media and weak civil society. In each case, it is important from a theoretical standpoint, to discuss scenarios and ingredients for media policy reform if the press is to assume democratic functions consistent with the public sphere. Further, the importance of theorising media reform lies in the fact that Zimbabwe inherited a skewed mainstream media system which largely supported the status quo and was accessible to the minority white political and economic elite. The critical task of transforming the media into serving 'all' citizens therefore became one of the key challenges of the new postcolonial regime. To what extent and in what direction(s) the media have been 'transformed' in line with the trend in other public and private institutions in the transition is of importance to a critical political economy of the media.

In short, the critical political economy of communication approach is arguably a fitting tool of analysis for a study that seeks to investigate the role of the press in mediating a multi-faceted and contradictory transition and at the same time being dialectically influenced by factors attendant to the transition itself.

2.5 Media as Public Spheres: The African Context

Having discussed the theoretical and analytical aspects of the study, it is important that we turn to a contextual discussion of the role of the media in Africa (and Zimbabwe) in relation to democracy and the public sphere, in order to situate the present inquiry. Although the concept of the public sphere has Western roots, it is

applicable as an analytic category to the African media. Mak'Ochieng (1996) argues that, to facilitate democratic processes on the continent, the African media "should be a political public sphere or public forum accessible to all contending political players, groups and interests whose objective is the deliberation of common public issues or affairs and the framing and influencing of public policy" (p.11). To fulfil this and a range of other roles such as scrutinising the exercise of power, the media as public spheres should be free "from political and economic constraints and pressures from the state and from organised and vested economic and other interests" (Ibid: 11). Such media should also be owned or controlled by diverse groups or interests in society rather than just the elite. The discussion that follows looks at both the historic and contemporary roles the African media have played in their societies, as well as outlining some constraints and opportunities that have influenced those roles.

Although much of the global debate around the role of the media in society has been preoccupied with its democratic role in the context of industrialised capitalist democracies in the West, there has also been debate—albeit rather delayed—on the media's role in the context of Africa especially in the aftermath of the demise of the colonial state (Faringer, 1991; Ronning, 1995; Saunders, 1991, 1999; Tomaselli, 2000). Prior to the 1990s, most discussion of the media in Africa was dominated by the question of the role the media should play in development, then understood to be just economic development. Everything else was supposed to be secondary to this urgent task of development (Ronning, 1995).

In the specific context of nations emerging from colonial rule, the normative role of the media was to mobilise citizens around the objectives of development by providing information that was deemed—especially by the centralised state—to be important for those objectives. The promotion of national unity was considered a prerequisite for successful development, and the media was assigned the role of 'reflecting' a nation in the making as it were, often by ignoring disagreements, dissent or corruption within the state. Although certain sections of the privately owned media through investigative journalism exposed the fissures and corruption within in the emerging states and other public and private bodies, there was usually a high price to pay. Punishment often came in different ways, from arrests, torture or even death, to a

denial of foreign currency required to import input costs by the government (Saunders, 1991; Sandbrook, 1996).

However, the early 1990s "may be characterised as the period when the interest in the debate over press freedom and the role of the media in the democratic process suddenly burst into the open in Africa" (Ronning, 1995:1). This shift of emphasis from the media being principally agents for development to agents for democracy has been attributed to a number of factors, both internal and external to the African continent. Firstly, the failure of the promised development to materialise, coupled with the increasing disillusionment in many countries because of the elusive material content of the new dispensation, led to an interest in matters of governance and participation. Another factor was the fall of the one-party regimes and military dictatorships in most parts of Africa, a development which, combined with the development of multi-party systems, gave impetus to demands for democratic structures (see Ronning, 1995; Kupe, 1999; Hyden and Okigbo, 2002).

External to Africa was the end of the Cold War between 1989 and 1991. While the continent had been used as a pawn in global geopolitics, with the 'defeat' of communism and the triumph of the free market ideology, the discourse of liberal, multiparty democracy was spread to Africa largely as a precondition for development aid. Also, the dismantling of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and the ensuing debate there on how to organise new and democratic social institutions where the media play a central role as vehicles for the exchange of ideas and information, was an important factor in the subsequent popularisation of the debate in Africa (Ronning, 1995).

Because of their intricate links to socio-political and economic processes, the media were deemed to be important providers of information that was necessary for a successful democratisation project. Though the developmental agenda remained a key issue, it was overshadowed by democratisation, which was thought to be a prerequisite for development. The experience of a highly centralised decision-making process with very few mechanisms for consultation and which did not allow for open debate and dissent had hamstrung the media in the 1960s through the 1980s, and reduced citizens to ways "that were not too dissimilar to the situation under

colonialism" (Kupe, 1999: 2). Broadly, the substance of the new debates was the promotion of a private or civic press that would keep the state rolled back so it could keep its hands off the economy and private life, as well as promoting the development of a plurality of political parties contesting for power during periodic elections (Ronning, 1995; M'bayo *et al*, 2000). Reporting elections, along with representing other formal features of liberal democracy, became an important function of the African media in these debates.

Because this study specifically focuses on the press, it is important to consider some aspects of the debate on the constraints and opportunities of this medium in relation to the ideal of the public sphere. Of interest to note is that the press in Africa historically emerged as a result of the continent's contact with Europe, with the first papers in Africa coming during early 19th Century in Egypt, Sierra Leone and South Africa. Mytton (1983) argues that the introduction of the press in Africa "marked the beginning of a break with the past" (p.37). This was because print medium not only required literacy in the general sense of reading (itself a new phenomenon to traditionally oral communities) but also literacy in a colonial language. Therefore, right from its inception, the press in Africa emerged as a very limited forum accessible to sections of society who had both the literary and linguistic competence in foreign languages. It can still be argued today that despite the demise of the colonial state and the relative expansion of the press during the 1990s, problems of access to the press remain a fundamental constraint to citizens' participation in the polity through the media in Africa. During the colonial era, the mainstream press in most parts of Africa served as a forum for the elite, mostly colonial settlers in British settler colonies in East and Southern Africa, or the *evolves* in French colonies (Mytton, 1983). In the majority of cases, the mainstream press served as ideological state apparatuses supporting the colonial project (see Ziegler & Asante, 1992).

At independence, African leaders, most of whom had themselves used sections of the press—especially the alternative press—as instruments for mobilisation for democratic change, were generally intolerant of a free press. Under these largely authoritarian postcolonial regimes, the press was supposed to be a critical but subordinate 'partner' to the development and nation-building project (Mytton, 1983; Ziegler & Asante, 1992). In some cases like Zambia and Tanzania, the media was

nationalised at independence, hence its subjugation by the state was relatively easy. The role of subordinate 'partner' often meant the press taking a docile position on matters of democracy and accountability. As Mak'Ochieng (1996) notes, the media in general were, during this era, "expected and indeed pressurised to support the powers that be in what turned out to be the establishment and perpetuation of a subservient media"(p.1).As a result, the mainstream press in the context of early years of independence in Africa largely played to the gallery by cheerleading.

Although the liberalisation of most African economies and the introduction of multi-party politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s propelled the expansion of the press, it still suffers critical limitations. Ansah (1991) identifies three factors as major constraints to the African press. These factors include the crisis of power, the crisis of ownership and the crisis of resources. The crisis of power is in relation to some weak African states which, because they lack legitimacy, see the media as potential vehicles of sowing dissent. In such cases, the crisis of legitimacy leads the state to act tough on investigative or any form of informative and impartial journalism. The most common methods are incarceration of journalists or closure of newspapers. The discussion of the political economy of the Zimbabwean press in this thesis (particularly during the 'third' transition) pays significant attention to the crisis of legitimacy and its implications for the role of the press in democratic transition.

The press in Africa also faces the perennial problem of resources, both financial and to an extent human, which restricts its circulation to mostly urban centres. Lack of adequate funding and financing for the press has largely resulted in undeveloped infrastructure and distribution systems. This problem is linked to the generally small newspaper market on the continent, where illiteracy and poverty combine to keep the majority of the population outside the reach of the press. The small market for the press has resulted in its total reliance on advertising for funding. In mostly small and ailing economies, the declining advertising expenditure (or adspend) has often resulted in either newspapers closing down or pandering to the whims of advertisers in ways that are inimical to a public sphere potential of the media. Some of the survival strategies that newspapers in Africa have had to implement in these economies include segmentation of readers, drastic reduction of editorial budgets, the shift from news to entertainment and the cut-down on investigative reporting (see

Cowling, Chuma & Kupe, 2004). It is also increasingly becoming the norm for media owners to streamline the powers of editors and making them answerable to financial managers, a situation that from the point of view of business could be commercially prudent, but which undermines editorial independence and restricts the range of representations in the press to the powerful in society (see Underwood, 1993). It has also resulted in self-censorship among journalists, a negation of the press's role as a public forum for debate.

In authoritarian political contexts, the crisis of resources in relation to the African media has been exacerbated by the state's strategies to keep privately-owned media out of circulation. In Cameroon, for example, Nyamjoh notes that the government printing and publishing house, a state monopoly company which printed both government and privately owned newspapers, "chose to stay out of business and risk closure as a result of financial difficulties, rather than allow free competition between the opposition and pro-government press" (2005:155). The state printer would reluctantly agree to print private newspapers, but only after scrutinising their content first. Another strategy by the state printer, Njamnjoh notes, "was to delay printing of, or not printing at all, the private newspapers for an alleged want of materials" (Ibid:156). In 1996, Zimbabwe's only independent Sunday paper, *Sunday Gazette*, was forced to close down hardly a month before the Presidential elections after the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe stalemated efforts by South African media group Times Media Limited to rescue the paper through acquiring a controlling stake. This raised media speculation that the government (which had directed many of its parastatals not to advertise with the paper) was partly behind the bankruptcy and closure of the paper, which it has consistently chastised for being anti-government[7]. There are numerous other examples where the state employs, in addition to legal, administrative/bureaucratic and violent strategies, economic methods to bankrupt a critical media (see Chalaby, 1998). In some parts of Africa, the state-assisted impoverishment of the privately owned press has been a consistent strategy to undermine its potential as an institution of the public sphere.

[7] See Sapa article: "Row as Zimbabwe's only independent Sunday paper is closed down", 11/2/1996.

The crisis of ownership factor relates to the fact that in many African countries outside South Africa, the largest newspaper organisations are owned or controlled by the state. This ownership structure has often resulted in the state media being reduced to parrots of the incumbent governments. Ansah argues that even in cases where private newspapers have been launched or expanded in the 1990s, some of them have either fallen prey to international or regional corporate interests or, where owned by local capital, continued to face persistent financial problems. Save perhaps for South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt, most African countries "are either too small and/or too poor to develop a media structure capable of ensuring the representation of a wide range of views and experiences" (Ansah, quoted in Ronning, 1995:11).

While Ansah correctly identifies state ownership of the media as a problem in the context of postcolonial transitions on the continent, it should be pointed out as well that corporate ownership of the media has not necessarily broadened the public sphere. Post-Apartheid South Africa presents a case where the media is predominantly owned by private capital and there is continuing debate over the role of the media as institutions of the public sphere in such a scenario. In his discussion of the political economy of the print media in post-1994 South Africa, Tomaselli (2002) argues that the restructuring of the major media-owning groups was an elite enterprise which did not lead to the liberation of the public sphere. He writes:

> A rationalised public sphere, organised by private, profit driven organisations and subordinate to the principle of profit maximisation, remained closed for the most part to wider public participation. The public sphere largely remained under the control of property-owning private people whose newly found autonomy is rooted in the sphere of commodity exchange (p.144).

Despite (or probably because of) the changes to the structure and ownership of the media after 1994, what has happened in reality in South Africa is the creation and consolidation of the market shares of a few conglomerates (Chuma, 2006). The mainstream print sector in particular has remained a commercial sector whose functions are determined by the strict adherence to the market philosophy, resulting in "a triumph of entertainment over journalism, ruthless cost-cutting…and the abundance of bland, grey, over-processed journalism" (Harber, *Business Day*, 5/5/2005). Harber argues that in a country where rigorous public debate is crucial to

the ongoing democratisation process, commercial threats to the institutional autonomy of the media were strong impediments to democracy. He notes:

> As political control over the media recedes, commercial influence steps in. And the lesson we are learning is that it can be almost as damaging to the flow of information and quality of national debate as direct political interference *(Business Day*, 4/5/2005).

The point therefore is that whereas the predominant model of state ownership that existed and still exists in many African countries (including Zimbabwe) has undermined the role of the media in democratic processes, leaving the media to private ownership, funding and financing does not necessarily 'liberate' the public sphere. Indeed, some case studies on deregulation, commercialisation and privatisation of the media in Africa show that genuine pluralism and diversity of media can remain elusive despite these changes (Kupe, 2003; Ugbondah, 2002; Van de Veur, 2002).

It is important to note that there is a connection between the role of the media in Africa and the bigger socio-political communities in which they operating. While arguing that the media in Africa "continues to struggle for editorial freedom, with limited skills and material resources, while the broader society within which it operates continues to struggle for political freedom," Kareithi (2005:2) notes that there is need for broader social analyses of a range of contexts and factors which undermine media freedom and its role in society (2005:3). This reality makes studies premised on a political economy of the media potentially invaluable because they examine not just the institutional factors of the media but the broader relations between media and other institutions and centres of power. These relations both directly and indirectly influence media behaviour and functions. In their discussion of the role of the media during the 'first wave' of democratisation in Africa (1950s-1960s), Hyden and Okigbo (2002) argue that the press had "a key role in keeping the discursive realm of the emergent nationalist community alive" (p.35). This they attribute to the existence of "Africa's first window to democracy" which was "much more genuine…than is often acknowledged by Africanist political scientists" (Ibid: 35). They contrast this era with the 1970s when states developed authoritarian tendencies which led to a reversal of even some of the nominal freedoms the media had previously enjoyed. Although this historical account can be contested, the

argument that there is a connection between the broader political and social system and the role of the media is highly invaluable.

With regard to the African press, it should be noted that despite its structural weaknesses in relation to the public sphere ideal, the role the African press has played and continues to play in the fledgling twin processes of democracy and development remains important and therefore a legitimate area of academic inquiry. It should be noted that while most African governments rushed to impose full control over broadcasting and large sections of the print media at independence, there existed portions of the private press which provided significant alternative platforms for critical national debate. In the case of Zimbabwe, for example, Saunders offers an insightful study of how *Moto* magazine and the *Financial Gazette*—a small circulation church-owned monthly magazine and a relatively small private financial weekly, respectively—provided a formidable counter-hegemonic challenge to the ruling government's hegemony-construction project during the first decade of independence (Saunders, 1991). Hyden and Okigbo (2002) cite the case of some privately owned daily newspapers in Kenya *(Daily Nation)* and Nigeria (*Daily Times*) standing up to authoritarian political systems in their countries and retaining public credibility despite the pressures they experienced.

While it is true that the mainstream press both in Africa and abroad has generally remained an urban-based elite public sphere, it is also true that as a medium it is highly influential in Africa especially against a background of highly regulated and monolithic broadcasting systems. In a context where information is viewed as a critical social asset, the influence of the press can be linked to the public opinion-making process driven by opinion leaders with access to newspapers (Mytton, 1983; Waldahl, 1998). While admitting the inherent constraints to the African press as forums for rational-critical debate, Kupe contends that:

> …the African press of today is much better than that of decades prior to the 1990s. There is some degree of probing, analyses and an attempt to be an open forum for debate and discussion, which facilitate a wider diversity of views, ideas and opinions in the quest to build democratic societies (1999:6).

In the final analysis therefore, despite its limitations with regards to the public sphere ideal, the press in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular has and continues to play an important role in the different phases of the socio-economic and political transitions. It is important that this role be examined in relation to both the internal organisational dynamics of the press as well as the broader macro forces shaping its operations.

2.6 Perspectives on the Zimbabwean Transition

Having touched in more-or-less broad terms on the role the media has played in Africa and the opportunities and constraints that have informed that role, it is important to now engage the debates around Zimbabwe's postcolonial transition as a way of locating the role of the media in the process. Although the study is not primarily about the political economy of transition in Zimbabwe—rather it is interested in the role of the media in representing the periodic contests for political power during the transition—it is important to reflect on certain broad aspects of the process because they inform the manner and extent to which the media framed these contests and other aspects of national debate. In other words, the critical political economy of the media approach enables us to theorise at the level of both the media and the political and economic institutions steering the transition process.

There is a substantial amount of literature on the complex subject of the meaning and material content of the transition in Zimbabwe[8]. In broad terms, there appears to be at least two predominant perspectives. The first or the 'official' view looks at the transition as a total transformation of society from the evils of the past to the glories of the present and the future. Then there's a countervailing argument that is critical of the transition. A pervasive argument in much of this literature is the view that the transition to 'democracy' remains incomplete in so far as it consists of a replacement of just the colonial political status quo without a concomitant redressing of economic and social imbalances created by previous regimes. The same view also holds that at best, the transition has created a black *nouveau riche* elite instead of a broad-based

[8] Some of the key works Zimbabwe's postcolonial transition and major problems attendant to it include Astrow (1983), Mandaza (1987), Mandaza and Sachikonye (1991), Mlambo (1997), Chan (2003), Campbell (2003) and Bond and Manyanya (2003). In addition, there are also 'official' works that generally painted a glowing picture of the transition. These include among others, Martin and Johnson (1981) and Banana (1989).

and equitable economic empowerment programme (see Sachikonye, 1995; Mandaza, 1987, 1991; Mlambo, 1997).

The view that the transition from colonialism to a 'democratic' dispensation has been a total, if somewhat miraculous one, has largely been part of the official mantra employed by the new political elites. In Zimbabwe, the attainment of majority rule was followed by the publication of a fairly large amount of literature, especially biographies and autobiographies outlining what were largely triumphalist accounts of the liberation struggle icons. This was true for example of autobiographical works on Robert Mugabe (see, among others, Martin, D & Johnson, P, 1981). Such works outlined, at times in exaggerated terms, the contributions of the personalities concerned, to the total liberation of their people. Besides autobiographies, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) reports and statistical studies detailing improvements in such crucial areas such housing, clean water, land redistribution and education for previously disadvantaged groups also buttressed the official 'transformation' view of the transition. Such publications, with a few exceptions, were generally "geared towards justifying the status quo, or legitimising the writers' or their subjects' political and strategic choices in the past" (Alexander, 2002:4). In the context of Zimbabwe's 'third' transition, (see Chapters Six-Eight) the controversial land reform programme, also called the "Third Chimurenga," was accompanied by the growth of an officially sanctioned popular music genre rooted on Zanu PF election campaign rhetoric whose theme was: "Zimbabwe will never be a colony again."[9] The official 'transformation' view also held that state dominance of the public media after 1980 was an essential part of the "Zimbabweanisation" of media and other cultural industries in the wake of the attainment of majority rule (see Chapter 4).

The countervailing perspective—what could be termed the "elite transition" thesis—argues that transformation has only partially occurred at a broader political level and left most colonial socio-economic structures intact. A substantial body of literature premised on this perspective started emerging in Zimbabwe since the 1980s (see Mandaza, 1987, 1991; Moyo, 1990, 1992; Makumbe & Compagnon, 2000; Bond,

[9] See Sibanda, M: http://www.freemuse.org/sw7086.asp. Accessed, 24/05/2005.

2000). The general argument in most of these works is that the negotiated transition was a compromise that effectively resulted in the abandonment of key principles of the liberation struggle and an adoption of an economic system that perpetuates the same injustices that the struggle sought to eradicate.

One of the proponents of the 'elite transition' thesis is Andre Astrow, who, as early as 1983, had begun to question whether Zimbabwe had become a case of a revolution "that lost its way" in light of the dominance of continuity rather than change in the postcolonial state. Reflecting on the Zanu PF government's economic policy during the first decade of independence, Astrow argued that the postcolonial state had left the colonial capitalist economy intact because, even during the liberation struggle, "the aim of the petit bourgeois leadership was not to overthrow capitalist relations of production, but to remove the discriminatory structures of settler society hindering its advancement as a social group" (1983:136). Astrow also cites the constraints posed by the Lancaster House settlement, among them the preservation of private property rights, as contributory factors to the sustenance of the status quo.

It was not only the economy that was left relatively intact. Astrow noted, three years into independence, that:

> …little meaningful change has actually taken place, while significant tensions have emerged between the Mugabe government and the African people…Today the state apparatus has remained virtually intact and the basic economic structure of the country unchanged. While the white settlers have seen most of their privileges preserved, African workers who have gone on strike and landless African peasants squatting on 'white' land have been repeatedly faced with severe repression by the Zanu (PF) government (1983:1)

The debate about the transition has, however, transcended these two seemingly irreconcilable approaches outlined above. There appears to be a growing trajectory within Zimbabwean (and to an extent African) transition theory that looks at both opportunities and constraints confronting the new African state, factors which can explain the degree(s) of state autonomy as well as the locus of decision-making. Pillay, for example, has characterised the post-apartheid South African state as "a site of contradictory impulses and tensions" (2003a: 1). He cites the new state's complex

attempt to balance two alternative—and potentially competing and contradictory—models of democracy namely liberal democracy that facilitates elite rule and economic growth through private enterprise; as well as the more radical, participatory model that places a high premium on redistributive policies. Zimbabwe's transition has also been characterised largely in these terms (see Herbst, 1990; Mandaza, 1987; Darbon, 1992).

Of interest to this study is the manner in which these contradictory impulses in Zimbabwe's negotiated transition presented both constraints and opportunities to the selected media's framing of political contestation in the country.

2.7 Reflections on the State and Civil Society in Zimbabwe

Given its role as the predominant and most influential player in media policy and practice during the period under study, it is important to briefly reflect on the nature of the state and its relations with civil society in Zimbabwe. As argued in Chapter Four, Zanu PF in 1980 inherited a state which, despite having been 'bruised' during the war, was largely intact and remained "the most concrete symbol of settler defiance" (Herbst, 1990:26). It was a state which had survived UN sanctions by implementing a raft of successful economic measures including import substitution. Besides, the inherited state had an efficient bureaucracy which was tailored mainly to serve white minority interests, while its instruments of force and violence were also designed to be agile enough to deal with black nationalist uprising. Not only was the Rhodesian state (and later the Zimbabwean state) intimately involved in every aspect of the economy, it was also a state which had been effectively 'captured' by the then ruling Rhodesian Front (RF) party for hegemonic purposes (Saunders, 1991). In 'capturing' the state the RF represented an alliance between the white middle class and local manufacturing interests, pitted against what a senior Rhodesian government official described as "villains" who represented "the fraudulent device of international capital" (Nicolle, 1971:2). Large multinational enterprises were generally liberal-oriented and sought accommodation with the liberation movements in the interests of a more stable political and economic climate conducive to big, export-oriented business. This went against the political agenda of the RF, which had vowed to rule in perpetuity.

The infiltration and dominance of the state by the ruling party continued when Zanu PF won the elections and assumed power in 1980. Then Prime Minister Mugabe famously remarked in 1984 that the ruling party was

> …more important than the government and…the Central Committee is above the Cabinet because Ministers derive their power from Zanu PF…In the future there will be no separation of the party from state organs, because after the national congress in August, government programmes will be based on the resolutions of the Zanu PF Central Committee (Herbst, 1990: 7).

Indeed, to follow up on this promise, the Mugabe government created a Senior Ministry of Political Affairs with the mandate of coordinating party-government relations and activities. The Ministry was staffed mainly by ruling party cadres whose salaries were drawn from state coffers (Herbst, 1990). Notwithstanding its infiltration by the ruling party, the state in Zimbabwe retained legitimacy for much of the first decade of independence, and pursued a developmental agenda under its "Growth with equity" plan which emphasized economic growth and expansion of social services of health and education (Mlambo, 1997). At the time, Zanu PF represented an alliance of diverse interests including peasants, workers, aspirant black bourgeoisie and middle class as well as liberal white capitalist interests (see Mandaza, 1987; Campbell, 2003). However, during the 'second' transition, the dominant interests in Zanu PF became local and foreign capital allied to a stronger bureaucratic class and a rising black bourgeoisie. This explains the state's decision to adopt ESAP in 1991 amidst opposition from workers, whose interests at the time had taken a back seat[10]. This new alignment of forces came against the background of economic stagnation and a ballooning national debt by the end of the 'first' transition. In an era characterised by a global move towards neo-liberal thinking and the predominance of the IMF and World Bank, Zimbabwe's political and economic elites fell for what was hitherto

[10] Mandaza and Sachikonye's edited volume, *The One Party State and Democracy: The Zimbabwe Debate* (1991) contains insightful critical reflections on the ruling party's ideological and policy shifts during a phase characterised by global changes following the demise of the Soviet Union. The Zanu PF government's adoption of the market friendly Investment Code in 1990 and subsequent implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) is cited in the volume as a reflection of the shifts in the nature of the dominant forces and interests being served by the ruling party (see Sachikonye's article, 'The Context of the Democracy Debate' in particular).

viewed as the ultimate solution to the country's economic crisis (Bond & Manyanya, 2002).

Evans (1995) provides an insightful characterisation of states on the basis of an analysis of state-society relations, which can arguably help explain the changes in the nature of the state in Zimbabwe. Focusing on the role of the state in industrial transformation in the so-called developing world, Evans comes up with three categories of states; namely developmental, intermediate and predatory states. Developmental states are coherent entities with institutionalised bureaucratic power which keeps individual incumbent leaders from unevenly aligning with sectional interests to the detriment of everything else. These states also "help formulate (developmental) projects that go beyond responding to the immediate demands of politically powerful constituencies" (Evans, 1995:248). Although they are relatively autonomous, developmental states are also embedded with key social classes which share the state's broader transformative and developmental goals, rather than just their narrow interests. The ability to sustain the intricate balance of "embedded autonomy" through a continual negotiation and renegotiation with different societal interests defines the developmental state. For all its corporate coherence, however, the developmental state is always in danger of being 'captured' by any one of these societal interests and in the process lose its developmental character and degenerate into a clientelistic and predatory state.

Unlike developmental states, the predatory state "preys on its citizenry, terrorising them, despoiling their common patrimony, and providing little in the way of service in return" (Ibid, p.45). By extracting at the expense of society, predatory states undermine development even in the narrow sense of capital accumulation. In these states, the bureaucracy is rapacious, and rent-taking is a means of survival right from the top to the lower echelons of state power. The only source of cohesion in predatory states is individual ties, and individual maximisation takes precedence over societal, collective goals (Ibid, p.12). Evans cites Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) under President Mobutu Sese Seko as the archetypal predatory state.

The third category is the intermediate state. This state contains "some semblance of bureaucratic organisation, but not the degree of corporate coherence enjoyed by

developmental states" (Ibid, p. 45). Because of this character, intermediate states find it harder to maintain the contradictory balance of embedded autonomy which drives developmental states. Evans places Brazil and India in this category.

To the extent that the state in Zimbabwe enjoyed societal legitimacy and spearheaded development and transformation, it could be characterised as an intermediary state—with a very close approximation of the developmental state—during the first decade of independence. However, by the end of the second decade and the beginning of the third, the state had developed strong predatory tendencies. At the time, state 'capture' by a narrow set of interests in control of the ruling party followed the failure of liberalisation, in the process strengthening the predatory features of the state. Its popular legitimacy had vanished in the wake of the biting effects of ESAP and growing corruption within the bureaucracy, among other things. To contain the rising popular disenchantment, the state resorted to brute force rather than negotiation with the affected social groups. Saunders and Saul (2005) describe the nature of the state in Zimbabwe in the midst of a serious legitimacy crisis after more than two decades of independence:

> …(we) now see an unprecedented degree of militarization of the state and politics, and a political economy characterised by its subordination to the survival of the ruling party. It is an extremely dangerous period, not least because militarization solves none of the underlying problems to which the democratic movement was reacting in the late 1990s…The "securitisation scenario" might enable Zanu PF to hold on to power, but not its legitimacy (Saunders & Saul, 2005: 16)

By the time of crisis during the 'third' transition, the state in Zimbabwe was caught up in a classical paradox of being too 'strong' to die because of its militarised nature, yet too weak to successfully address the economic and political crisis gripping the country. Coercion became the only way through which the state engaged with affected social interests, including workers and sections of the private media.

To conclude my discussion of the state, I would argue that during the first decade of independence the state was a legitimate, intermediate state which exhibited "partial and imperfect approximations of embedded autonomy" characteristic of

developmental states (Evans, 1995:13). It represented an alliance of diverse (and potentially conflicting) social interests, while at the same time retaining some corporate coherence which made it possible to spearhead a range of economic and social development programmes. However, the second and third decades saw the state transform into an authoritarian and predatory state which became less and less accountable to the broader society for its actions.

The changes which occurred within the state during the period under study partly mirrored changes in state-civil society relations. Although civil society does not constitute the primary focus of this study, it is important to briefly reflect on its conceptualisation and constitution in the Zimbabwean context because it informed state-press-capital relations as well. Keane (1988:14) defines civil society in general as an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged primarily in a complex range of non-state activities—economic and cultural production, voluntary associations and household life—and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions. This conceptualisation of civil society would include institutions such as the independent media, professional associations, student movements, religious groups and co-operatives.

According to Pillay, civil society is a contested terrain which includes a "vast array of voluntary associations that make every day life, from business associations to trade unions, stokvels and religious groups, in dialectical unity with all other spheres"(Pillay, 1996:341). This conceptualisation breaks society into three partially overlapping spheres, namely political society, economic society and civil society (Ibid). Political society includes political parties and the legislature; economic society includes the corporate or market sector; while civil society includes non-profit and voluntary groups such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions and professional bodies. For purposes of this study, civil society is taken to refer to the third sphere of society consisting of non-profit and/or voluntary organisations including trade unions, women's groups, students unions, human rights and church groups. It excludes the 'economic society,' which consists of representatives of capital because this sector is studied separately in terms of its relations with the press and the

state in Zimbabwe, as well as its influence on media framing of political contestation in the transition.

Relations between state and civil society have been the subject of much debate. Neo-liberal approaches argue that a vibrant civil society which is key to any democratisation process should necessarily be 'liberated' from the state (Sachikonye, 1995:7) In this view, institutions such as the independent media should be at the forefront of scrutinising the state as watchdogs to prevent the latter's infringement of the rights of citizens. Other institutions of civil society should also, according to this view, be on guard against statism of any kind, including the prominent role of the state in the economy. There are also other approaches which view civil society-state relations as not always characterised by struggle and adversity. Stewart (1997) has noted that: "Groups within civil society may be allied with the state or opposed to it, or both at different times. They may also be co-opted by the state. The state is not necessarily always the villain of the piece"(1997: 17).

Mandaza (1991) shares this view of civil society-state relations, especially with regards to Africa. He views their relationship in dialectical terms rather than as one of diametrical opposites. In the case of Zimbabwe, the relationship, he argues, depends on the extent to which civil society in its totality continues to

> …temper the *political instinct* characteristic of a dependent compradorian post-colonial state, at times variously constituting a key element within the state, and at other times variously posing as the *unofficial opposition* when the state has become so weak as to self-propel itself towards the *one-party-state* (emphasis original) (Mandaza, 1991: 39).

This characterisation of state-civil society relations also conforms to Pillay's notion of a 'progressive' civil society forging a tension-ridden alliance with the emerging democratic state, if only to ensure that its democratic potential is fulfilled (Pillay, 1996). At the same time, this sphere of society should be independent enough to check on a state that is sliding towards authoritarianism.

In Zimbabwe, state-civil society relations assumed the dialectical character described by the scholars cited above. There were phases during which sections of civil society

and the state were on the same side, and yet during others there were fierce struggles between them. As noted earlier in this chapter, during the first decade of independence, the Zanu PF-controlled state represented an (uneasy) alliance of civil society and corporate interests which shared the party's broad political, economic and social programme. The creation of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU) among others, with the help of state institutions, reflect the extent to which the state sought to maintain alliances in civil society. This was largely for hegemonic purposes (Saunders, 1991). The discussion below focuses on the state's management of the early transition partly through co-option of civil society and rival (or potential rival) centres of power.

2.7.1 Managing the Transition in Zimbabwe: State-Labour Relations

One of the key features of the Zimbabwean ruling elite's construction and management of the transition was its co-option of rival centres of power within civil society. One way of doing this was to bring the labour movement into its ambit. Labour unions had been subordinate but very critical partners in the nationalist movement during the liberation struggle, and with the attainment of independence in 1980, Zanu PF decided to pre-empt any potential rival centre of power by spearheading the merger of the existing six labour federations into one national union, the ZCTU (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 1997). So involved was the government in the ZCTU's formation that the labour body's inaugural leadership consisted almost exclusively of members of the ruling Zanu PF. (The founding Secretary-General of ZCTU, Albert Mugabe, was the then Prime Minister's brother and leading member of the ruling party).

The creation of the ZCTU in 1981 followed the government's harsh suppression of a series of wildcat strikes by workers protesting against low wages. The rationale was to enforce 'discipline' and 'responsibility' in the workplace, a goal which the state shared with (mainstream, white) capital and the clientelist leadership of organised labour (Saunders, 1991: 33). Because of its infiltration by the ruling party, the ZCTU was for the greater part of the first decade of independence a subordinate partner of the state. However, as discussed in Chapter Five, the labour body later decoupled itself from the state and led a coalition of other civil society groups in protests against

increased state tyranny and grinding poverty for workers in the wake of ESAP during the 'second' and 'third' transitions. Many of the civil society groups which emerged after the 'first' transition were non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which grew up in response to the impoverishing effects of ESAP.

2.7.2 Managing the Transition: Economic Policy

In Zimbabwe, the attainment of majority rule was achieved through negotiations, which resulted in legal and political frameworks binding the emergent ruling elite to, among others, the creation of a government of national unity incorporating former colonial rulers as well as the protection of private property, including land (Mandaza, 1987, Mlambo, 1997). There have been arguments that this arrangement, while significant in ensuring both a smooth transition and investor confidence, in practical terms also meant a subtle relocation of the power for the Rhodesian white elite from the political to the economic and therefore a legalised continuance of the skewed status quo that nationalists had fought against for many years (Mandaza, Ibid, Astrow, 1983). The Lancaster House constitution which resulted from cease-fire talks in 1979, enshrined property rights, including a controversial 10-year moratorium on land reform. It is perhaps because of all these factors that the first decade of independence in that country has been described by some critics as a period that "saw very little progress (being) made in social and economic redistribution" (Sachikonye, 1997:107)

Zimbabwe inherited a highly skewed economy that had suffered years of international sanctions, global recession and a full-scale armed struggle that had drained state coffers (Herbst, 1990). The new government implemented economic policies that were an attempt to both redress the past inequalities and attract investment—especially foreign direct investment—for growth. The two aims were from the beginning contradictory (Mandaza, 1987; Chan, 2003). The first decade of independence witnessed a mixed economic policy which was both interventionist and market friendly. The challenge was to achieve economic development in the context of "growth with equity" which meant increased state investment in hitherto neglected social services such as education and health for the majority of the people (Mlambo, 1997; Chipika *et al*, 2000). However, by the end of the first decade the economy remained stalled and debt-ridden because excessive state borrowing to finance the social sector was not matched by increased investment into the economy. This forced

the government to adopt the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-initiated Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991, and later extend it in 1995. Among other things, the austerity measures entailed a drastic reduction in government expenditure in the social sector, and the opening up of the economy to free market competition. Despite the promises of improved livelihoods for citizens that accompanied the adoption of ESAP, the reality is that the programme led to the worsening of life for ordinary people in Zimbabwe and a negation of the gains that the government had made in the first decade of independence (Mlambo, 1997; Chipika *et al*, 2000).

At the same time, the projected increase in foreign investment did not materialise as envisaged (Bond and Manyanya, 2003). The social and economic impact of ESAP programmes led to workers' unrest and disillusionment, which in turn led to the formation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 as a direct offshoot of the ZCTU. The manner in which the state handled the economic transition attracted significant debate in the press at election time. Analysis of the media's representation of these debates as they were played out at election time can provide insight into the interplay between the media and centres of political and economic power in the changing society. There is therefore no doubt that the nature of the economic and political transition in Zimbabwe was and remains a highly debated subject that has presented the press with both opportunities and constraints in terms of its role as a discursive realm. It is therefore important to explore those factors from both within and beyond the media organisations.

2.8 The Media Context in Zimbabwe

The history of the press in Zimbabwe is traceable to the arrival of British colonialists who, two years after occupying the south-western part of the country, launched the first daily, the *Rhodesia Herald* in 1892 (Mararike, 1997). The South African-based Argus group later bought the major newspapers in Zimbabwe—including the *Rhodesia Herald* and its sister publication, the *Chronicle* (launched in 1894), among other small weeklies—consolidating them under a company called Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company (RPP). As was the case in most other African states, the press in Zimbabwe was therefore from the onset linked to colonial capital. It was not until the late 1950s that alternative, black-targeted newspapers were launched. Some

of these papers included the *African Daily News,* as well as *Parade* magazine. There were also irregular but highly critical Church-run publications such as *Umbowo* and *Chapupu.* This press was, however, limited in circulation and for the most part had to contend with the restrictive Rhodesian laws. Ziegler and Asante (1992) summarise the kind of news the mainstream colonial press carried:

> …(W)hat the colonials read in their newspapers were stories of promotions, transfers, births to colonial personnel, deaths, and other service news. Nothing occurred in the press to indicate that there were people other than colonial administrators in the territory. The desires and wishes of the Africa people in social, cultural, economic or political terms were simply ignored. In the old *Rhodesia Herald* not until the 1950s did the editor hint at the possibility that Africans, among whom the whites lived, existed and had ideas and problems of their own (Ziegler & Asante, 1992:24)

At independence, the Zimbabwe government bought off the Argus shares and established the Zimbabwe Newspapers company under the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which was meant to be a buffer between the state and the media (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, 1991). But from the onset, as discussed in Chapter Four, the trustees and board members were closely aligned to the ruling party and hence the idea of a buffer never really materialised. In effect, the biggest newspaper company in Zimbabwe has since independence been controlled by the government.

The private press, which had survived brutal colonial legal deterrents to publishing, expanded marginally at independence in 1980. The major private media were the weekly *Financial Gazette*, the Catholic Church-owned *Moto* magazine and the popular magazine *Parade*. The real expansion of the private press was to occur following the liberalisation of the economy in 1991. By the end of the 'second' transition, Zimbabwe had close to a dozen privately-owned national and regional weeklies, although a few folded during the same period. However, these private newspapers did not succeed in challenging the market hegemony of the state-owned Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) stable, which, by 2004, boasted of two well established dailies and three weeklies.

It can be argued that Zimbabwe represents the 'old' pattern of state ownership of media that characterises many countries in Southern Africa, quite unlike South Africa, for example, which may be seen as representing the 'new' neo-liberal Africa where the state has no direct investment business in the media. Also, Zimbabwe in the post-2000 era promulgated some of the harshest laws on the media, the most controversial being the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which provides for compulsory registration of journalists and media organisations that practise journalism in the country. These laws and policies are discussed elsewhere in this study (Chapter Six). The nature of the transition in Zimbabwe—in particular the various challenges that confront the transforming state, as well as its policy directions—has profound influence over the way the press in that country mediates debates and issues at different stages of the transition.

2.8.1 The Media and Transition: Some Comparative Perspectives

The media often have the complex role of reporting or representing issues in the transition, while at the same time being themselves institutions in transition. For a critical political economy perspective, how institutions in transition report the same process is tied to the dynamics of the transitional process, in particular the shifting power relations between and among the players in transition. As Rozumilowics (2002) notes, the nature of the 'democratic' transition influences both the nature of media reforms as well as the role the media can play in the transition itself[11]. Using a "stages of transition" model in the context of mostly post-Cold War political and economic transitions across the world, Rozumilowics argues that throughout the pre, primary, secondary and mature stages of transition, the media have important roles to play, relative to the nature of the transition. During the pre-transition era, media actors ideally should "attempt to widen the level of discourse and room for regime criticism within a society…they also attempt to pinpoint reformist tendencies within the authoritarian regime, embryonic opposition groups or latent sectors of an emerging civil society to lend them support" (2002:24).

[11] Rozumilowics discusses three different types of transitions, namely internally pacted transitions where the former regime and the newly emerging opposition forces agree on a framework of free and fair elections or a codified transfer of power or positions of authority to the opposition; and externally pacted transitions which involve the mediation of third parties. The third category includes ruptured transitions which normally occur through revolutionary overthrow of the previous regime. See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the Zimbabwean transition.

During the primary and secondary stages of transition, the media's role focuses on closely monitoring the establishment of 'democratic' political, institutional or economic structures in society (Ibid:20). These phases may include developments like constitution-making, repeal of old repressive legislation and formulation of new laws, including media laws, and the adoption of new economic policies. Because media reforms of one kind or another also normally accompany political and social reform, media institutions also ideally have to scrutinise and inform the media reform process. The late/mature transitional phase should see media professionals and policymakers consolidating their work within the new institutional system "while incorporating larger portions of society into the process in order to broaden the democratic discussion" (Ibid: 24).

Rozumilowicz's characterisation of transitions and the role of the media in the process is important in the sense in which it situates media as institutions which are both in transition themselves and which also seek to influence the direction of the transition through reporting on changes within the broader society. As indicated above, it is important to note that the degree and nature of transition will vary from country to country, so will the alignment of forces and relations between media and other institutions in the transition (Sandbrook, 1996).

In most countries in South America, for example, the transition from autocracy to democracy did not witness the decoupling of the media from the state despite the deregulation of economies (Waisbord, 2000). The different configurations of the relations among media, states and capital/markets determined the way they mediated the transitional processes. Waisbord (2000) notes in relation to the transforming South American societies that "press economics remained attached to both states and markets. The pursuit of commercial ambitions remained solidly tied to the state rather than just to the market" (p.51).

In some of these cases, as in most parts of transforming Africa, state departments continued to be in charge of decisions that determined the future of newspapers, for example the allocation of foreign exchange, importation of newsprint and technology, taxes and tariffs. Sandbrook (1996) notes that in many newly democratic African countries, governments regard the private media with suspicion, perceiving them as

partisan, and therefore seek to tame or bypass them. Their (governments') tactics normally include

> a continuing public monopoly of broadcasting outlets, the intimidation of reporters and owners of printing presses, the application of stringent libel and media laws, delays or cut offs in the allocation of imported newsprint, and the withdrawal of governmental advertising from critical newspapers (Sandbrook, 1996:81).

In some transitions it may be interesting to note that while there may be a realignment of the media themselves in terms of ownership and editorial orientation, in most cases they continue to function as political tribunes identified with distinctive political, economic and ideological interests. In such cases, the idea of political dispassion and neutrality stands contrary to the stark realities of the socio-political context, and therefore has little chances for success (Sparks & Reading, 1998; Waisbord, 2000; Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). In South Africa, Tomaselli has argued that the post-1994 shifts in the ownership structure of the previously stable commercial media industry in that country was accompanied by changes in the "political and ideological allegiance of each of the media corporations" (2002:129). However, Tomaselli points out that these shifts in ideological or political positioning did not necessarily broaden public access to the mediated public sphere because the whole exercise was underwritten by elites, both economic and political. Within South African civil society, there is also continuing debate on whether the public service broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) actually enjoys editorial and programming autonomy enshrined in the country's laws, especially in light of its proximity to the ruling ANC government as well as its predominant reliance on the market for funding (see, Haffajee, 2006; Kadalie, 2005; Green, 2006; Duncan, 2002).

In South East Asia, the case of Taiwan draws interesting parallels to the African and South American cases. The ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party from 1949-1987 tried to maintain control over civil society through a combination of coercion and co-option, resulting in the establishment of a patron-client relationship between the state and the media. Chin-Chuan Lee (2000) notes that unlike in advanced capitalist countries where state power may be embedded within the economic system, Taiwan, as is the case in some African countries, typifies "state corporatism of late developing

countries in which the state plays a dominant role in shaping power distribution and deciding economic policies" (p.126).

While many approaches to the role and place of the media in transition view media as subordinate institutions to political and economic elites, others stress the media's agency. In his analysis of the media and the public sphere in post-1994 South Africa, Jacobs (2003) argues that the decline of more direct forms of political articulation and representation after the attainment of political freedom has seen the media emerging as political actors in their own right. The fact that the media frequently have a combative relationship with big business and the ruling party is cited as an illustration of the fact that the media are no longer pawns in service of power. He notes that the media are not "merely conduits for the government, political parties or citizens in post-apartheid South Africa, but have emerged as autonomous power centres in competition with other power centres" (2003:41).

Gunther, Montero and Wert (2000), in a study of the role of the media in Spain's democratic transition during the late 1970s and early 1980s, also stress the agency of the media. They note:

> Given the shallow penetration of party organisations into Spanish society, coupled with the weakness or absence of other secondary organisations with explicit ties to political parties, the media served as the principal channels for the flow to citizens of partisan cues, democratic values, political information, and norms of tolerance of different political views (2000:51).

Besides being channels for multiple social and political interests within the Spanish society, the media as social actors in their own right placed a variety of important democratic reforms on the public agenda. For example, they consistently campaigned against the continuation of the authoritarian *franquismo* system of the day and presented democracy as the only viable option for the country. The media in general presented "a realistic and attractive model for the exit from authoritarianism based on pacts and transactions, on gradualisms, and on the adaptability of the demands of political actors and social forces to greatly altered circumstances" (Ibid:51).

The foregoing comparative reflections show that media are key institutions in political transitions, and that their roles can be both embedded within but also autonomous

from other institutions in the transition. The interface of the press, the state and capital in transforming societies should therefore be viewed not as just deterministic or antagonistic. Rather, it should be seen as a relationship that is intermeshed, fluid, dialectical, and even blurred—with profound implications for the media's role in relation to the public sphere.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins the study. In analysing both media content and the context of its production in relation to the public sphere ideal, it is hoped that a broader understanding of the media's institutional role in the particular context of Zimbabwe's transition will be acquired. The public sphere, as an analytic category, was discussed at length in the chapter, which adopted a more nuanced definition of it as a multilayered, porous phenomenon in which participants and causes are drawn from a cross-section of society or societies, and one whose functions are key to democracy. The media's role in democracy and democratic transition was identified as more or less synonymous with their public sphere role; that is, their ability (or inability) to provide expression to these multi-faceted discursive realms where citizens representing different social interests deliberate on issues of mutual concern. In pursuing the media's role in relation to the public sphere in the case of Zimbabwe, this study chose to apply the critical political economy of the media perspective because of its holistic approach to media representation and its awareness of changes in both the media and society and their implications for the study of media performance. Critical political economy allows one to study the interface between the state-press-capital relations and patterns of media representations of political contestation in the transition; rather than just focus on either media content alone or media relations with centres of political and economic power alone as enough to tell the whole story surrounding media framing of political life. The chapter has also outlined the main perspectives around the nature of the transition in Zimbabwe. In so doing, attention was paid to the role of the media both as institutions that are themselves in transition and as ones that represent other institutions in the same process.