An opposition newspaper under an oppressive regime:
A critical analysis of The Daily News

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Abstract
This study focuses on the unprecedented ways in which newspaper journalism helped the cause of democratisation at the height of the economic and political governance crisis, also known as the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’, from 1997 to 2010. The research is designed as a qualitative case study of The Daily News, an independent private newspaper. It was based on semi-structured interviews with respondents, who were mainly journalists and politicians living in Zimbabwe. The analytical lens of alternative media facilitates a construction of how The Daily News and its journalists experienced, reported, confronted and navigated state authoritarianism in a historical moment of political turmoil. The study discusses the complex relationships between the independent and privately owned press, the political opposition and civil society organisations. The research provides an original analysis of the operations of The Daily News and its journalists in the context of a highly undemocratic political moment. Some journalists crossed the floor to join civic and opposition forces in order to confront the state. The state responded through arrests and physical attacks against the journalists; however, journalists continued to work with opposition forces while the government enacted repressive media and security law to curtail coverage of the crisis.

Keywords
Alternative media, activism, cross-membership, urgency, radical, social change, opposition, advocacy, Zimbabwe

Introduction
This research focuses on the role played by an independent newspaper in opposition politics in Zimbabwe, at the height of the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’ from 1997 to 2010. It was a time when, among other things, the Zimbabwe government tightened its grip on the media in order to influence and maintain its dominant position in defining and articulating the crisis, ‘both at home and in the Diaspora, as well as its critics abroad’ (Chiambu and Moyo, 2009: 180). As suggested by Hammar and Raftopoulos (2003: 3) and Raftopoulos, (2003: 217), there are contentious debates about what constituted and caused the crisis. However, it is generally agreed that the crisis had local and global dimensions that were located in a failing economy, resulting in massive shortages of basic commodities such as food and fuel, social and political unrest, the disputed and often violent land acquisition program and the imposition of sanctions by the West. Hammar and Raftopoulos (2003: 3) persuasively submit that, despite different and numerous scholarly interrogations, this was a multifaceted crisis:

It is a crisis generated by and generating particular ensembles of politics and practice related to at least three intertwining analytical themes and empirical areas: the politics

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Opposition politics in Zimbabwe appeared to be dominated by state power during the Zimbabwe Crisis. However, not much recognition has been given to the formal and informal coalition of forces that arose to effectively challenge the erosion of democratic freedoms by the ruling forces that has occurred since Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980. In this regard, Willems (2010: 1) has, for example, usefully argued that the absence of physical protests in the streets of Zimbabwe should not be equated with the absence of resistance. This approach replaces the narrow focus on the forms of resistance associated with dramatic revolutions and grand rebellions that is often used by journalists and scholars, with a profound assessment of everyday forms of resistance – such as popular culture – used by Zimbabweans to challenge the increasingly undemocratic state (Willems, 2010: 1). It is therefore persuasive and significant to also interrogate the role of the informal and formal forces that teamed up to challenge undemocratic state practices. As Chabal (2014: xiii) notes:

The salience of civil society in Africa thus arose from the idea that it embodied the productive resistance of ordinary people against the authoritarian state, which monopolized power and exploited the populace.

This study considers how the emerging Zimbabwean democracy responded to a scathing newspaper and its journalists, who mobilised various forms of opposition politics against perceived authoritarianism. While it is not unusual for some sections of national media to oppose the state, this study examines the experiences of the privately owned ‘independent’ newspaper and its journalists, who were outspoken about and critical of undemocratic tendencies at a time of heightened political and economic crisis.

The focus and rationale of the study

While it is not unusual for the mass media to be controlled by undemocratic governments, the same mass media can also act as a site of opposition politics in oppressive regimes. Unger (1990: 371) argues that, in an oppressive political system, at particular moments the mass media – especially a free press – can be an effective platform for public debate, which can help to challenge the status quo in emerging democracies with weak political opposition parties.

The study of a leading privately owned newspaper, *The Daily News*, is significant in helping to explore the manner in which activist journalists and the privately owned news media have confronted an undemocratic regime. The investigation addresses a gap in the existing academic work in media and communications, which has underplayed the role of alternative newspapers and journalists in opposing the policies of an increasingly undemocratic political regime, particularly at the time of the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’. At stake is the agency of such media institutions and journalists.

The research adds new insights from empirical and verifiable data, and the original personal experiences and insights of the journalists, using their own voices and the reasons why they confronted a repressive government. Opposition parties gained unprecedented support in the period under analysis. Other studies have explored the role of alternative media, such as new media, in the processes of the organisation and mobilisation of the ‘movement for globalization’ (Kavada, 2005: 72). This research acknowledges the various scholarly works and contributions on alternative media and journalism by Atton (2004, 2007), which recognise the connection between alternative media and social change through such platforms as radio, blogs and the network of independent media centres known as Indymedia, where journalists actively report news from their involvement in social causes such as protests. However, this study focuses on an alternative newspaper and its journalists to enrich and build on this analytic framework in a context often marked by state violence against journalists and other agitators for...
social change, where the newspaper had informal relations and alliances with opposition forces while maintaining its autonomy. It further builds on the significant contributions of the recent scholarly work of Skjerdal (2012) on normative African journalism models, in which he suggests three alternative journalism models: journalism for social change, communalism journalism and journalism based on oral discourse. Of relevance to this investigation, and supporting Atton (2002) and Downing’s (2001) major contributions on alternative media, is Skjerdal’s (2012: 640) articulation of journalism for social change, which entails advocacy, activist, liberation and revolutionary journalism among other variables. Skerdal (2012: 641) argues that journalism for social change champions the journalist as ‘a change agent’.

Background and context of the study

From 1980, when the country gained independence from Britain, and in all the independence elections in 1985, 1990, 1995 and 1996, the ruling ZANU PF enjoyed huge mandates from the electorate, arguably on the basis of its liberation credentials. However, at the turn of the century, Zimbabwe was grappling with deep political and economic crises that were, among other things, a result of the failed structural adjustment programs implemented in 1990, attempts to impose a one-party-state and involvement in regional war in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998, democratic deficits and rising poverty among the working class, student and workers’ strikes, and civil society organisations calling for constitutional reforms (Hammar and Raftopoulos, 2003; Saunders, 2000). Mustapha and Whitefield (2009: 216) submitted that by the late 1990s and then more rapidly after 2000, ‘the logic of the Zimbabwean state was rapidly transformed. With a worsening economic crisis and the strictures of structural adjustment, the state became partisan as it strove to maintain control.’ Alexander (2009: 189) suggests that the ZANU PF’s strategies of the mid-1990s left it politically vulnerable. Structural adjustment, a stalled land reform program, declining state capacity and accountability, and elite corruption combined to undermine the political capital derived from the delivery of development and the nationalist mantle.

Alexander (2009: 185) submits that the combination of a new and vibrant political opposition, the violent farm invasions of the largely white-owned farms, and the holding of deeply flawed and disputed elections changed the political situation in Zimbabwe in 2000. She suggests that two specific events reshaped the possibilities for Zimbabwe politics in 1997. The first of these was the ZANU PF government’s decision to accede to the demands of material compensation made by the war veterans of the 1970s liberation war. The second was the designation of more than 1400 mostly white-owned commercial farms for compulsory acquisition by the state, precipitating what critical voices have termed the ‘crisis’ of 2000, and what the government has termed the ‘third chimurenga’, or uprising, of descendants of those previously disadvantaged by colonialism after 1890. The period between 1997 and 1999 was therefore a crucial historic era in opposition politics and Zimbabwean democratisation struggles. First, civic society groups – such as students, labour, academics and the church – came together in 1997 to form the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). Raftopoulos suggests that the emergence of the NCA in 1997 represented a convergence of a critique of the state around the issues of political democratisation and economic change, constructed through the organisational frameworks of the churches, the emerging human rights organisations and the labour movement.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was at the centre of mobilising and organising the formation of the NCA. The NCA’s role was to push for democratic constitutional reforms. In March 1997, the ZCTU organised an effective mass stay-away from work by both public and private sector workers to protest against food and fuel price rises (Saunders, 2000). President Mugabe’s government immediately sought action to ensure that stay-aways would be avoided. In January 1998, after two days of riots over a steep rise in food and fuel prices in the
country, mainly in the capital Harare, the government met in an emergency session and decided to establish a program of limited price control. It is significant to note that the political and economic crises that engulfed the state in the late 1990s were not represented by any opposition political party because opposition politics were weak and in disarray. As Alexander (2009: 188) notes, in the mid 1990s:

workers and civil servants struck repeatedly. Others were also unhappy with the shifts of the late 1980s and 1990s; the independent press was blossoming and grew increasingly outspoken and critical, students protested over time and again not least over corruption, intellectuals vocally expressed their disenchantment, and civic groups were formed to demand political rights, state accountability and constitutional rights.

Some leaders of the NCA, mainly from labour, left the civic body and formed the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999. Like the NCA, the MDC was formed under the stewardship of ZCTU. The new opposition party, the MDC, was made up of many disparate groups with contradictory interests – workers, employers, white commercial farmers, peasants, students and non-governmental organisations (Hammar and Raftopoulos, 2003).

Following pressure, President Mugabe conceded to the demands that were expressed through demonstrations in Zimbabwe, together with other demands that the 1979 Lancaster House Constitution was too heavily influenced by the country’s colonial past. On 21 May 1999, President Mugabe announced the convening of a Constitutional Convention to draft a new constitution. The outcome was rejected in a Constitutional Referendum in February 2000.

My research contends that these disparate voices were helpfully brought together by The Daily News. My argument is that, while The Daily News did not manufacture the social discontent, it influenced, reflected and affected how the Zimbabwe Crisis was reported in its news coverage. The Daily News was a private, oppositional newspaper formed in April 1999 by private business people and former journalists with a history of confrontation with President Mugabe’s government. It was structured as a commercial newspaper to be later led by business telecoms tycoon Strive Masiyiwa, who controlled 60 per cent of the shares in 2000. Masiyiwa had fought previous court battles against the government to win a cellular licence in 1998.

There was a history of confrontation with the owners of the paper. Through its alternative journalism, the paper provided oppressed voices and ordinary people a platform from which to articulate their issues and challenge abuse of power. The Daily News positioned itself as the alternative thought leader, organiser and mobiliser against state forces, with the intention of rejuvenating the emerging democracy. Unprecedented, though, was its sustained alternative journalism approach, which relied not only on experts as sources in its news coverage, but on systematically and deliberately focusing on, and telling the stories of, the ordinary victims of political repression.

The Daily News was also the only private and daily run newspaper in a country where the government had a firm grip on the public media, with two major daily sycophantic newspapers, The Herald and The Chronicle, published in Harare and Bulawayo, the country’s first and second largest cities respectively. As asserted by Atton and Hamilton (2008) in their overview of the complex nature of alternative journalism, The Daily News was not merely an opposite of the mainstream and government-controlled news media: it captured the issues of the moment in the context of an enormous governance crisis. The newspaper set the agenda during the three main elections during in its life: the referendum of February 2000, the June 2000 elections and the 2002 presidential elections. Twice, in March 2000 and January 2001, The Daily News had its offices and printing machines respectively bombed by assailants who were never prosecuted (Hammar and Raftopoulos, 2003; Nyarota, 2006).

The Zimbabwe government responded by putting together repressive laws targeting the media in order to exclude critical perspectives on the governance and legitimacy crises.
(Chiumbu and Moyo, 2009: 180). The battery of new laws that undermined the performance of news media included the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002, which among other things compelled journalists and media institutions practising in Zimbabwe to register with a government-appointed commission. The Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001 entrenched the monopoly of the sole state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, to the extent that no private television or radio stations operated in the country, while the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 infringed on the exercise of fundamental civil and political liberties by making it unlawful to assemble, protest or demonstrate without police authority.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative study utilising in-depth interviews. The use of a qualitative method was to preserve and analyse the situated form, content, and experiences of social action, rather than to subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argue that actual talk and gestures are some of the raw materials of analysis in qualitative studies. The respondents were current and former journalists and the management of The Daily News, former and current senior government officials (among them three cabinet ministers), civic society activists and political party representatives.

Data were recorded using a voice recorder and written notes were taken as backup. Liamputtong (2009: 42) argues that interviews in social science research are understood as special conversations, while Holstein and Gubrium (2003, in Liamputtong 2009: 42) suggest that ‘interviewing is a means of collecting empirical data about the social world of individuals by inviting them to talk about [their] lives in great depth’. An important observation in this research is that the researcher heard the perspectives of the interviewees in their own words, and came to know about the respondents’ social circumstances. The research provides the authentic voices and stories of the lived circumstances of the respondents. The process of interviewing is one in which researchers continually make choices that are based on the scope of the research, interests and prior theories about which data they intend to extract and explore further with the respondents and the data they do not want to pursue (Jones, 1985: 47). However, Jones cautions that in carrying out the interviews, ambiguity should be avoided (1985: 47). The problem of ambiguity arises when the researcher allows the respondents to ramble in any direction they choose without giving specific directions as to the purpose of the interview. This problem can be encountered if the respondents have no clear idea of what the researcher’s interests and intentions are. Jones argues that researchers are more likely to get useful data if respondents are informed at the outset about the research topic, even in broad terms, and provided with justification for the researcher’s interest in the investigation.

In the process of carrying out the interviews for this study, the respondents were informed about the research topic, objectives, interests and the reasons behind the study, and also informed that consent needed to be granted by the interviewees. The most significant aspect that made this research possible was that the researcher, as an experienced journalist, had prior connections and linkages to the journalists, government and opposition respondents, and had worked with civil society organisations. In this research, I avoided providing extensive detail about my five-year working experience at The Daily News. I felt that the detailed experiences of my colleagues captured in the study reflect and capture what I also experienced, working together as part of a team of mostly activist and defiant journalists. One issue I sought to address from the beginning was to ensure that my former colleagues in the media and civil society would respond to my questions honestly, without the temptation to tell me what they thought I would want to hear. During my debriefing sessions, I asked these colleagues to be as open and honest as possible in order to assist me to achieve a credible and robust product and not to shy
away from expressing their thoughts on the questions posed to them. I also emphasised that this investigation constituted a valuable contribution to media and communication in emerging democracies such as Zimbabwe, so it was important to be honest and frank in the interviews in order to assist in the production of a credible piece of work. Integrating this component of the methodology strengthened the reliability of the data and minimised, as much as possible, the impact of my role as a former colleague of many of the interviewees on the results.

**Alternative media, opposition politics and authoritarian regimes**

Despite its origins in Western literature, alternative media theory assists in bringing to the fore the oppositional and activist journalism underpinning this investigation. Banda (2008: 79) posits that native resistance to colonialism and subsequent formations of statehood formed critical and dynamic sites for African mediation, and that current democratisation discourses and projects in Africa underpin the role the media can play. This study also builds on works by scholars like Chabal (2014: xiv), who suggests that academic studies on agency in Africa do not capture everyday forms of resistance by ordinary people against state repression.

Atton (2002: 3) sees alternative media as increasingly being about providing the means of democratic communication to people who normally are excluded from media production. It is observed that alternative media are not part of the dominant theoretical traditions of media research, although Marxist analysis of the media contains such space. Atton (2002: 11–12) suggests:

> In a media culture that appears less and less interested in in-depth investigative reporting, alternative media provide information about and interpretation of information of the world which we might not otherwise see and information about the world that we simply will not find anywhere else. Alternative publications are at bottom more interested in the free flow of ideas than in profit.

Downing (2001: vi) observes that radical media can be considered from different angles, depending on the position of the observer. However, he also points out that radical and alternative media have one thing in common: ‘they bundle somebody’s rules, although rarely all of them in every respect’. There are other aspects that distinguish alternative media from mainstream media, such as ownership, partisanship and independence in terms of their relationships with the audience, but for the purpose of this study the opposition and activist currents are more important. This distinction is important because alternative media can mean different things. For instance, in an overview of the role of the black press during the apartheid period, Johnson (1991) observes that alternative media in that situation meant four different things, Johnson suggests that four basic considerations could define a publication as ‘alternative’. These include that it is not set up primarily for commercial motives; that its justification for existence is to fulfil the resistance role in South Africa; that it aims to serve an audience of which a significant proportion is black; and that it sees the commercial press in South Africa as failing to fulfil or reflect the aspirations of the majority of South Africans (Johnson, 1991: 24).

Social change is at the heart of alternative media. Downing (2001: ix) contends that radical alternative media serve to express oppositional views vertically from subordinate groups directly in the power structure and against the power structure’s oppressive behaviour. The main source of news for these publications is to the voices and concerns of alternative social players, such as the poor, marginalised and oppressed groups – which include women manual labourers, youths and children, together with other marginalised and underprivileged/subaltern groups. The purpose is to profile the agents of these groups and their struggles in order to change their situation and their contribution to changing society. As observed by Vatikiotis (2004: 4), ‘radical media offer space for alternative discourses in public debate as well as a locus of oppositional power to the agency of domination’. He further contends (2004: 4–5) that:
Moreover, not only do radical media constitute counter-information institutions, which try to disrupt silence, to counter the lies, to provide the truth, they also constitute conveyors of social change.

The most crucial aspect of the insights into alternative media generated by this study, as Downing (2001) articulates, is that radical media activists have often experienced state repression, execution, jailing, torture, fascist assaults, the bombing of radical radio stations, threats, police surveillance and intimidation. The study also fits the alternative media framework advanced by Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain (2007: 5), who observe that, ‘Alternative media for us ... are the media produced by the socially, culturally and politically excluded.’ Such media allow activists such as those profiled in this study to be actively involved in social change and political activism programs. The question of power, its distribution and exclusion are key, and all alternative media work exists and flourishes in various spaces of relative ‘independence’ from, and negotiations with, institutional power. In other words, like all cultural practices, it is embedded in the real social relations that surround it (2007: 10). However, Deane (2007: 206–207) cautions about the differences between alternative media in developing and developed societies, arguing that alternative media in developing countries tend to have very different origins and dynamics from alternative media in industrialised societies:

In most industrialised countries alternative media are normally taken to mean media that are rooted in, controlled by or in some way are accountable to non-corporate, often community, interests, and are explicitly focused on providing perspectives that are distinct from – often discordant with – the mainstream media. They are especially defined by being independent of and often explicitly established as an alternative to corporate oligopolies that control large sections of the mainstream mass market media. That rootedness together with their determination to avoid income sources that could compromise their independence, often means that they are small in scale and both limited and restricted in profit-making.

Apart from this, Deane (2007: 207) further points out that alternative media in industrialised countries grew out of the global civil society mass social movements of the 1990s, particularly in response to globalisation and the falling economic costs of media production. In most of the Soviet bloc, much of Africa and large parts of Asia, including China, the mainstream media were controlled by governments.

**Findings**

Respondents were interviewed over a period of one year, between July 2012 and July 2013. Data obtained from respondents, The Daily News journalists, opposition party officials, state officials and civil society actors suggest the government’s position that Daily News journalists were opposition and activist elements is validated, as some of them crossed to join the opposition party, MDC. The tabloid nature of the paper and its headlines – which reflect the ideological or editorial position of a newspaper – usually coincided with the holding of key meetings, such as the United Nations General Assembly, the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where Zimbabwe was on the agenda for various reasons, including human rights violations.

In discussing the relationship between The Daily News and the opposition MDC, the party’s former spokesperson during the crisis period, former Minister of Information, Communication and Technology and organising secretary of the party Nelson Chamisa, pointed out that:

> It was a partnership of convenience in the sense that we all believed that we needed to usher in a new democracy so the midwife of that democracy, the nurses and doctors to deliver through an operation of that democracy, was the MDC (Interview with Nelson Chamisa, Harare, 8 December, 2012).
Given this relationship, one can discern that *The Daily News*, as an alternative medium during a period of crisis, served the interests of the opposition to a larger degree. In this regard, former Minister of Information and Publicity in the Office of the President and the Cabinet, Professor Jonathan Moyo, then argued that the country needed to protect itself against the ‘forces of regime change’. The minister accused the US government of attempting to subvert the government, leading the regime to respond:

> The *Access to Information and Privacy Protection Act* was actually triggered by a specific event involving the then American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs who, in an appearance before a congressional committee upon being asked what his government was doing to ostensibly promote democracy in Zimbabwe, said among other unacceptable things, that his government was working with some other governments in the Southern African region but more with NGOs, journalists and media houses inside Zimbabwe to seek regime change. (Interview with Jonathan Moyo, Harare, 20 September 2012)

George Charamba, who doubles as Permanent Secretary in the Information Ministry and Spokesperson for the Presidency, linked *The Daily News* with the opposition MDC party. He observed:

> Well, it was a direct relationship. We saw some blurred boundaries between individuals who were in fact political players, and persons who staffed the newsrooms. We also saw a link between the disgruntled white commercial farmers and the overall equipping of *The Daily News*. There was a very compelling case, which was picked up by the establishment, to say that some of the computers that were being used in the newsroom of the *Daily News* had in fact been donated by farmers. The money for newsprint and some form of support that was being extended to the *Daily News* came from structures that were, in fact, political … (Interview with George Charamba, Harare, 13 September 2012)

Charamba was at the centre of crafting media laws, working with the Minister of Information. Given the government’s perception of the relationship between the paper and its main political rival, the opposition MDC, the former minister argued that *The Daily News* was not a media institution but rather a political party from the point of view of ZANU PF. According to the then Editor of the paper, Geoffrey Nyarota, *The Daily News* and its journalists demonstrated and played that role by telling the story of Zimbabwe under conditions of persecution – which included several arrests and beatings of its staff – without ‘fear or favour’. While the MDC, ZANU PF and government officials seemed to agree that the paper and its journalists were supporting opposition politics by giving them a positive platform from which to articulate their agenda, the paper and its journalists refuted allegations that they were part of a regime-change agenda. The positive coverage of stories about opposition political parties by newspapers and journalists has been observed by scholars, who have argued that:

> Alternative media … are crucially about offering the means for democratic communication to people who are normally excluded from media production. They are to do with organizing media along lines that enable participation and reflexivity. (Atton, 2002: 2)

In an interview, Luke Tamborinyoka, the Political Editor of *The Daily News*, and still spokesperson for the former Prime Minister and Opposition Leader Morgan Tsvangirai, said of the role of *The Daily News*:

> *The Daily News* became the platform of the people and in the June 2000 election, where ZANU PF won narrowly. The people voted ‘no’ in the constitutional referendum in February 2000. *The Daily News* was a vehicle of the people’s articulation of the ‘no’ vote. *The Daily News* became a platform for victims of the land reform program; the white commercial farmers and the farm workers, where they could tell their stories of violent assaults during the evictions. It should be remembered that we were actually one
of the first publications in Zimbabwe to cover the killing of the white farmers. (Luke Tamborinyoka, Harare, 12 February 2013)

It could be suggested that the wide national news coverage of the electoral process presented by The Daily News could have assisted the political opposition to seek political change. This was arguably the first election where opposition parties received the support of a national daily newspaper that reported news about ordinary people in both urban and rural areas during critical electoral processes.

Tamborinyoka disputes assertions by the government that the paper was a mouthpiece of the opposition and that it promoted the interests of the former colonial power, Britain, and its Western allies, such as the United States:

We happened to be two babies born around the same time (1999) and it was not deliberate. There was a perception, really, during the first days in the life of the newspaper that The Daily News was riding on the popularity of the MDC, but I think the converse was also true: that the MDC-T was also riding on the popularity of The Daily News. The Daily News was a popular newspaper and obviously the people saw that as a platform to articulate their views. (Luke Tamborinyoka, Harare, 12 February 2013)

Experiences of Daily News journalists

Downing’s (2001: 19) work suggests that radical media activists have very often experienced state repression, execution, jailing, torture, assaults, the bombing of radical radio stations, threats, police surveillance and intimidation tactics. The experiences of alternative, radical and activist journalists, as painfully experienced by The Daily News journalists during numerous cases of arrests, beatings and detentions, are full of tensions and hostility from the authorities, primarily because radical media challenge state power and hegemonic institutions.

Testimonies by the journalists and management of the paper reveal that, through their investigative, oppositional and activist journalism, The Daily News provided a public realm for discussion, criticising public policies and exposing official corruption among powerful people in government. As result of this oppositional journalism during the crisis period in Zimbabwe, The Daily News was bombed twice in 2000 and 2001, and its journalists were arrested, detained, assaulted and intimidated on numerous occasions by state agents and groups associated with the regime, such as party supporters and veterans of the liberation struggle. For example, a senior editor with The Daily News, explained how, together with a photojournalist and the driver, he was assaulted by police in June 2002 for covering a public event:

My worst moment was when I was assaulted by riot police on 16 June 2002. We were covering the international youth day. The Daily News was invited, so were other newspapers, but we were the first to get there. We were brutally assaulted for about 30 minutes. (interview with Guthrie Munyuki, Harare, 16 May 2013)

While other private newspapers, including independent and privately owned papers like The Standard, The Financial Gazette and The Independent, covered the assaults against journalists, these were weekly papers that could not capture the detailed daily state transgressions against the media in the same way as The Daily News. Narrating the ordeal that journalists faced in an interview in Harare on 17 February 2013, one of Zimbabwe’s leading human rights lawyers and the former President of the Law Society of Zimbabwe, Beatrice Mtetwa – a victim of police attacks for representing the journalists during that era – observed that there were human rights abuses by the authorities:

The conditions in Zimbabwe’s police stations, especially the holding cells, are very well known, and apart from threadbare blankets, if you get any, everyone knows how overcrowded they are. You know that being in custody basically means that you are just basically stripped of virtually all basic decency in that you have to do all your private business, like using those ablution facilities, in the full view of other prisoners. Basically, the
During the crisis period, there was considerable impunity granted to people connected to top government officials. A case in point was the beating of The Daily News staff inside a police station by Jocelyn Chiwenga, the former wife of the Army Commander, General Constantine Chiwenga, for covering a protest by the opposition MDC party. One photo journalist, whose finger was broken during the assault, described the circumstances of the action in an interview in Harare on 18 March 2013:

I remember in 2003, on 18 March, when I was covering a stay-away organised by the MDC. I was taking pictures in a Harare suburb called Budiriro. Jocelyn Chiwenga saw me carrying a camera, taking pictures of people who were moving around. I had to run away, because previously The Daily News had published a story where one of our photographers was arrested taking pictures of soldiers queuing for basic commodities. Chiwenga recognised me. She then ordered the soldiers who were escorting her to arrest me. She ordered that I be taken to Glenview Police Station. She later came to check if I was at the police station. When she saw me, she took off her shoes and started to beat me up while I was in custody. (Interview with Phillimon Bulawayo, Harare, 10 October 2012)

Senior management and the editors of the paper were not spared from the arrests, detentions and persecutions by the state in the course of their duties. Award-winning journalist and founding Editor-in-Chief of the paper, Geoffrey Nyarota, was arrested and detained, his office was bombed in 2000, and he was threatened with death on more than six occasions:

My saddest experiences extended over the period of the land invasions in 2000. It is my hope that I will never again endure that kind of hardship – not personal, but that of the people under my charge. There was nothing as painful as having to take a decision in terms of the assignment of staff. To assign a member of staff to an area where you knew that their lives were at risk, you knew that the assignment was fraught with danger. People were going out for assignments in situations of crisis, but the assignment had to be carried out by somebody. (Interview with Geoffrey Nyarota, Harare, 5 November 2012)

**The Daily News journalists’ cross-membership**

It’s not crossing the floor as such, they are in the same camp, and it’s just someone leaving a newspaper to go to the political party. It’s like Zanu PF; it has its paper The Voice. Can you say someone who has left The Voice newspaper to join Zanu PF has crossed the floor? The Daily News discourse and the MDC discourse are the same, the language is the same and the objective is the same. It is a regime change agenda. They are pursuing the same goal to unseat ZANU PF. (Interview with Herald Deputy Editor Cezar Zvayi, 12 October 2012)

However, unlike The Voice, owned by ZANU PF, The Daily News is a privately owned newspaper. What is undisputed is that some senior editors and managers of The Daily News have crossed the floor to join the MDC, the biggest opposition threat to the government. Some journalists joined civil society organisations that also dissented against President Mugabe’s administration. This crossover to join mainstream politics, especially given circumstances where the government accused the paper of working with the opposition party, Western governments and civil society organisations, seems to validate the claim. The founding Board Chairperson and CEO of The Daily News, Muchadeyi Masunda, was appointed the Mayor of the capital, Harare, following the opposition MDC’s victory in the 2008 council elections, while his predecessor, Samuel Sipepa Nkomo, was appointed Cabinet Minister in an inclusive government in 2009. However, some of the journalists and one manager in question disagree,
stating that there was no prior relationship with the party apart from sharing common goals and principles on respect for human rights and democratic governance.

Samuel Sipepa Nkomo, now a senior member of the MDC, a former minister and former Chief Executive of the Daily News, agreed with his former employees that they did not parrot the position of the opposition party when they worked for the paper. He stated:

If the government draws a conclusion like that, it’s up to them. The journalists were professionals. I can tell you that during my time, and even now, if I had to choose to join a political party, I can’t join a party that perpetrates violence and injustice against its own people. The only party that I could join, to which I was invited, was the MDC, because it’s a democratic party. There is no democracy in Zanu PF, so I could not be part of that party. Zanu PF does not allow people to make public their opinions. In the MDC, you can say whatever you want to say and they protect and respect the democratic rights of people. That’s why I joined the MDC, that’s why Luke Tamborinyoka joined the MDC, because to us we were fighting for democratic change.

(Interview with Sipepa Nkomo, Harare, 24 January 2013)

The Daily News and social change forces

Unger (1990) suggest that in emerging democratic societies, such as most African states, a free press may in fact be more effective than an opposition party when it comes to achieving change in an oppressive political system. This research argues that this role of the media in countries such as Zimbabwe could be helpful in trying to understand the role of the opposition and the independent or private press in confronting an authoritarian administration. In an insightful interview at the University of Zimbabwe, where he teaches law, Lovemore Madhuku, the Chairperson of the NCA and a constitutional law expert, argues that there is little doubt that The Daily News and its journalists contributed to the opening up of the democratic space during his organisation’s fight for constitutional and democratic reforms in the country. He refuted suggestions that The Daily News had an ambiguous relationship with other democratic forces, pointing out that:

There was a very clear relationship there. The Daily News saw itself as part and parcel of the democratic agenda. It was a newspaper, yes, but a newspaper with an agenda to open up society and to oppose undemocratic practices, especially by the state. That was a clear position by the newspaper. So it would see itself as being in the trenches with these organizations and you get almost every encouraging thing done by the other players, The Daily News would publish. Stories about the protests by students, civil society and the opposition were not published in the state-controlled newspapers. The state-run papers positioned themselves as the defenders of President Mugabe’s regime and its oppressive policies. On the contrary, The Daily News covered people’s expressions and disillusionment with the system. (Interview with Lovemore Madhuku, Harare, 13 February 2013)

Throughout the interviews carried out with civil society leaders, it was apparent that the paper promoted their calls for reforms and shaped the discourses of the day in a manner that benefited them.

The Daily News’ defiance stance

Most of the journalists and senior managers interviewed for this study argued that they took a deliberate activist and oppositional position in order to confront and expose human rights violations by the government, because they wanted to contribute to the realisation of a country that respects the rule of law.

Chair and CEO of the Daily News, Sipepa Nkomo, stated:

The call was that it was now a requirement for change in Zimbabwe. Zanu PF had failed; they had betrayed the tenets of the liberation struggle, the values and principles of the liberation struggle, so they must be changed. Somebody must stand up and The Daily News’ workers and journalists answered to that call. That is why they would be beaten, but come back to work tomorrow. I remember we were thrown into filthy cells
at Harare Central Police Station, but we will be there at work tomorrow. The journalists were fighting for a cause; if all good men keep quiet, evil will thrive, so they chose to stand up and be counted. (Interview with Sipepa Nkomo, Chair and CEO of the paper, Harare, 24 January 2013)

Despite twice being arrested, detained and released without charges, putting her family’s security at risk and being labelled an opposition political activist for writing for a newspaper that was oppositional and critical of government policies by the people in her neighbourhood, the senior entertainment reporter, Margaret Chinowaita, remarked in an interview in Harare on 30 July 2012 that she continued to work for the paper because ‘it was really like a struggle and I had to contribute’.

This study has explored why journalists from The Daily News defied state repression, the arrests, the beatings, the assaults, detentions and newspaper bombings, as well as risking their lives and families by continuously working on a newspaper targeted by the authorities. In the course of interviews conducted during the research, various reasons were given, among them that the journalists were waging a democratic struggle against the authoritarian regime and that it was a national duty to write and expose human rights violations.

**Conclusion: Conceptual contribution to alternative media studies**

One of the most enduring contributions of this study on alternative media, together with existing work on media and democracy, is its capacity to expand the conceptual framework. It de-Westemises media studies by contributing to new insights on media practices for harnessing media for political change in the Global South through media activism in the face of state-sponsored attacks. The case analysis of *The Daily News* in a non-Western context during moments of political turmoil points to a successful use of the alternative media analytic lens in democratising contexts where communication was used by opposition forces to democratis state power, as shown by the journalists. The study has demonstrated that in an African context during periods of political turmoil, a privately controlled commercial newspaper went against the grain and played the role of an alternative news medium at the expense of its commercial interests to advance the cause of democratisation.

The original authors of alternative media theory did not envisage this rebellious but significant contribution to a new and refreshing way of understanding alternative media in a democratising African regime. It demonstrates that private newspaper owners in contexts of repression can serve the broader national and democratic public interests that address community-based interests and the views of oppressed groups seeking social change, rather than the profit agenda with which they are normally associated. *The Daily News* and its journalists defied violent attacks, including the bombing of the paper and assaults against journalists, to confront state power while serving the democratic interests of the opposition and advocacy groups in order to open up society. The study further demonstrates that human agency cannot be killed by oppressive political practices. This dimension is often little acknowledged in political science and media and communication studies.

**References**


