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Producing loyal citizens and entertaining volatile subjects: imagining audience agency in colonial Rhodesia and post-colonial Zimbabwe

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The emergence of modern mass media on the African continent coincided with (and was in many ways a product of) the spread of British and French colonialism (Asante and Ziegler 1982; Larkin 2008). The introduction of radio, television and newspapers helped colonial regimes to constitute imagined communities of loyal settlers, to link up the colonial motherland to the settler colony, to persuade colonial subjects of the benevolence of colonial administrations and to dissuade them from challenging the status quo. In the process of establishing colonial domination and building modern mass media, governments developed a particular understanding of those who were watching television, listening to radio or reading newspapers. As Hartley (1987: 125) has argued, audiences are discursively produced through language:

[Audiences] are the invisible fictions that are produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival. Audiences may be imagined, empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the needs of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience “real”, or external to its discursive construction. There is no “actual” audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered *per se* as *representations*.

In the case of British Africa, English - as the official *lingua franca* of the state - was the language in which audience members were imagined by colonial administrations and discussed in policy reports and official records. Modern mass media did not only assist in the institutionalisation of English as the language of political, business and educational elites but also contributed to the emergence of separate ‘sphericules’ (Gitlin 1998) which were unified by the use of English or local African languages. In his book *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani (1996) argues that settler colonialism created a bifurcated state with on the one hand, a category of largely urban-based white citizens who enjoyed full civil, political and economic rights, and on the other hand, a category of largely rural-based black subjects who were denied these fundamental rights. In an article entitled *Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: a theoretical statement*, Ekeh (1975: 111) argued that the Western experience of a unified public sphere, which the state and civil society both occupy, is not reflective of African social spaces which are defined by their colonial legacy: “Our post-colonial present has been fashioned by our colonial past. It is that colonial past that has defined for us the spheres of morality that have come to dominate our politics”. Crucial to this colonial inheritance is Ekeh’s distinction between two publics: the primordial and the civic public. For Ekeh, the sphere of what he calls the primordial public “occupies vast tracts of the political spaces that are relevant for the welfare of the individual, sometimes limiting and

breaching the state's efforts to extend its claims beyond the civic public sphere" (1975: 107). While colonial languages such as English and French were part of the civic public and adopted by colonial administrations as official languages of the state, local African languages were treated as inferior and features of the primordial public. Whereas British colonialism deliberately promoted the codification of distinct indigenous languages and ethnicities as part of its divide-and-rule strategy, the French model of colonial rule was based on assimilation of an African middle class into French culture and language, a category also known as the *évolués*.

In order to gain an understanding of official state imaginings of audiences in former settler colonies such as Zimbabwe, English-language discourses are therefore crucial given the status of English as official language of both colonial and post-colonial governments. Although some post-colonial African governments opted to have a local African language as official *lingua franca* along with English, such as the case of kiSwahili in Kenya and Tanzania, Zimbabwe's first post-independent government chose to retain English (Ndhlovu 2009; Kadenge and Nkomo 2011). Zimbabwean linguists Kadenge and Nkomo (2011: 252) point to a "dominance of English in virtually all formal spheres of Zimbabwean life". While an examination of discursive imaginings of the audience in indigenous languages would be important, one is immediately faced with the challenge of recovering the 'indigenous', 'subaltern' voice (Spivak 1988). Because of the low status of indigenous languages in settler colonies and the suppression of these languages in the colonial archive (which by virtue of their existence privileged the settler experience), a historical reconstruction of discursive namings of the audience automatically leads us to focus on the English-language given its dominance in written documentation and its importance as the language of power.

Hence, adopting English-language discursive imaginings on the audience as object of study does not only *privilege* the English language but also to a large extent *reflects* the hegemony of English in the public domain of both colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. This paradox relates to an observation Chakrabarty (2000: 6) makes in his book *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*: "European thought has a contradictory relationship to [...] political modernity. It is both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the various life practices that constitute the political and the historical in India". Hence, examining discourses on audiences in the English language is both important and insufficient. It is crucial because the space that can be reconstructed as public was dominated by the English language but it is also imperfect because it to a certain extent perpetuates this hegemony and leaves beyond consideration the way in which the notion of the audience was constructed, debated or discussed in local languages such as chiShona or siNdebele.

Deploying Hartley's understanding of audiences and drawing on Foucault's theory on discourse and practice, the chapter examines how colonial and post-colonial governments in Zimbabwe imagined audiences in English-language policy discourse and argues that these discursive imaginings were part of a particular set of policy interventions with regard to media. Foucault describes practice as "the point of linkage (*enchaînement*) of what one says and what one does" (1980: 42, quoted in Gutting 1994: 30). Discourse legitimates certain ways of acting and prevents other practices from being accepted as 'normal'. In this chapter, I consider language and discourse crucial to the circulation of power exercised in and through institutions such as the colonial state. I consider the notion of discourse in a deliberately broad manner, referring to the ways of talking about audiences. Like Foucault, I consider discourses to be inextricably linked to practices. Discourse is produced through certain practices and other practices are made possible through the particular framing of an object in discourse. Discourse is then linked to both

discursive practices (practices that communicate meanings through language) and to a set of non-discursive practices. For Foucault, discourse should thus not be treated as strictly referring to a specific group of linguistic texts but it crucially also refers to a set of social practices to which those texts are intimately connected. Central in this chapter is the relation between the discursive practice of imagining audiences (the particular framing of audiences) and non-discursive media-related practices such as government policy interventions with regard to media. As Butsch (2008: 1) has argued, “[a]udiences have been depicted variously as good or bad, threatening public order or politically disengaged, cultivated or cultural dupes, ideal citizens or pathological”, and when “[d]epicted as volatile crowds and a danger to social order, audiences became targets of government discipline”. In the specific context of colonial Rhodesia, this chapter begins by demonstrating how the state imagined African audiences as bad, volatile crowds vulnerable to manipulation and as threats to the status quo while white audiences were imagined as citizen publics crucial to the reproduction of the status quo. As the following sections will show, these imaginings were linked to clear policy interventions with regard to the press, radio, television and cinema.

Producing loyal citizens

In the early days of colonial rule, the Rhodesian press primarily targeted white citizens in order to create loyal publics who would support Cecil John Rhodes’ colonial mission and help maintain British South African Company (BSAC) rule as opposed to direct colonial rule from Britain (Ainslie 1966: 44). One of the main purposes of the press at the time was to safeguard BSAC’s economic interests by creating a united ‘imagined community’ of white settlers (Anderson 1983). For example, according to *The Rhodesia Herald*, its main objective was “to advance to the fullest of their powers the mining and agricultural interests, to discuss and criticise moderately, but without fear or favour, the topics of the day or hour, and to promote fellowship and unity amongst all classes and sections of the white community” (Gale 1962: 19). Newspapers published by the Argues Printing and Publishing Company (APPC) primarily reported on issues that were of interest to the growing community of white settlers and hardly reported on the situation in which the majority black population found itself.

While newspapers targeting a white readership were imagined as constituting good citizen publics, papers primarily appealing to a black readership such as *The Bantu Mirror* (established as *The Native Mirror* in 1931) – both published in English - were aimed at entertaining Africans in order to channel “native thought away from politics and into safer pursuits” (Bourgault 1995: 160). The paper’s editorial line was in support of the Southern Rhodesian colonial government and political opinions of blacks were rarely published. It was therefore largely tolerated by the Rhodesian government. A leading black journalist in 1950s Southern Rhodesia, Lawrence Vambe, described the politics of the newsroom at *The Bantu Mirror* as follows:

They were very sensitive to issues relating to politics amongst the black people. One found oneself as a black journalist being questioned and intimidated. ‘Why did you write about this, why don’t you leave that alone, why don’t you write about sports and beer halls?’ [...] But the more you found resistance from those quarters, the more you were determined to express the African point of view (quoted in Saunders 1999: 4).

Instead of giving a voice to the growing resistance to settler rule from African nationalists such as Joshua Nkomo, *The Bantu Mirror* painted a more positive, a-political picture of the vibrant

life in the expanding black townships of Southern Rhodesia (Willems 2008: 2). Before the official enactment of urban racial segregation in the late 1950s, mixed urban townships such as Makokoba and Mzilikazi in Bulawayo saw a blossoming of cultural activities in the 1940s and early 1950s which was eagerly reported in *The Bantu Mirror*. The emerging African urban middle class, residing in these newly established areas, proved a fertile mass readership which the newspaper's ownership was keen to exploit.¹ During this period, the development of mass media targeting Africans was therefore primarily aimed at an urban middle-class audience, leaving the rural population largely outside the reach of mass media. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this was a key imbalance that the post-colonial government sought to address through projects investing in improving access to newspapers in the rural areas, hereby seeking to empower the 'rural masses' who were a key constituency of the liberation movement. Over time, discourses on audiences thus shifted from a concern with primarily urban consumers of media to rural masses waiting to be educated and empowered through for example radio and local newspapers.

While newspapers in Southern Rhodesia constituted their own, separate readerships, radio broadcasts were exclusively targeted at white audiences in order to create unity among white settlers (similarly to the aims of *The Rhodesia Herald* and *The Bulawayo Chronicle*). Radio broadcasts began in the 1930s and were initially run on a voluntary basis by Rhodesian postal employees who had an interest in amateur radio (Zaffiro 2002: 42). These amateur broadcasts ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Southern Rhodesia Broadcasting Service (SRBS) in 1941 which was managed by the Postmaster-General. The SRBS was mainly established to meet the needs of white settlers and to provide "an escape from the native environment, reminding settlers of colonial power, dispensing safety and security, and offering a centre of reference at the level of news" (Zaffiro 2002: 42). While Rhodesian officials imagined radio as a powerful tool to connect white listening publics to the colonial motherland, they did not consider it a suitable medium for Africans who were on the one hand imagined as 'primitive' and incapable of comprehending a modern tool such as radio, and on the other hand as vulnerable to outside influences. Rhodesian officials "argued that Africans did not want broadcasting, that they would not understand it or that it would put the wrong ideas into their heads" (Zaffiro 2002: 43). Most crucially, colonial administrators feared that "possession of a wireless set would allow Africans to listen to foreign stations and cause revolutions" (Frederikse 1982: 96). Africans were seen as "gullible to subversive appeals by communists and nationalists" (Zaffiro 2002: 46). Hence, SRBS's radio broadcasts primarily targeted the white settler population and no efforts were made to reach out to the African population.

The sceptical attitude of Southern Rhodesian government officials towards radio was, however, not universally shared among representatives of the British Empire in Southern Africa. It was contrary to the way in which their counterparts in Northern Rhodesia (now known as Zambia) imagined the role of radio. In an address in Lusaka on 12 June 1949, the Director for Information of Northern Rhodesia, Harry Franklin, made attempts to convince his neighbours in Southern Rhodesia of the importance of providing radio broadcasts to Africans:

I would put to you three points in favour of African broadcasting. The majority of Africans are still illiterate. Broadcasting is about the only way to get at them in the mass [...]. Whether you like it or

¹ The early 1950s also saw the establishment of *African Parade* which was the most popular magazine among middle-class Africans in the 1950s and particularly provided updates on music and the entertainment industry and offered cautious support to African nationalists.

not, the African mind is awakening, is thirsty for knowledge. Let us give it the right kind of knowledge; if we don't, it will surely pick up the wrong [...]. We want a happy and contented African people. Now what can the native do when he has finished his work, his own work or yours? He can get drunk if he has the money, or gamble, or worse. If there's a full moon he can dance. But most nights he can only go back to his hut, with no light and generally no ability to read, even if he had a light. There, he can talk and think. And one of the things he can talk and think about, not very happily, is how much better off you are than he is, you with so many things he hasn't got, including a radio to entertain you. The African loves music, plays, rhetoric, argument – all the things that radio can put across so well. Let him have them (quoted in Frederikse 1982: 96).

Franklin thus saw radio as a medium that was particularly suitable for Africans. Contrary to his colleagues in Southern Rhodesia, he declined to believe that “Africans would not take to broadcasting knowing that primitive tribes in Eastern Russia and peasants in India had taken to it” (quoted in Smythe 1984: 196). Instead, radio could entertain them and distract them from debating more serious political issues. Radio had the power to divert Africans' attention from the evils of colonial exploitation. Furthermore, radio could be a powerful means of mass education and combat Africans' illiteracy. While formal education would require significant investment and time, mass media were imagined as a faster and more cost-efficient tool to educate Africans. Franklin argued that it would be important for the Northern Rhodesian government to dominate the provision of education so as to prevent “the completely ignorant blackman from being exploited by ‘agitators’ from amongst the newly educated elite” (quoted in Smyth 1984: 196).

However, as a result of the increasing use of external shortwave broadcasts by the two key liberation movements, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in the late 1960s and mid-1970s, the Rhodesian government could no longer ignore radio as medium in the propaganda war. While in the 1950s, officials in Southern Rhodesia were highly suspicious about offering radio broadcasting services to Africans, they were forced to counter ZANU's and ZAPU's shortwave radio programmes broadcast from abroad. Hence, the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC, SRBS's successor) resolved to introduce a regular radio service for Africans in 1969. The station was named Radio Three and aimed to persuade Africans not to cooperate with the ‘terrorists’, i.e. the guerrilla fighters (Zaffiro 2002: 60). RBC's African service largely served the needs of the RF government by discrediting the nationalist cause. However, the radio station failed to attract African listeners which led the government to conclude that a new strategy was required in order to convince Africans not to lend their support to the liberation movements. In explaining the failure of Radio Three, an ex-employee of the Psychological Operations Unit (POU) constructed Africans as unresponsive to modern mass media:

When you want to communicate with the African tribesman in this country you have a hell of a problem. He doesn't necessarily listen to the radio, or pick up the daily paper – that's the problem. The message, the method of communication is a problem. The pitch is also a problem. It can't just be in English. It also has to be in the vernacular. Plus there's the fact that the African is greatly affected by tribal customs. So we had to start from scratch (quoted in Frederikse 1982: 120).

Hence, the Rhodesian state imagined African audiences as ‘unmodern’ and fundamentally different from European settler audiences. This is reinforced by the use of the term ‘tribesman’ which evokes a sense of ‘primitiveness’, a notion that Africans were stuck in local traditions and customs which prevented them from understanding the medium of radio. Modern mass media were considered to be part of the English-language civil public from which Africans were being

excluded. Africans were ‘othered’, part of the indigenous-language primordial public and seen as incapable of adjusting to modern media. It was therefore the medium rather than the message that the Rhodesian regime blamed for its lack of success in winning the hearts and minds of Africans. In order to communicate with Africans, a different method was required. Radio and newspapers were not considered suitable to persuade Africans not to support the guerrilla fighters. The POU therefore resorted to an approach that was similar to the methods used by the liberation movements. Mirroring the door-to-door campaign deployed by ZANLA, the RF government decided to quite literally take the message to Africans instead of relying on their initiative to switch to RBC’s Radio Three or to pick up a copy of *The African Times*. Hence, the Rhodesian Air Force initiated a major campaign during which hundreds of leaflets were dropped from the sky (Frederikse 1982: 121-22).

Apart from taking pamphlets to the rural areas, the Ministry of Information’s ‘internal services’ branch also set up a Mobile Cinema Unit which brought screenings of anti-nationalist films to the rural areas. Most of the film makers in this unit had learned about film making in the Central African Film Unit (CAFU) which had been producing mainly agricultural instructional films since the 1940s (Hungwe 1991; Burns 2002). Similar to the concerns expressed by the POU about the suitability of certain media for Africans, there was a strong belief within the Mobile Cinema Unit that films intended for African audiences required a different approach. They worked from the assumption that “Africans were intellectually different from, and inferior to, Europeans. Therefore they produced films for Africans that were remarkable for their simplistic style, demeaning images, and paternalistic messages” (Burns 2002: xix). This was reiterated by an official from the Rhodesian Information Services who argued that “[i]t has been known for some time that many film productions designed for African audiences were, in fact, not getting across, mainly because the story was too fast-moving and the techniques used tended to confuse” (quoted in Burns 2000: 208).² The department believed that films made in the immediate environment of African audiences were most effective and that the content of these films was most often accepted as truth.

Hence, through a set of policy interventions, settler colonialism created separate publics for Africans and white settlers. The particular imaginings of audiences were linked to certain preconceptions about the suitability of certain media for specific audiences. While modern mass media such as radio were seen as suitable to unite white settlers and create loyal citizens, African audiences were on the one hand imagined as vulnerable and on the other hand as pre-modern, unprepared and incapable of adequately understanding the use and relevance of modern media such as radio and cinema.

Pedagogical nationalism and the production of modern subjects

One of the major aims of post-colonial governments in Anglophone Africa was to dismantle the bifurcated nature of the state by providing full citizenship rights to African ‘subjects’. In the process of turning former ‘subjects’ into ‘modern’ citizens, newly independent governments accorded an important role to media in this transformative process. While the Rhodesian state imagined black Zimbabweans both as ‘primitive others’ unaccustomed to the modern medium of radio and as volatile crowds vulnerable to manipulation, the newly independent government imagined them as ‘pedagogical objects’ (Bhabha 1990: 304-305) who through the assistance of modern mass media were going to be transformed into fully-fledged Zimbabwean citizens.

² See on colonial imaginings of African audiences also Ambler (2001), Smyth (1988, 1983, 1992), Burns (2000, 2002).

Television, radio and the press were therefore largely deployed as means to educate citizens about issues such as agriculture, to spread government information and to create a patriotic audience in touch with local notions of culture.

Instead of imagining audience members as ‘primitive, illiterate tribesmen’, the post-colonial government imagined African audiences as modern subjects of the state who had to be emancipated given their marginalisation during colonialism. Invoking a more agentive, revolutionary discourse, terms such as ‘the masses’, ‘the rural masses’, ‘the black majority’, and ‘the people’ were commonly deployed to refer to audience members. The ruling party ZANU-PF also often invoked the Portuguese term *povo* (literally ‘people’) which was a word the party borrowed from its fellow liberation movement in the region, the Mozambican FRELIMO. The term *povo* had a revolutionary connotation and should be understood as part of a broader socialist discourse in which the people, and particularly rural peasants who had been central during Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle in the 1970s, were part of a mass vanguard challenging the hegemony of colonialism. Hence, these terms were inscribed in a broader transnational, leftist and socialist context from which Zimbabwe’s liberation movements emerged, having received support from China (ZANU) and Russia (ZAPU) during the 1970s liberation war. The terms are profoundly related to the Cold War context that characterised Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle in which the Rhodesian Front settler government frequently framed the threat posed by the guerrilla fighters as part of a broader ‘red danger’.³

The ways in which audiences were imagined by the post-colonial government were also clearly linked to a particular set of interventions the post-independent state made in Zimbabwe’s media landscape. In order to create a modern, educated citizenry, the state invested considerably in extending the reach of mass media to the rural areas. Similarly to the purpose of media in Egypt, “[t]he addressee was the citizen, not the consumer. Audiences were to be brought into national and international political consciousness, mobilised, modernised and culturally uplifted” (Abu-Lughod 2005: 11). The new ZANU-PF government saw media as important vehicles in the promotion and facilitation of development along socialist lines. At independence, the government adopted a statist socialist agenda which was aimed at creating wealth and prosperity for the black majority population and sought to correct past injustices. The main objective of the government’s first economic plan *Growth with Equity* was to create a more equitable society through land reform and improved access for the black population to social services such as health, education and agricultural support.

Because of relatively low levels of literacy among Africans, the government considered radio as an important education tool in the project of developing the ‘masses’. Priority was given to development of the rural areas. As Zimbabwe’s first Minister of Information and Publicity, Nathan Shamuyarira argued at the time, “both the print and the electronic media should be a vehicle for education and instructional purposes. They should endeavour to reach the broad masses of our people in the rural areas with instructional information for skills that will enable them to improve their lives” (quoted in Mathema 2001: 8). Modern mass media therefore fitted very well within a modernist, socialist paradigm in which the *povo* (i.e. the rural masses) instead of the colonial settlers, were to be emancipated. Just like

³ This is reiterated for example in a 1967 booklet *Red for Danger* from the Rhodesian Ministry of Information, Immigration and Tourism: “Rhodesia, by defending the Zambezi River against the further advance of Chinese communism, has set an example to the Western world. It is worth pointing out to those who scrambled, with little dignity and almost indecent haste, from other parts of Africa that there is no intention of allowing Southern Africa to fall prey to Chinese communism” (p. 8).

the government considered radio as a crucial tool for rural education and development, newspapers were also attributed with an important role in informing ‘the people’. However, as the government noted in a policy statement, “[f]or the rural masses to be informed, the media must ‘talk’ in the languages the masses can understand” (Government of Zimbabwe 1987: 4). While all former Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company (RPPC) titles were published in English, Zimpapers therefore introduced two new vernacular newspapers in 1985 which primarily targeted a rural readership: *Kwayedza* (Dawn in chiShona) which was published in chiShona and *uMthunywa* (Messenger in siNdebele) in siNdebele.⁴ The main aim of these new papers was to “ensure that urban news and events, including official news are read alongside news and events on rural development and the hopes and aspirations of the rural people” (Government of Zimbabwe 1987: 4).

Apart from transforming subjects into modern, educated citizens, another key aim of the new government’s media policy was to produce loyal ‘national’ citizens in touch with local notions of culture. Raising awareness about the dangers of ‘imperialism’ and promoting an alternative, socialist route to development, Shamuyarira, argued as follows: “[b]efore any journalist picks up his or her pen they should be committed to the ideology of liberating the masses and exposing the machinations of imperialism. Journalists should educate and inform the masses about the advantages of a socialist path” (quoted in Zaffiro 2002: 107). One of the priorities of the new ZANU-PF government was to free its media both from the association with the previous Rhodesian Front (RF) government and with the South African apartheid regime. Media were considered important in resisting imperialism and in challenging the continued domination of ‘the West’. The successor to the RBC, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), made clear efforts to increase local content on television. According to a 1988 government report, ZBC had “increased the number of local programmes on television from 16 percent to about 45 percent, accommodating news, drama and current affairs programmes from the rural areas” and government saw this as a clear “departure from the pre-independence tradition where most of the TV programmes came from Britain and the United State of America” (Government of Zimbabwe 1988: 3).

Furthermore, the transfer in January 1981 of RPPC from South African capital to an independent body, the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), would, according to President Mugabe “reverse the colonial trend in the media and make it serve the interests of the dominant force in the country, the masses” (quoted in Mathema 2001: 9). For government, the main aim of ZMMT was “to decolonise information and eliminate the pernicious and hostile South African influence from the press and the media” (Government of Zimbabwe 1987: 2). As Shamuyarira outlined, “[g]iven the historical control of the press in this country by South African financial interests before independence, we insist in independent Zimbabwe that the press be owned and managed by Zimbabweans, and preferably be insulated from Zimbabwe financial interests also” (quoted in Mathema 2001: 8). ZMMT also facilitated the establishment of a truly ‘national’ news agency and played a role in redressing the ‘imbalances in international news flows’. At independence, the Inter-Africa News Agency (IANA), which was owned by the South African Press Association (SAPA), was responsible for the provision of foreign news to Zimbabwean publications (Mathema 2001: 20). After independence, a major priority for the government was to cut media and information links with South Africa and to transform IANA into a truly Zimbabwean news agency. One of ZMMT’s first tasks was to take control of IANA which was

⁴ *uMthunywa* stopped publication in 1993 due to viability problems linked to political interference but was relaunched on 4 July 2004 as a tabloid (Mabweazara 2007: 54).

subsequently renamed to Zimbabwe Inter-Africa National Agency (ZIANA) and became Zimbabwe's first national press agency.

The government did not only want to reduce its reliance on South Africa in the field of media but also aspired to become less dependent on the big Western news agencies. It took a number of measures in this regard such as bringing a halt to its UPI subscription and negotiating news exchange agreements with other African news agencies and countries in the former communist bloc (Zaffiro 2002: 89). For example, ZIANA was involved in the now defunct Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool (NANAP) which was formed in 1976 and was a major outcome of debates around the call for NWICO.⁵ However, despite these measures, "nearly three-quarters of all news stories used at ZBC still originated from western wire services, with AFP the preferred source" (Zaffiro 2002: 89). In order to distance itself further from South Africa's apartheid regime, the Zimbabwean government also played a leading role in strengthening ties with the so-called 'frontline states' (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe) in the field of media and communication. In the 1980s, South Africa was the main base of many international news agencies. According to the Zimbabwean government, this gave "credence and credibility to Pretoria's biased view of the political, economic and cultural set-up in Southern Africa" (Government of Zimbabwe 1987: 14). In the eyes of the frontline states, the concentration of foreign correspondents in South Africa resulted in news articles that interpreted events in the region through the eyes of the apartheid regime.

In the post-independence period, audiences were thus primarily imagined as *povo*, i.e. rural masses who needed to be educated and emancipated on the socialist, revolutionary path carved out by the state. Audiences were considered as susceptible to the continuing threat of foreign, capitalist, subversive media which had the potential to disrupt the process of nation-building and to challenge government's socialist, anti-colonial ideology. The interventionist, post-independent state heavily invested in modern mass media to ensure its content was in line with its policy goals and to guarantee that those who previously did not have adequate access to media were now included in their reach.

Audiences as vulnerable consumers of subversive information

Up until the 1990s, Zimbabwe's media landscape was heavily regulated, hereby securing a virtual monopoly of both Zimpapers and ZBC. The imagining of audiences as subjects to be transformed into modern, educated citizens, however, changed in the context of the implementation of a structural adjustment package, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which was partially imposed on Zimbabwe by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the early 1990s but also 'warmly' welcomed to a certain extent by Zimbabwe's growing black middle class who stood to benefit from economic restructuring. ESAP paved the way for liberalisation of the economy and enabled a group of emerging black entrepreneurs to penetrate the newspaper market which was previously dominated by the state-controlled *The Herald*. A number of private weekly newspapers emerged and because *The Herald*'s editorial line was largely supportive of government, by criticising

⁵ NANAP was established to correct imbalances in global news flows by encouraging news agencies of non-aligned countries to share news. A similar initiative which the government also actively supported was the Pan-African News Agency (PANA). This agency was created in 1979 by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in order to correct "the distorted picture of Africa, its countries and peoples resulting from partial and negative information published by foreign press agencies" and "to assist in the liberation struggles of peoples against colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, racism, zionism and all other forms of exploitation and oppression" (Cavanagh 1989: 355).

government policies these newspapers soon began to fill a void in the market. Because these newspapers were expensive, they were primarily available to a small, urban business elite. While in the early-mid 1990s, Zimbabwe did not have a viable and organised political opposition, this however changed in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the growing importance of an increasingly popular opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which was established in 1999, and rapidly gained ground in the aftermath of the negative economic impact of ESAP on the everyday lives of most working-class and lower middle-class Zimbabweans who were confronted with increasing food prices caused by the abolishment of subsidies or faced retrenchment in the public sector. The foundation of the MDC coincided with the emergence of a new daily private newspaper, *The Daily News* which was the first serious challenge posed to the government-controlled *The Herald* newspaper.

In this tense political climate, the ZANU-PF government began to imagine audiences as vulnerable in ways similar to the manner in which the Rhodesian government had constructed African audiences. State discourse was increasingly characterised by a degree of paternalism in which audiences were imagined as victims of private or foreign media in need of protection from the state. The establishment of the Media Ethics Committee (MEC) in July 2001 was legitimised as an intervention that sought to protect the public from the irresponsible, out-of-control private media. *The Herald* described the background to the establishment of the MEC as follows:

The media ethics committee faces a mammoth challenge to arbitrate media relationships, which are characterised by chaos. The media scenario today is inundated with daily mudslinging, charges and countercharges, denials, retractions, matters dealing with privacy, libel and defamation, and court proceedings. This is mainly due to the low level of truthful reporting in our newspapers. The papers are full of exaggerations. Their reports are biased. The stories are mere smear campaigns and are based more on the emotions of the writers than reasoned opinions. In some papers, there is more gossip than straight reporting or analysis. The reader is certainly shortchanged or cheated by such unethical standards.⁶

The establishment of the MEC was thus mainly justified by reference to the ‘unprofessional’ and ‘unethical’ behaviour of private newspapers. The state of the media in Zimbabwe was characterised as dominated by poor standards of reporting. Government saw the establishment of the MEC as a necessary measure in order to ‘protect’ vulnerable readers from the ‘unprofessional’ reporting from private newspapers. As *The Herald* wrote shortly after the introduction of the MEC:

The measures are being taken to ensure that the media reports on events in a responsible manner consistent with the aspirations of a developing nation like Zimbabwe. Recently the readers have been on the receiving end, sometimes being bombarded with unnecessary trivial squabbles between the newspapers which have nothing to do with them. This has compromised professional journalism as the media has deviated from its noble duty of informing the public and settled scores thereby depriving the readers news. The generality of the readers have complained of being starved of news while the media houses engage in petty quarrels to further their own interests at the expense of their valued clients. The proposed new regulations should be able to protect the people from being abused by the media. Individuals should be able to enjoy their privacy without invasion by the media.⁷

⁶ Media ethics committee faces mammoth task, *The Herald*, 18 October 2001, p. 9.

⁷ Chigodo, Tim, Readers on receiving end, *The Herald*, 30 July 2001, p. 12.

The state was presented as deserving a key role in deciding what was considered as ‘appropriate information’ for audiences. Audience members were viewed as unable to make this decision for themselves. Therefore, the state had an obligation to step in and regulate the media sector. Government did not only want to protect audience members and the nation from ‘harmful information’ through tightened ethical reporting but also argued that the new chaotic media landscape demanded new legislation. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which was introduced in early 2002, was presented as a measure that would protect individuals reported in the media. As acting Minister of Information and Publicity, Paul Mangwana, noted in an address to journalists in 2006: “Your industry could not organise itself for self-regulation. Our society suffered for it while your employers reaped fabulous profits from it. What passed for defamation to individuals reflected as happy profit to publishers, bylines and awards to reporters. The unregulated situation inspired rewarding recklessness”.⁸

The representation of audiences as vulnerable subjects in need of protection by the state echoes discourses of the Rhodesian state on defenceless audiences that were exposed to manipulation by subversive, foreign media. The state’s phobic concern with the impact of foreign media on audiences was further demonstrated during an incident in February 2011 when forty-six Zimbabweans (including Munyaradzi Gwisai, Member of Parliament of Highfield constituency in Harare) were arrested over watching a video on the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia. In March 2012, Gwisai was convicted together with five accomplices as the state felt that their viewing of footage of the Arab Spring was aimed at instilling feelings of hostility against the government. As the magistrate justified “Watching the video is not a crime, however, the manner at which they watched it was meant to arouse feelings of hostility to those present in the meeting. Watching it in those circumstances was nasty and pathetic”.⁹

The state’s concern about foreign media was also expressed through its response to the growing popularity of satellite television in the second half of the 2000s. The rapidly rising number of imports of cheap satellite free-to-air decoders (known locally as ‘Wiztech’) was interpreted by government as giving rise to a non-patriotic citizenry who increasingly neglected to watch the national monopoly broadcaster, ZBC. Hence in mid-2008, the army and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) was reported to have launched Operation Dzikisai Madhishi (‘Remove your dishes’), an operation which was aimed at forcing Harare residents to remove their satellite dishes as these were considered to be carrying programmes from channels such as the South African private broadcaster eTV, the public broadcaster South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and Botswana Television (BTV) which allegedly harmed the image of the country.¹⁰

Hence, audiences were not only imagined as vulnerable but also as increasingly ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘un-African’. While during the colonial era, African audiences were presented as ‘primitive’ and ‘unmodern’, and therefore unable to comprehend modern mass media, in the 2000s, a similar culturalist discourse emerged which portrayed African audiences as having lost touch with their cultural roots. For example, a government-affiliated academic and frequent television talk show commentator, Dr Vimbai Chivaura, described the state of Zimbabwean audiences as follows “[R]ight now we are destroyed spiritually. We are suffering from what

⁸ Be patriotic, journalists told, *The Herald*, 11 September 2006.

⁹ Rupapa, T., Gwisai faces up to 10 years in jail, *The Herald*, 20 March 2012.

¹⁰ Ncube, M., Operation Dzikisai Madhishi extends media blackout, *The Zimbabwean*, 14 June 2008, available from: <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/comment/13400/operation-dzikisai-madhishi-extends-media-blackout.html> (last accessed: 16 October 2011).

psychologists say [sic] somnambulism. We are really sleepwalking, walking corpses, zombies [...]. We are carrying other people's world view" (quoted in Gandhi and Jambaya 2002: 12). In response to the perceived threat of foreign media, the government introduced the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), which was promulgated on 4 April 2001 and amended on 19 September 2003. Commenting on the new act, ZBC's Director General, Luke Munyawarara, argued that this new piece of legislation would enable Zimbabwe to "get back our economic resources to define our own destiny, bring the people of Zimbabwe and Africa together and to put ourselves on the world map as Zimbabweans and Africans".¹¹ The BSA set the stage for the introduction of local content conditions which stipulated that a television station must carry at least 75 per cent of its content from Africa while radio stations must ensure that at least 75 per cent of its content comprises of Zimbabwean music. While mass media arguably had contributed to the alienation of Africans from their heritage, these were now envisaged to be crucial in the 're-Africanisation' of audiences in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

In colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, official imaginings of audiences were intimately linked to particular interventions justified by the state in relation to its subjects. The particular reasons that motivated governments to promote or curtail certain forms of media also fundamentally shaped the manner in which the audiences of these media were imagined. This is not to invoke a technologically determinist, functionalist or instrumentalist argument but it is to suggest that the way in which audiences were imagined cannot be separated from the way in which the technologies that they are subjected to were considered. In the specific colonial context of Rhodesia, different forms of media had different connotations to the colonial administration. Given the low levels of literacy among Africans, newspapers were primarily considered to be appropriate to influence white settlers and a small, primarily missionary-educated, middle class black readership. Radio and television sets had limited distribution among Africans and were primarily accessible to the white settler community. However, because of the oral features of broadcasting, these forms of media were treated with extra care by the colonial regime as they could carry subversive content that could potentially influence the - largely illiterate - African population and threaten the status quo. The specific qualities of cinema - its speed, montage, sound, fictional character - were deemed to be unsuitable for Africans unaccustomed with the medium.

Given the novelty of modern mass media and the low levels of circulation of radio, television and newspapers among Africans, audiences were imagined as not being accustomed to the consumption of modern media. Hence, the colonial government did not treat mass media as static objects that found a place in people's homes but as tools which had to be actively 'delivered' to people. African audiences were 'othered' as 'unmodern subjects' who had to slowly be familiarised with modern mass media. In colonial Rhodesia, discourses on audiences were characterised by levels of anxiety, fear and panic on the one hand (i.e. the fear that African audiences would gain access to forms of subversive media) and by degrees of 'otherness' on the other hand (i.e. the idea that African audiences were incapable of comprehending mass media content by virtue of their alien culture). The introduction of modern mass media was thus a careful balancing act aimed at on the one hand persuading colonial subjects of the benevolence of colonial rule and on the other hand at preventing them to become too comfortable with consuming mass media content, hereby potentially gaining access to subversive ideas. While the

¹¹ ZBC takes lead in implementing Broadcasting Act, *The Sunday Mail*, 6 May 2001, p. 9.

colonial Rhodesian government primarily imagined African audiences as a vulnerable category that needed to be controlled or entertained in order to distract them from pursuing political activities, the post-independent Zimbabwean government was determined to use mass media to emancipate the *povo*, i.e. the rural masses, and transform them into modern, educated subjects. In the context of the liberalised, politically volatile 1990s, government discourses on the audience began to shift back to the manner in which the Rhodesian state had constructed audiences: as vulnerable subjects in need of state protection.

Hence, the nature of official discourses on audiences in colonial Rhodesia and post-colonial Zimbabwe was to a large extent determined by their political agency within a given social and political context. Mamdani's (1996) distinction between citizens and subjects is crucial in understanding the way in which colonial and post-colonial governments constructed audiences and publics. Livingstone (2005: 3) describes the way in which "[a]udiences are denigrated as trivial, passive, individualized, while publics are valued as active, critically engaged and politically significant". Employing this distinction, I have demonstrated that early settler rule imagined citizens as potential constituents of good publics which could aid in solidifying unity among settlers. Subjects, on the other hand, were constructed as vulnerable to propaganda of foreign broadcasts. To divert subjects from political affairs, subjects became good audiences if they were fed with entertainment. The particular construction of good and bad publics was crucial in legitimating certain government interventions. Colonial rule created separate publics in which audiences were imagined in different ways. White audiences were imagined as audiences to be educated and informed whereas black audiences were constructed as audiences to be entertained.

As the chapter also highlighted, the particular colonial construction of audiences as vulnerable subjects to be controlled by the state found renewed currency in the politically volatile context of the 2000s, characterised by the rising popularity of the MDC, hereby demonstrating the reproduction of colonial discourses in postcolonial contexts. While the lingering shadow of the Empire underlines the importance of researching discourses on audiences in English-language government policy documents in post-colonial contexts, a need remains to examine potential alternative imaginings in suppressed local, African language discourses. While this might enable us to hear the 'subaltern' speak, it could however also run the risk of underestimating the powerful echo of the colonial hangover.

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