**5. When Your ‘Take-Home’ Can Hardly Take You Home: Moonlighting and the Quest for Economic Survival in the Zimbabwean Press**

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This chapter examines how the Zimbabwean economic and political context has nurtured an environment in which journalists “illicitly” incorporate extra journalistic work into their daily routines as a way of supplementing their poor salaries and surviving the economic challenges facing the country. Although this practice –commonly referred to as ‘moonlighting’ – has always been part of journalism practice in Zimbabwe, the severe economic crisis that followed the post-2000 events promoted an unprecedented mercenary approach to journalism. Consecutive years of political crises resulted in severe economic decline which led to periodic shortages of food, fuel, electricity, medical supplies and other necessities basic for survival. Soaring inflation and currency depreciation became “the most visible manifestations of Zimbabwe’s economic woes during the first half of 2008. By mid-July, estimates of annual price increases “exceeded […] 2, 000, 000 per cent, while the domestic currency lost practically all its value” (Gilpin 2008). This precipitous economic decline was closely related to a number of complex political developments which created chaos and uncertainty resulting in the erosion of business confidence and the economic isolation of the country (Gilpin 2008). To “[prevent] their meagre cash resources from completely evaporating” (The Economist 2008), most workers (including journalists), developed imaginative and extremely agile strategies to survive. Attempts to catch up with the galloping hyperinflation saw the informal economy overtaking the formal one (The Economist 2008).

While this economic situation impacted on the operations of the media, other factors also came into play, particularly the political (and legal context). In the wake of increasing dissenting voices which reflected the country’s worsening economic problems the government decided to muzzle the private press as well as prohibit a number of foreign media houses from operating in the country by promulgating restrictive legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in January 2002 (Mabweazara 2011). Some Western media houses were accused of ‘‘writing falsehoods to tarnish [the government] image at home and abroad’’ (Mano 2005, 62). These developments prompted the closure of several private newspapers, although a number of publications succumbed because of the biting economic environment. Consequently, some observers argue that journalists in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, suffer increasingly the restrictions of media owners and are often without job security. They are also paid very little and live in direct contact with the deprivation, problems, and sufferings of the wider public1 (see Baglo, 2008).

Although the formation of a coalition government between rival political parties in September, 2008 brought significant changes in the Zimbabwean media terrain, in particular, the “loosening” of restrictive media laws which led to the resurfacing of previously banned papers (such as the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe’s *Daily News*) and the registering of new ones (such as Alpha Media Holdings’ *Newsday*), still, the repressive political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe highlighted above have had a lasting impact on the everyday professional practices of journalists in the country. In particular, the prohibition of a number of foreign media houses provided space for some public and private journalists to act as “underground” foreign correspondents for independent online newspapers as well as for the Western media. To juggle between the incompatible interests of their everyday jobs and the “underground” employers, journalists resort to the use of pseudonyms as a way of avoiding recognition by formal employers and protecting themselves from the perceived threat to personal security by the authorities. This has implications for professionalism and ethical standards as accountability is buried in anonymity. While journalists justifiably seek economic survival through moonlighting, this has many negative influences on the quality of journalistic practice and weakens their watchdog and critical role in society.

A central argument of this study is that the combination of moonlighting, bad treatment by editors, repressive conditions and poor salaries are undermining the professionalism of journalists not only in Zimbabwe but in many other African countries. These conditions not only differentiate African journalists from their counterparts in the economically developed world of the North, but also illuminate how the conditions of material deprivation tend to subvert conventionalised ethical canons of journalism such as independence and impartiality. The study further argues that while the practice of moonlighting in Zimbabwe is clearly tied to the struggles for economic survival in the context of a severe economic crisis, it also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which stories that critique government policy and expose social ills are forced out of the broader public forum. Such stories find space mainly in ‘independent’ online publications and foreign media houses that most Zimbabweans do not have access to.

In examining the impact of economic insecurity and government repression on journalists, the present study draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with over 40 journalists from six Zimbabwean mainstream newspapers: the dominant state-controlled Zimpapers (two dailies, *The* *Herald* and the *Chronicle* and two weeklies the *Sunday Mail* and the *Sunday News*) and two weeklies from the small but vibrant Alpha Media Holdings (*The* *Zimbabwe Independent* and *The* *Standard*). Interviewees were selected using purposive criteria and convenience sampling methods. Central criteria in the selection were to include journalists from different news desks in order to cover all key “beats” as well as a diversity of positions and roles across the newsrooms. The goal was to make sure that the analysis “adequately understood the variations in the phenomenon of interest in the setting, and to test developing ideas about the setting by selecting phenomena that are crucial to the validity of those ideas” (Maxwell 1992, 293). Interviewees were selected on the basis of their representation of different professional journalistic roles but working in the same newspaper environments under common conditions, rather than bringing together participants from a variety of newsrooms.

Some of my interviews were carried out in situ, at the journalists’ desks in the newsrooms. This facilitated a direct interactive engagement with the reporters and an understanding of the foundational motivations behind their moonlighting activities. As Robert White (2010, 43) puts it, “It is the direct observation and the in-depth discussions with journalists about their practices that reveal the underlying reasons and their socio-political philosophy”. This approach facilitated a close understanding of ‘insider’ perspectives of practices and cultures relating to moonlighting in the newsrooms studied.2 The research was carried out between June and December 2008, a period during which Zimbabwe’s political and economic crisis reached its peak following the disputed first round of presidential elections and the subsequent runoff elections.

**Moonlighting in journalism: Framing the debate**

‘Moonlighting’ generally refers to the second full-time or part-time job taken up by employees for a variety of reasons (Kanyane 2005). Journalists have plenty of opportunities for moonlighting which may not necessarily be directly related to their core professional activities. As Yehiel Limor and Itai Himelboim (2006, 267) observe: “Journalists may choose to engage in a variety of additional activities, such as political engagements, working in advertising and public relations, and performing educational and celebrity-type activities such as interviews”. While some moonlighting opportunities will not have a potential for a conflict of interest, others not only pose a conflict of interest but also threaten professional and ethical standards to varying degrees (Lo et al., 2005, 159). In the present study, moonlighting specifically refers to additional journalistic work taken up by reporters to augment their income.

It is important, however, to see moonlighting in journalism through the lenses of its implications for the professional-normative practices of journalism as well as the ethical standards. According to professional norms, “journalists must avoid situations that create a conflict of interests, whether actual or merely perceived, to remain loyal to their major stakeholder: the public” (Limor and Himelboim 2006, 266). Conflict of interests arise from situations in which employers have private interests that appear to clash or defeat the objective exercise of official duties (Kanyane 2005). For Sandra Borden and Michael Pritchard (2001, 79): “[a] conflict of interest involves being involved in circumstances that give others reason to worry about whether one’s judgement is actually vulnerable to secondary interests that tend to make that judgement less reliable than others are entitled to expect”. In journalism conflict of interests arise in situations where “there is reason to be concerned that the judgement and performance of journalists might be unduly influenced by interests they have that lie outside their responsibilities as journalists” (Borden and Pritchard, 2001, 74). As Franz Kruger (2004, 101) puts it: “The pay may be good but the cost to credibility are substantial” as some moonlighting opportunities “set the broader ethical alarm bells ringing” (Kruger 2004, 101). Thus, when a reporter is involved in multiple interests, this may corrupt the primary motivation of the mother employer (Borden and Pritchard, 2001). In this sense, conflict of interest interferes with professional responsibilities, judgements and the very reason clients and employers value journalists as “professionals” who are expected to be objective and independent of any private and personal interests that either interfere or appear likely to interfere with the performance of their core duties (Kanyane, 2005). In fact, the very principle of “independence calls on journalists to remain free of associations or activities that may compromise their integrity or damage their credibility” (Black et al. 1995, 98). It is therefore essential for individual journalists and news organisations to honour that principle if they are to be effective in fulfilling the primary obligation of journalism.

Although conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may arise in many areas, very little research has been done on the professional implications of moonlighting for journalism in Africa. While it is certainly not the only practice that may cause conflict of interest, it is a widespread practice that has received very little scholarly attention. This article is therefore an attempt to shed light on the “salience of the phenomenon and its legitimacy on the socio-political and organisational environment of journalists” (Limor and Himelboim 2006, 268).

**Newsroom attitudes and approaches to moonlighting**

Although there was consensus among reporters that newsrooms are strict on moonlighting, there was no clear formal policy or semblance of homogeneity in terms of the organisations’ positions and approaches to the practice. As one senior reporter at *The Herald* noted:

We are only allowed to write for those organisations where there will be no conflict of interest. You can’t write for *The Zimbabwe Independent* or *The Financial Gazette*, but perhaps you could write for the *New African* and *The* *Southern Times* because their editorial policies are more or less similar to ours.

If you are caught moonlighting for rival organisations you will be dismissed instantly. We have had several cases of people who have been dismissed because of moonlighting allegations.

This scenario is, however, not peculiar to the Zimbabwean situation. Kruger (2004, 100) observes that in the South African context: “news organisations have various policies: some rule out moonlighting completely, others positively encourage it as long as it does not impact on them in any way”.

A common position across the newsrooms studied, however, was the disapproval of members of staff working for rival groups, especially the use of company resources for these purposes. Newsrooms thus sought to monitor and track emails generated from their computers through the use of spyware – computer software that obtains information from a user’s computer without the user’s knowledge or consent in order to identify reporters moonlighting for rival news organisations. At the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, a Zimpapers editor was suspended and subsequently dismissed on allegations of moonlighting after his emails were intercepted and used as evidence against him in a disciplinary hearing3. In the light of these circumstances, journalists are extremely cautious in their use of email communication for private business within the newsrooms. This was particularly the case with company emails which they saw as easily susceptible to interception. As one senior editor at the *Chronicle* explained:

[…] you see, at the moment there are a lot of suspicions on company email. People suspect that if you use the company email the Information Technology (IT) department can intercept and read your private mails, but if you have a web-based email the belief is that it’s more secure. For that reason, I have a company email and a personal web-based email. I prefer to use the web-based […] I don’t really feel comfortable with the company email.

The IT manager at *The Herald* confirmed the presence of a system that monitors journalists’ email traffic and a general commitment towards censoring journalists’ online activities within Zimpapers.

We have a system in place that enables us to see who has generated what email and what content. So, we regularly do random checks for abuse from our main server […] Sometimes if we are not sure with the nature of the content we simply intercept and quarantine the email […]

Our major challenge, however, is in monitoring the web-based emails. It continues to be a big challenge as *journalists smuggle* (sic) *stories from our newsrooms to foreign media houses on a regular basis*.

We could be more drastic actually by using stricter ways of controlling and monitoring email traffic, but we want people to be responsible […] (emphasis added).

Journalists in the private press were equally cautious in their use of email for moonlighting purposes because of fears and suspicions of snooping. One senior reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent* explained:

I’ve got two private web-based emails, one of them is completely anonymous even if I write to you, you will not recognise the email is from me because I use a secret username. It is strictly for private business. *You see for most of us to feed our families, we have to freelance, which is against our company policy* […] you cannot freelance using the company email […]

We are also aware that management has surreptitiously installed malicious spyware on our computers *to monitor who is sending stories where* because they suspect that most of the content on these Zimbabwean news websites is originating from our newsroom [...]

So, we use private emails like Yahoo to wire stories abroad and the company email for business related to the newspaper. Essentially, the private email is for business which you don’t want to be detected by management [...] (emphasis added).

Although these circumstances render the deployment of email in newsmaking difficult, journalists “are far from being mired in ‘backwardness’ or passively awaiting external salvation” (Berger 2005, 1) in regard to using email for their private business. Thus, as noted above, journalists have resorted to the use of private web-based emails for personal business, including filing stories to their “underground” employers. As one senior reporter at *The Zimbabwe Independent*, explained: “You see, for most journalists to survive they have to freelance and you can’t freelance using a company email. It’s a dismissible offence. So, we use private web-based emails like Yahoo with anonymous usernames to wire stories abroad […]”.

This scenario not only reflects the ethical ambiguities concerning moonlighting which are rooted in the journalists’ quest for economic survival but also the newsrooms’ attitudes and approaches towards moonlighting by their staffers which are anchored in concerns over “corporate self-interest rather than professional ethics” (Kruger 2004, 101). This points to the “lack of stable, deep value commitments” in the newsrooms (White 2010, 42). Like their staffers, the newsrooms seem to be only concerned about their private gains, and not the “noble objective of ‘serving the people’” (Kasoma 1996, 95) as a whole.

In some of the newsrooms, however, editors struck an informal compromise with their reporters by “allowing” them to moonlight as a way of keeping the newspapers afloat as well as retaining their key staff under the dire economic conditions in which they are operating. As one reporter at *The* *Standard* put it:

Well, we reached an informal understanding with the editor-in-chief of the newspaper after looking at the economic situation that we are living in, we had to come to a compromise on how best to try and survive. Basically, if the truth be told, we are helping out the company by taking up extra paid work elsewhere. Everyone knows that *our take-home can hardly take us home* (emphasis added).

The laissez-faire approach towards moonlighting in some of the newsrooms is thus partly explained by the economic challenges facing the newsrooms and their battle to retain key staff in a context where staffers largely view themselves as subsidising their employers. However, as this study attempts to show, the laissez-faire culture also encourages a disregard of professional standards. It hampers recourse to professional codes of ethics (as instruments of self-regulation) and results in reporters and editors glossing over ethical violations. As Limor and Himelboim (2006, 280) rightly contend: “The economic conditions in which African journalists operate turns any form of prohibitions and constraints on additional work into lip service only, as the journalists find themselves unable to abide by these rulings”.

**Journalists’ quest for economic survival**

As noted earlier, moonlighting in the Zimbabwean press is deeply anchored in journalists’ quest for economic survival by supplementing their meagre salaries. New technologies (in particular the Internet), play a central role in sustaining this widespread practice (I return to this point shortly). The new technologies become important because the news organizations that the journalists moonlight for mainly consist of foreign media houses and online newspapers with an interest in Zimbabwean issues. The latter are predominantly run by exiled Zimbabwean journalists who have maintained contact with their former colleagues in Zimbabwean mainstream newsrooms. The interview extract below with a senior news reporter at *The Standard* is telling in terms of the economic drive towards adopting extra work outside one’s regular employment in the mainstream newsrooms.

Knowing as you do that here in Zimbabwe working as a journalist is tough […] particularly in terms of the salaries we earn, this means that within my main daily business, I have to look for more ideas in order to be able to formulate stories to sell to some outside news websites and get a few extra bucks[...]Thus, I would give my newspaper its own piece of the flesh (sic) first, and then I would do my other work. Basically, I think we are helping out the company […]

So, I would say that my work routines revolve around that kind of culture in which I have to browse the Internet in the morning, look at daily newspapers and try and set an agenda that caters for my company’s interests as well as mine.

This response typifies the taken-for-granted and almost naturalized explanation of the “conflicting” professional practice that characterizes news work in the Zimbabwean mainstream press. As shown earlier, the surge in moonlighting is directly related to the political and economic environment following the post-2000 developments. According to Mano (2005, 62) this era “presented the media with new political, economic and legislative challenges” which increasingly saw the tightening of the media’s legislative environment and the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe following accusations by government “of writing falsehoods to tarnish its image at home and abroad” (Mano, 2005, 62). This scenario provided space for “[s]ome public and private journalists [to act] as foreign correspondents for Western media, some of which are traditionally hostile in their coverage of Africa” (Mano 2005, 62).

This state of affairs promoted the development of “underground” relationships between foreign media houses (with restricted access to Zimbabwe) and local mainstream journalists who were forced to look elsewhere to supplement their poor salaries. Nyamnjoh (2005, 73-74) observes that poor salaries and working conditions in African newsrooms have “inevitably led to “prostitution” by journalists or what one may term a hand-to-mouth journalism, if not a journalism of misery. Any bit of money can lure a journalist to write anything”.

In the newsrooms studied journalists chose to retain their contractual obligations with their regular employers for a number of reasons that include: financial security in case their part-time jobs fail them; to maintain cover from surveillance forces, to safeguard their legitimacy and maintain visibility to prospective foreign media houses; and more importantly, as regards the present study, to ensure guaranteed and regular access to the technologies that sustain their part-time work; particularly, the Internet. As Nyamnjoh (2005, 70) explains, this predicament forces many of the practitioners to opt for a “Jekyll-and-Hyde personality” that allows them to accommodate the interests of their regular as well as their “underground” employers.

**The ‘new’ media and the professional implications of “moonlighting”**

One of the main findings of this study was the centrality of the Internet in facilitating the bourgeoning of ‘underground’ extra paid work for journalists in the mainstream press. Although moonlighting has always been part of mainstream journalism practice in Zimbabwe, journalists’ exposure to international news organisations through the Internet – coupled with the prohibition of foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe – has cultivated a mercenary approach to journalism. For most journalists, making money has taken precedence over professional and ethical standards. This development was clearly articulated by one desk editor from *The Zimbabwe Independent* in a lengthy interview at the Harare Press Club:

The Internet has economically empowered a lot of journalists in Zimbabwe where the majority of top journalists were forced to flee the country. Those that have remained have managed to use the opportunities offered by the Internet to break into global media organizations that were traditionally very difficult to break into [...]

There are people right here in this very club who are doing jobs for *Reuters*; *BBC*; *The Washington Post*;and *The* *New York Times*: some of the biggest news organizations in the world. It has all been made possible by the Internet. I can say 90 per cent of the journalists operating in Zimbabwe survive through the Internet because these are the guys that feed the outside world with stories. For instance, almost everyday we have a story on BBC from Harare and Bulawayo yet the BBC is banned from practising in this country.4 It’s a similar story with the CNN and numerous other media organisations that are banned from practising here; they are being serviced by local journalists […] we are talking here of journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms. These are journalists that can now be classified as some of the richest guys in Zimbabwe...some of these guys drink here [in the press club] everyday and drive very good cars...and all these are benefits accrued through the Internet [...]

Interviewer: But doesn’t that whole scenario have negative professional implications?

Journalist: It does to a certain extent, because we have had instances where we discuss rumours in this press club and ten minutes later you find the rumour on the Internet as a story. A case in point was during the March 29 [2008] parliamentary and presidential elections, rumours were circulated here in the press club that Mugabe was losing and that his sister, Sabina, had collapsed and died in shock. In no time at all, there was a story on the Internet that Mugabe’s sister had died. Someone had picked it up and written a story under a pseudonym and the editor of that particular news website published it without cross checking. Embarrassingly, two hours down the line the government was denying it!

From the above, it is clear that although the Internet has provided Zimbabwean mainstream journalists with opportunities for economic survival, the opportunities are fraught with negative professional and ethical implications. Journalists are clearly “oblivious of the effect of their reportage on society, as long as they make money” (Kasoma 1996, 97). As one desk editor at the *Chronicle* put it: “People don’t care what they are selling to these online publications […] anything that brings money on the table will go, including unverified information”. Commenting on the impact of the Internet on African journalism practice, Kasoma (1996, 95) writes:

In a world in which the information superhighway has made journalists practise their profession in a hurry as they strive to satisfy the world’s craving for more and quicker news and other information, the humaneness of journalism has increasingly been giving way to the expediencies of cut-throat financial […] competition.

In light of the ethical and professional challenges posed by the revolutionary changes emerging with new technologies, Clifford Christians (2008, 6) calls for an urgent need to develop an “ethics of integrity” that updates ethical and professional concerns articulated in the pre-digital era among media professionals. For Christians (2008, 6), a new “media ethics agenda must be developed for the cyber world” of online networking.

It is perhaps important to highlight that the interview extract above reinforces a point noted earlier, that moonlighting in the Zimbabwean mainstream press also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which news organizations that carry stories which critique government policy and expose social ills predominantly find space in “independent” and foreign news organizations that are restricted from practising in the country. In fact, at the time of doing fieldwork for the present study, many foreign news organizations deemed hostile to government policies such as the BBC and CNN had been banned from practising journalism in Zimbabwe hence their reliance on local journalists.

Journalists’ use of pseudonyms as a way of disguising their identities from their regular employers and protecting themselves from a perceived threat to personal security by the authorities further compromises ethical standards as accountability is buried in anonymity (Moyo 2007; Chari 2009). Moreover, the speed with which the Internet allows for the publication of stories also fuels the publication of “unsubstantiated and often highly opinionated stories” (Moyo, 2007, 91) as seen in the publication of press club rumours about the alleged death of Mugabe’s sister referred to in the interview extract above.

The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one’s regular employer and the “underground” employer also led to unprofessional behaviour in the newsrooms as journalists resorted to “stealing” stories from colleagues in order to sell them to their “underground” employers. The entertainment editor of the *Sunday News* described this scenario thus: “moonlighting has resulted in several problems in this newsroom, people steal stories from each other and sell them to online publications […] there are also growing incidents of fabrications”. Reinforcing this response, one assistant news editor at *The Herald* gave an insightful illustration of how journalists “stole” stories from each other in a newsroom interview:

Interviewer: In your experience in this newsroom, have you witnessed any forms of abuse of these technologies?

Journalist: A lot, because of the editorial system that we use […] I will show you something [looks around], you see that reporter, look at his monitor – he is going through other people’s raw copies, he is on “read only”, come closer, come and see what I am talking about [we both move towards the journalist]. Look, now he is in his own “basket”, but [seizes the mouse to illustrate his point] if he moves up here he can see all the stories that have been filed for tomorrow’s paper, but he can only read, he can’t edit them. So, what he does is, he secretly copies these stories, spices them up (sic) a bit and sends them to an online publication that he works for clandestinely, no one can tell he has done it […]

The challenges faced by newsrooms in their attempts to monitor and control moonlighting were further articulated by one desk editor at the *Zimbabwe Independent*:

There are a number of challenges that are beginning to emerge in this newsroom because of moonlighting. First, reporters are in the habit of nicking colleagues’ stories and selling them to other publications. Even if you were to monitor them there is very little you can do [...] because of technological advancements. Journalists will simply use flash disks to transfer stories from one computer to another without being detected. Some even have computers at home and they do their business there without even coming to the newsroom […]

The professional and ethical challenges posed by the increase in moonlighting among mainstream journalists were also a result of competition for breaking news among foreign news agencies and online newspapers with an interest in Zimbabwe’s unfolding socio-political crisis. As one reporter at *The Standard* explained, the competition among journalists to be the first to break a story exposed the profession to ethical challenges:

[…] because of the competition among news agencies and online publications for the Zimbabwean story [...] each journalist wants to be the first to break the story and make more money. This has damaged the profession as people don’t even wait to adhere to the cardinal rules of journalism: verifying and crosschecking issues.

This perhaps further finds explanation in Edward Wasserman’s (2010) observation that: “News media, especially on the Internet, are developing greater reliance on producers of content who are not full-time employees”. News organizations thus find it beneficial (and less expensive) to get more and more of their content from people who are not on their fulltime payroll. However, “[t]his poses a huge challenge to traditional ways to ensure independence and guard against conflicts of interest” (Wasserman, 2010). From the above, it is clear that moonlighting journalists “focus attention on the potential conflict between a commitment to other employers or extraneous interests represented by additional work” (Limor and Himelboim 2006, 267).

Clearly, the phenomenon of moonlighting points to the challenges that the material realities of working as a journalist for a poor salary imposes on journalists in Africa. It highlights how such conditions tend to subvert conventionalized notions of journalistic independence and impartiality. While this practice is entrenched in Zimbabwean newsrooms and has assumed a particular dimension, research has shown that it is equally widespread in other countries. For example, Lomir and Himelboim (2006, 265) observe that The Croatian Journalists’ Trade Union has maintained that the country’s journalism has deteriorated as a result of extensive moonlighting. The same goes for countries like Pakistan where journalists are said to double as state agents (Limor and Himelboim 2006).

Moonlighting is, however, by no means the only kind of conflict of interest that arises for journalists. It is not isolated from related practices that have been seen to “either compromise journalistic independence or force journalists to negotiate the universal norm of objectivity” (Mabweazara 2011, 114). The practice has close links with other commonly known corrupt practices in journalism. For example, Berhanu Lodamo and Terje Skjerdal (2009, 134) discuss the practices of “freebies (taking items such as free tickets or dinners for the journalist’s personal gain) and brown envelopes (the informal transfer of money from sources to journalists” among broadcast journalists in Ethiopia. They argue that these practices are mainly as a result of “lack of ethical consciousness” (2009, 152) among journalists. Writing about similar practices in Cameroon, Lillian Ndangam (2006, 180) notes that the quest for “self-enhancement and even self enrichment” through the practice of *gombo* (a metaphor for various payments, freebies and rewards solicited by journalists) breaches and subverts professional standards. Ndangam sees these practices as being more than ethical lapses and slips, but rather as institutionalized and “deeply entrenched” (2006, 196). In Tanzanian newsrooms journalists are also alleged to “indulge in corrupt practices and conflict of interest undermining the credibility of the media in the process” (Mfumbusa 2006, 259). For these reasons the press in Africa “has been called all sorts of names, from “cocktail”, “bread-and-butter”, “cheque-book”, “yellow”, “attack-collect”, “brown-envelope” or “survival journalism” (Nyamnjoh, 2005, 59).

However, these practices highlight the impact of the conditions of material deprivation which differentiate African journalists from their counterparts in the economically developed world of the North. Nyamnjoh (2005, 65) is thus quick to contend that: “to blame all these shortcomings on the media and their practitioners would be to overlook other factors that make it difficult for even the most committed professionals to excel ethically in the African context”. A number of writers point out that the economic conditions generally prevailing in most African countries have pushed journalists to trample ethical codes in pursuit of economic survival. Writing from a Tanzanian context Mfumbusa (2006, 267) observes that “poor and irregular pay encourage moonlighting and acceptance of ‘junkets’”. Nyamnjoh concurs in his observation that financial hardships have led many African journalists to “seek positions as stringers for the major Western media” (Nyamnjoh 2005, 87). Against this backdrop, moonlighting in journalism has to be seen in the light of the economic context in which African journalists operate. This differentiates its impact on journalism from experiences in the economically developed countries of the North. Whereas in Western countries the underlying conflict may be between professional interests and the individual right of occupation, in African contexts where journalists are poorly paid “professional norms may conflict with the very basic commitment to individual and family survival” (Limor and Himelboim, 2006, 268). It is perhaps important to highlight that political, economic and cultural differences across countries render it difficult to conceptualize an ethics that is “fundamentally transnational in character” (Christians 2008, 6).

On the other hand, while the practice of moonlighting in Zimbabwe is clearly tied to the struggles for economic enhancement in the context of severe economic crisis, it also articulates the consequences of a restricted media environment in which stories that critique government policy and expose social ills mainly find space in “independent” online publications and foreign media houses that make use of local journalists (see Mabweazara, 2010).

**Concluding remarks**

This study has examined how the Zimbabwean economic and political context has broadly nurtured an environment in which journalists “illicitly” incorporate extra (journalistic work) into their daily routines to supplement their poor salaries. With the increased exposure of journalists to international news organisations through the Internet and the prohibition of selected foreign media houses from practising in Zimbabwe, moonlighting has taken on “new” meanings that pose critical professional and ethical questions. The pressure to maintain efficiency in the face of a demanding workload divided between one’s regular employer and the “underground” employer has compromised professionalism in the newsrooms as journalists resort to unethical practices such as “stealing” stories from one another and plagiarism in order to meet their targets. As Kasoma (1996, 95) puts it: “the African press, seems to be abandoning the noble objective of “serving the people” for the selfish cause of “serving self”. Journalists have a selfish and self-centred approach to journalism rather than a societal one (Kasoma 1996).

Given the challenges that newsrooms face in paying their staffers, one can argue that the answer to the problem of moonlighting does not lie in discouraging or prohibiting the practice (especially in situations where journalists cannot rely on their employers for principal financial support), but in devising ways of ensuring that journalists act transparently and fully declare any activities outside their main employment which are likely to have a potential for a conflict of interest. What we perhaps need are well thought-out formal newsroom policies that clearly articulate the problem of moonlighting and prohibit situations that pose conflict of interest. However, this can be complicated and controversial especially when matters of survival are at stake. As Borden and Pritchard (2001, p. 89) note, the major challenge is that “conflicts of interest may escape detection precisely because the secondary interests that oppose themselves to journalists’ primary responsibilities are worthy in their own right”. It is, however, crucial that practices that pose conflicts of interests such as moonlighting are recognised “so that they may be avoided – or when this option is not reasonable – so that they may be managed with a minimum of damage to the crucial mission journalists perform” (Borden and Pritchard 2001, 89).

Most importantly, newsrooms should foreground ethical values and “the grounding of practices in a form of fundamental commitment to the citizenry or national development” (White, 2010, p. 43), rather than private commercial interests. The individualistic approach by journalists in the practice of their profession could thus change to a more accommodating, societal one, based perhaps on Kasoma’s much contested notion of “Afriethical foundations” which advocates for a “society centred” (1996, 96) rather than a money-centred profession anchored in “self-enrichment and self-aggrandisement” (Kasoma 1996, 95). This is particularly important given that: “In today’s world, we are highly dependent on journalists for furnishing information that enables us to make meaningful decisions about our lives, and we have little choice but to trust that journalists will strive to meet our needs and interests in this regard” (Borden and Pritchard 2001, 75). Practices that pose a conflict of interest put into jeopardy this trust. For this reason, secondary interests should not be allowed to interfere with the primary goals of truthful, fair and thorough presentation of news.

More empirical research is needed across cultures if we are to fully understand the notion of moonlighting in terms of its trends and implications for the practice of journalism across Africa. This empirical research can lead to more substantive theoretical propositions that illuminate our understanding of the practice of moonlighting and the rules governing conflict of interest.

**Aknowledgement**

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**Notes**

1. On average, in January 2009 when the Zimbabwean economy was dollarized the least paid journalist across all the newsrooms was earning US$160 and the highest paid was taking home US$300 per month (Mabweazara, 2010).

2. Due to the sensitivity of some of the responses provided by interviewees, I have deliberately avoided using their names referring only to their generic titles in place of actual names in order to protect their identity.

3. ‘Zimpapers Managers Spy on Suspended Editor’, reported in *The Standard*, September 27. 2008. Retrieved December 3, 2008 from: http://www.thestandard.co.zw/local/18997-zimpapers-managersspy-on-suspended-editor.html

4. However, with the formation of a coalition government between opposition and the ruling party ZANU-PF in September 2008, government softened its stance towards foreign media.

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