**3. African Journalism Cultures: The Struggle for Free Expression Against Neo-Patrimonial Governance**

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The study of journalism in Africa rarely focuses on everyday practices of journalists, especially the ‘culturally distinct’ practices that underpin journalism on the continent, what this book has broadly termed *newsmaking cultures* (see Chapter 1). The intricacies of these *newsmaking cultures* are central to this chapter. To understand a ‘culture’, according to cultural anthropologists, one enter into the worldview of the concerned people, which functions as a pair of lenses that filters certain aspects of a lived existence or reality. In the African context, as some scholars argue, this worldview is largely dependent on *who you know* and not on *what you know*. They argue that it is not just our personal ideals and ambitions that count, but the complex structures of power which we must align ourselves with in order to survive (Hyden and Okigbo 2002; Thompson 2004; Bayart 2009; Diamond 2010).

Above all, we must be aware of the structures of power that relate to the ruling elite, and in particular, to the personage who so often has been ‘President for life’ as is typical in a number of African countries. Journalists, especially must be acutely aware of this structure of power as they decide on *what* issues to cover and *how* to cover them. With every step, the journalist on the continent is asking difficult questions: ‘will this story pass through the filter of the editor who often represents the interests of the political elite? Will my article bring down personal reprisals from the state security agents? Dare I allude to the corruption and mismanagement caused by the latest party appointees in the ministry I am reporting on? Underpinning all these questions is one of the most prominent aspects of journalistic cultures in Africa – the continuous struggle of journalists with the autocratic, personalistic styles of governance (Diamond 2010). As Hyden and Okigbo (2002) point out in their *Media and Democracy in Africa*, the major concern in the daily practice of journalism is the repressive neo-patrimonial system of politics on the continent, which is characterised by the centralization of power on “an individual to whom all within the system owe their positions” (Thomson 2004, 127). This often entails “the discretionary use of public resources by the powerful individual “to strengthen personal and/or partisan power and favor allied news organisations” (Waisbord 2013, 153-154).

Virtually all analyses of the social, economic and especially political institutions in Africa relate to this neo-patrimonial governance that dominates public life (Bayart 2009; Diamond, 2004). [[1]](#footnote-1)The question here is, in what ways is journalism on the continent affected by the structural relations between governments and news organisations, as well as between officials [or powerful individuals] and reporters” (Waisbord 2013, 155)? Similarly, in what ways are journalists striving towards building a culture that exposes and challenges neo-patrimonial institutions thereby engendering democratic governance. The bulk of the study focuses on the latter.

In responding to these poignant questions, it is important to highlight the fact that in democratic societies, the foundations of journalism as a profession rest on its commitment to a number of normative ideals, especially the truthfulness and accuracy of reporting public events. This also includes the general tolerance of freedom of expression, the exposure of human rights violations and non-democratic public procedures (Wasserman 2010, 2012; Diamond 2004). In Africa, these commitments are mainly inculcated in journalism education, newsrooms and journalistic associations, but are broadly part of a historical legacy of the colonial times (Omu 1978). As this chapter observes, since independence, African journalists, especially those working for the so-called ‘independent’ or privately-owned press, have created cultures of resistance to neo-patrimonial rule despite facing various attacks and even death threats from state security agents (Kasoma 1995). While most post-independence regimes maintained a stranglehold on the public media, virtually controlling all editorial processes (see Chapter 1 and 13), with the liberalisation of the media sector in the mid-1990s, the independent press tried to bring African nations toward democratic governance thus vindicating the human rights enshrined in most African constitutions (Kasoma 1995; Bourgault 1995; Nyamnjoh 2005). Many news organisations and professional bodies in Africa over the years have emphasised that the profession must become reflexively aware of its role in order to safeguard and maintain its professional capacity (Wasserman 2010).

In the light of the above, this chapter reviews research on journalism practice in Africa. It specifically focuses on issues directly implicating (and contesting) neo-patrimonial dominance and related efforts toward democratisation on the continent. These issues mainly relate to: 1) Confronting the falsity and repressive violence of the ‘loving father image’ of African neo-patrimonial strongmen; 2) The press, civil society and human rights discourses as a ‘united front’; 3) Using the freedom of ‘alternative media’ to unmask neo-patrimonial repression ; 4) Pushing legal reforms to protect journalistic freedom and ‘freedom of information’; 5) Challenging the influence of ‘political money’ on journalistic expression; and 6) Investigative journalism training, the exposure of bad governance and the crippling demands for profitability. In discussing these interrelated issues, this chapter attempts to give concrete examples which project broader values, practices and experiences of journalists on the African continent.

1. **Confronting the falsity of the ‘loving father’ image of neo-patrimonial governance**

Efforts towards accurate, honest and critical reporting on the African continent continually clash with personalistic governance which puts itself above the law and seeks to avoid any form of public scrutiny. As seen earlier, patrimonial rule literally means the pretension of ‘fatherly authority’ and the media are expected to treat the actions of presidential figures with unthinking, childlike obeisance (Schmitz 2006). In cultivating this image of ceremonial elegance, heads of states put themselves above the rule of law, and anyone questioning this ‘kingly’, arbitrary governance is made to suffer the punishment of ‘the disobedient child’ (Gonzion 2011). A good example of this is seen during the long reign of Cote d’Ivoire’s Felix Houphet-Boigny from 1960 to 1993. He adopted the title ‘Le Vieux’, the ‘Old Man’, or, better, ‘Our loving father’ and was widely known as ‘The grand old man of Africa’ or ‘The sage of Africa’. Houphet-Boigny became a model for Banda in Malawi, Kaunda in Zambia, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Kenyatta and Moi in Kenya.

Journalists in Cote d’Ivoire who refused to echo this kingly praise of the president or those showing the slightest disrespect were taken out to the military camp of Seguela for a week of “mental straightening out” (Gonzion, 2011, 309). These reprisals were seen as ‘paternalistic repression’. Later presidents in Cote d’Ivoire ordered critical journalists to be whipped like naughty boys (Gonzion 2011). The newspaper *Mwana Halisi* in Tanzania was banned for some time in 2008 by the Minister of Information for reporting the clearly evidenced corrupt behavior and illegal trading by President Kikwete’s son because it showed disrespect for the president and his family (Masanja 2012).

In the Zimbabwean context, similar cases have obtained where news stories deemed to insult President Robert Mugabe and his family have quite often landed journalists in trouble. In March 2017, the editor of a privately-owned daily, *NewsDay*, and a senior reporter were arrested and charged under section 33 of the ‘Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act’ for a story on Mugabe’s health, which was deemed to ‘undermine or insult the office of the president’[[2]](#footnote-2). Similarly, in recent times, a number of journalists from the privately-owned press have been arrested and even assaulted in broad daylight for covering protests and demonstrations against the government as illustrated in figure 3.1 below.



**Figure 3.1:** A *NewsDay* reporter being manhandled by an undercover police officer for taking pictures of a scuffle between law enforcement agents and street vendors in the capital city, Harare (photo credit: Shepherd Tozvireva).

Unfortunately, the journalistic response to this familistic style is often just as personalistic. However, the best response by journalists in Cote d’Ivoire and many other African countries to this self-serving governance has been to form professional associations that monitor irresponsible journalism (Gonzion 2011). As Gonzion (2011) further observes, journalists in Cote d’Ivoire, as in many other sub-Saharan African countries, have been at the forefront of fostering a responsible, accurate public discourse based on universal human rights and universal norms of good governance, albeit in difficult circumstances. They have also been working to educate public officials to accept the right and importance of a truthful, critical journalism (Gonzion 2011). These developments echo Kasoma’s (1995, 542) observations about the role of ‘independent’ press in Africa. He argues that it

has broken the myth once held on the continent that *African dictatorial presidents were invincible and could not be criticized*. The once idolized presidents […] have been criticized for wrecking the economies of their countries […]. They have also been criticized for muzzling freedom of the press […]. (emphasis added)

In some cases, journalists in the ‘independent’ press (in association with the civil society and human rights organisations) have taken to the streets to directly protest the muzzling of the press as shown in figure 3.2 below.



**Figure 3.2:** Zimbabwean journalists and civil society activists protesting against the harassment and detention of journalists by the police (photo credit: Kumbirai Mafunda).

Journalists in Tanzania have also tried to raise the level of critical, responsible public discourse. Journalist associations working with the Media Council of Tanzania developed the ‘Dar es Salaam Declaration on Editorial Freedom, Independence and Responsibility’, which has set down norms and guidelines for introducing an objective and accurate evaluation of government and other public services. The Media Council of Tanzania and other organizations have been trying to educate journalists, government, as well as other public institutions to accept the importance of responsible criticism of public action (Media Council of Tanzania 2012, also see Chapter 11 in this volume). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe and other organizations such as the Media Centre[[3]](#footnote-3) have embarked on training programmes intended to strengthen investigative journalism.

In some countries, challenging patrimonial governance has taken the form of criticism of military takeover of the state. The opposition of journalists to military government in Ghana is well-documented, but especially revealing of the role and culture of journalists is the study of the systematic contestation of military rule in Nigeria by Ogbondah (1994). The forty years of military rule in Nigeria from the early 1960s to 1999 were a period of continued plunder of the national treasury and brutal repression of any protest. What the military dictators of Nigeria demanded of journalists above all was reverence for the personalistic ‘dignity’ of the presidential figure (Ogbondah 1994). Journalists, however, followed their own mandate. They carried on a relentless revelation of the violation of imprisonment without trial, enormous theft of national resources and use of public office for personal gain. During this time, virtually all editors and senior journalists suffered interrogation sessions and even torture. Dele Giwa, one of the founders of the news magazine *Newswatch* that introduced a tradition of investigative journalism was killed by a letter bomb, but he became a major inspiration of the unwavering criticism of the military dictatorship (Ogbondah 1994). This continual exposure of the repression and support for human rights groups, was an important factor in the return to democratic elections in Nigeria in 1999.

Journalists in Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent have also sought legal protection for their right to carry out responsible investigation into issues relating to governance and public services[[4]](#footnote-4). Fortunately, recent constitutions in countries such as Kenya (2010) explicitly protect journalists (Kiptinness 2012). However, the practical application of these legal defenses remains a challenge for most journalists on the continent (Dirbaba and O’Donnell 2012).

1. **The press, civil society and human rights voices as a ‘united front’**

Journalists in the private press have often been linked to civil society organisations that radically contest and challenge the abuse of power by governments in Africa.Neo-patrimonial rule is continually clashing with a rising class of educated people who lead civil society organisations advocating constitutional governance (Bratton 1994, see figure 3.2 above).The centrality of civil society lies in the fact that if isolated journalists attempt to criticize the abuses of African dictatorial governance, they are often quickly silenced, but if they unite with the civil society — legal associations, the church, business associations, women’s organizations etc., they make an impact in their fight against institutions of patrimonial governance. This united front emerged in many African countries in the late 1980s and through the 1990s, notably in Kenya against Moi and against Kaunda in Zambia (Bratton 1994). The campaign against the tactics of Rawlings in Ghana in the 1980s and 1990s, with the outspoken journalistic leadership of Paul Ansah, shows how proactive investigative journalism and leadership can have a significant impact on the political culture and institutions of a country (Gadzekpo, et al., c. 1995).

Ansah set the tone by avoiding the petty personalistic political infighting and speaking the broader language of human rights from his position as head of the journalism school at the University of Ghana and as the unofficial spokesman of the moral principles of the Ghanaian churches. He also had the advantage of the relatively united support of journalists and media associations in Ghana. Ansah’s famous phrase, “I am going to go to town on that fellow”, eventually found its way into the book *Going to Town,* a collection inwhich Gadzekpo, Karikari and Yankah brought out the journalistic skill of Ansah in coalescing support for more democratic governance. Ansah’s criticism of dictatorial rule in Ghana was particularly effective because it articulated well the political culture of an educated middle class.

The highly-educated brilliance of Ansah may be less typical than the ordinary journalist, but Ansah and other outstanding journalists developed a language and style widely influential among Ghanaian journalists. In the late 1980s and 1990s a series of studies revealed a broad range of the efforts by journalists in Ghana representing the civil society challenge of the often-repressive military governance of Rawlings (Boafo,1985; Andoh, 1993; Koomson, 1996; Ansu Keremeh and Karikari, 1998; Asante, 1996; Anoka, 1997; Hasty, 2005). Particularly insightful are the series of personal interviews by Diedong (2008) with Ghanaian journalists regarding the high points of their career.

Another important site of conflict with neo-patrimonial power structures is the questioning by journalists of editorial policies dictated by political leaders. The criticism of Rawlings’ regime at times became a confrontation between journalists and editors of leading state-owned newspapers such as the *Daily Graphic*. The willingness to risk even one’s employment in refuting editors’ directives reveals much of this aspect of journalistic culture. Yaw Boadu-Ayeboafoh, a journalist with the *Daily Graphic,* according to his own account, chose to support the right of opposition parties to begin to form and campaign even when the government board of elections was officially reluctant to allow opposition parties this right. This brought him into open confrontation with the editor of the *Daily Graphic* (Diedong 2008)*.* Day after day Boadu-Ayeboafoh brought to the editorial planning meetings articles on the demand of the opposition parties to begin campaigning. Finally, after a battle of words in the editorial meeting, he submitted a letter of resignation. Shocked at this show of values and conviction, the editor wrote a letter supporting Boadu-Ayeboafoh, “Of all the senior journalists at this newspaper, you are the one I feel so much confidence in” (Diedong 2008, 217).

As often happens, the positions taken by capable journalists can move editors to take risks. Once the editor knew that he had the united support of his staff, he was ready to take a more independent stand. On other occasions, Boadu-Ayeboafoh wrote news articles openly challenging Rawlings and helped to articulate the feelings of Ghanaians who deeply resented Rawlings’ oppressive governance.

His journalistic independence is an example of another important value, especially not being held ‘captive’ by any political strong man or political party. He could point out freely and honestly how a particular political leader was violating the principles of the Ghanaian constitution. For this, he became much more credible, popular and widely read by the Ghananian public. In all of this, he was aware of the risks for his career and even to his life, but he was willing to take the risks because of his belief in the importance of public debate for the country. He claimed that he was never arrested because of his popularity which would only increase his credibility with the public (Diedong 2008).

Boadu-Ayeboafoh demonstrates an important perspective in journalistic professionalism, an awareness of the responsibility that freedom brings.

It is good to be free. But as a journalist, how are you using the freedom to the benefit of the larger society. Are you using the freedom simply because it is freedom and you can do as you wish or because you are free you can do a lot of things for the people. (Diedong 2008, 21)

The question, however, is where do the values of journalists willing to confront autocratic rule come from? In the case of Boadu-Ayeboafoh, he had read widely the major thinkers and writers in Africa. He was particularly influenced by Chinua Achebe[[5]](#footnote-5). In his words, his fundamental belief

is underlined by what Chinua Achebe said about the individual who owns the cock in the community. When it crows in the morning, it becomes the property of all. In Achebe’s words. ‘The cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household, but its voice is the property of the whole neighbourhood’. So, my belief is that regardless of who owns the cock, it serves the good of the community in which it is found. This is the core belief that I have canvassed and shared with the people. Their interests are the things that should inform (us journalists) on the things we write about. The primary interest of every journalist must be the public interest. (Diedong 2008, 217)

Underpinned by these values and beliefs Boadu-Ayeboafoh promoted the solidarity of journalists in the face of attempts by politicians to separate and buy them off. He was executive secretary of the National Media Commission from 1999 to 2003. For years, he was a major supporter of the Ghana Journalist Association (GJA) and became its vice-president from 1999 to 2003 (Diedong 2008). In his view, membership to these associations is a key aspect of the independent culture of journalists.

Membership in the GJA enables journalists to learn from each other. It also enables [one] to reach out to my colleagues because, as you interact with them, you are not regarded as an alien. The seminars and workshops organized by the GJA on pertinent topics are useful in enhancing the standards of media performance. Exposure to all these seminars has had a very positive influence on me. (Diedong 2008, 220)

In Zimbabwe, these sentiments also relate to the prevalent role of the civil society and media Organisations such the Media Centre (noted earlier), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe chapter) and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, play a key role in the training, resourcing as well as supporting journalists in times of crisis.

It is important to note that the culture of neo-patrilineal governance is rooted in the control of wealth to buy compliance, the disregard of legal procedures and the bullying of the opposition into submission. Thus, the attempt to introduce a broader discourse and vision of human rights, constitutional guarantees as well as the rule of law is another important aspect of journalism in Africa. Again, an account from the experience of Boadu-Ayeboafoh in Ghana illustrates how journalists introduce the language of human rights to challenge officials who represent patrimonial rule (Diedong 2008).

In one classic case, Boadu-Ayeboafoh defended old women falsely accused of practising witchcraft in a rural area in Northen Ghana. In his view, the District Chief Executive of the area was judging the situation with the typical power-tactics of neo-patrilineal governance (Diedong 2008). When Ayeboafoh spoke to the official about the rumors of the harmful intentions of the so-called witches, the official noted immediately that he did not share his belief that the women should be tortured or even killed. Instead of joining the official plan to punish these elderly women on unfounded suspicion, Boadu-Ayeboafoh wrote a feature article highlighting the fact that these were false accusations. The article called for compassion and the need to help these elderly women. Boadu-Ayeboafoh recounts that the article was widely read and that two weeks later he got a call from the Department of Social Welfare inquiring about the location of the elderly women accused of witchcraft (Diedong 2008). He further states that his feature article led to the introduction of a program to assist the so-called witches who were simply elderly women with problems of illness and lack of proper food and shelter. The article led to the formation of a movement aimed at assisting elderly women falsely accused of practising witchcraft. It was a case of the culture of journalists affirming human rights against the culture of authoritarian officialdom.

1. **Using the freedom of ‘alternative media’ to unmask neo-patrimonial repression**

Most journalists are quietly committed to finding ways of revealing the falsity of cover-ups or outright lies publicized by governments. Yet neo-patrimonial governments have built up such a convincing discourse (largely through the state-controlled media), justifying their autocratic rule as a necessity. Much of the routine news reports in the dominant state-controlled media are simply a repeat of the patrimonial worldview that falsely portray political leaders as saviours of the nation. Neo-patrimonial rule attempts to defend its self-enriching forms of governance by inventing a discourse of appeal to national emergency, security and need for social order (Ogbondah 2002). This insistence on obedience to a higher authority (see Chapter 1) masks their violation of the constitution, silencing the voice of parliaments, civil society as well as the protests against their corruption. It is in this light, that journalists resort to using alternative media to systematically expose the falsity of neo-patrimonial discourses.

A striking example of this is the skillful investigative journalism of the Nigerian news magazines such as *The News, Tell* and *Newwatch* in de-legitimating the argument of the military governments that they were the only force for peace, order and economic progress in Nigeria. This continual de-bunking led toward the restoration of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999. While the Nigerian news magazines are not without their academic critics (Ogbondah 2003), a number of studies highlight their journalistic strategies which reveal the falsehood of government defenses of unjust governance (Torwel 2008). A good example is the debate led by the labour unions and many other sectors of the civil society questioning the claim by President Obasanjo that it was necessary to increase petrol prices. The news magazines proffered an opposing view showing that an increase in fuel prices would cause serious economic hardship for the masses of daily commuters, and that the move would, in the end, fill the coffers of Obansanjo’s friends. At a much deeper level the investigative journalism created a language that delegitimated the autocratic reasoning of Obansanjo and forced him to back down from the fuel price increases (Torwell 2008).

As noted earlier, journalists in the more independent media have attempted to develop oppositional discourses defending human rights and promoting social justice. The Nigerian news magazines discussed above brought in a new vocabulary of accountability in governance by showing that Obansanjo had not consulted the congress regarding the increase in fuel prices. They highlighted that he did not inform or consult the National Council of State or the National Economic Council, that most political leaders and economic advisors thought it was a wrong and ill-advised move, that he ignored the Speaker of the House of Representatives, that he overrode his own vice president, and refused to allow the evidence of economic advisors in meetings. The news magazines rekindled opposition by showing that General Obansanjo was continuing with his usual style of military governance that was brought in under the guise of national crisis. At the same time the newsmagazines legitimated the democratic voice of the labour unions by emphasizing the guidance of economic experts, the support of leading intellectuals in the country as well as the supporting opinion of experienced political leaders (Torwell 2008).

The second discursive battle of the Nigerian journalists with this neo-patrimonial style of governance was in showing that Obasanjo’s actions were not benefitting the public as he claimed but himself personally and his clique of friends. Obansanjo typically argued that the hike in the cost of fuel would channel resources into long-term national development plans, although he did not indicate any specific development project or plan. In fact, in most African countries autocratic regimes benefit the immediate circle of friends and stifle the growth of the most promising productive industries (Ogbondah 2003; Torwell 2008). The news magazines brought out another important fact that an increase in fuel prices would benefit local fuel importers while stifling the growth of local refineries and other local petroleum-related industries. They created counter-narratives that exposed the falsity of narratives generated by the government.

The investigative news magazines examined each of the government’s main arguments for raising fuel prices and provided clear and lucid evidence that these claims were untrue understandable by the general public, including those with low levels of media literacy. In this case, public opinion forced Obasanjo to back down. The news magazines played a major role in revealing the half-truths, smoke screens and other hidden strategies used to get the public to believe the falsehoods of government propaganda (Torwell 2008). They provided the public with the evidence to reject the false government claims. One can thus argue that the analysis of the news magazines helped the Nigerian public to see more clearly the nature of neo-patrimonial governance.

It also needs to be stated that the effectiveness of these alternative communicative spaces has largely been facilitated by their exploitation of the Internet and its associated interactive digital technologies, which collectively extend their reach beyond the Nigerian boarders. These alternative interactive platforms have been used to challenge entrenched mainstream official discourses, which reinforce neopatrimonial governance in most sub-Saharan African countries. For example, since the turn of the century, Zimbabwe has seen a proliferation of radical alternative news websites mostly run by journalists “pushed into the diaspora by the deteriorating political and economic conditions” (Mabweazara 2013, 233).

1. **Pushing legal reforms to protect journalistic freedom** **and ‘freedom of information’**

Neo-patrimonial regimes have attempted to defend and increase their concentration of power by retaining the legal systems of the colonial period or introducing new restrictive legislation in the name maintaining public order and security (Ogbondah 2002). Much of this legal system, often in violation of the principles of freedom and rights enunciated in constitutions, aims to restrict the right of journalists to exercise their profession. Journalists in Africa – particularly those in the private press – work with the constant fear that an article will cause an outburst of anger from some leading politician and an invocation of the laws make it difficult to report corruption and other forms of abuse of power. The continual contestation of legal systems that curtail journalistic freedom at a number of levels is a core aspect of the struggle against neopatrimonialism in many African countries.

Tanzania offers one of the most notorious examples of this use of repressive laws held over from the colonial period. The independence government in Tanzania not only kept the colonial legislation against the press, but amended it in 1968 to include the power of the president to stop the publication of any newspaper deemed to be against public policy (Masanja 2012). In 1976, the government of Tanzania introduced the Newspaper Act, which not only retained the Penal Code establishing as criminal acts a number of issues, including the publication of false news, incitement to violence, contempt of court, obscenity and criminal libel. It also added the offenses of abusive and insulting language, contempt of court and obscenity. All these so-called offenses are lumped together under the general offense of ‘seditious language’. The government of Tanzania also has the power to register, deregister, refuse or ban the circulation of a newspaper (Masanja 2012). The problem is that there is no precise definition of what is seditious. Over the last twenty years the law of sedition has been invoked against issues deemed to emotionally affect or wound public officials. For example, in 1999 the *Majira* newspaper was banned for one week for publishing the proposed “salaries of government ministers and members of parliament” (Masanja 2012, 338). In spite of protests against the sedition law by newspaper associations, the Media Council of Tanzania and other communication organizations, the parliament of Tanzania, controlled by the Chama Cha Mapinduzi Party for 55 years, refused to make any changes.

In general, the media and journalistic associations in Tanzania consider the courts of law and the legal system hostile to freedom of expression in Tanzania (Matumaini 2011). Tanzania does not have in its legal parliamentary statutes specific legal protection of free expression in the media (Matumaini 2011). In a 2010 survey involving media houses, media owners, training institutions, the Media Council of Tanzania, the offices of Information Services of the government as well as the advocacy organizations MISA (Tanzania) and Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA), 81% of the respondents affirmed their fear that there are continued legal threats and intimidation of journalists. Most respondents noted that they are afraid to openly protest because they have limited legal protection.

Regarding the ‘freedom of information legislation’, journalists and civil society leaders generally believe that if governments can be forced to reveal their activities or disclose key information, this would lead to greater public pressure for reform. However, as the Nigeria experience shows, unless the legislation facilitates an aggressive use of the opportunities by journalists and the media industry to demand the reporting of government practice, ‘freedom of information’ will have little impact (Ojebode 2011).

The movement to enact ‘freedom of information’ legislation in Nigeria had particularly wide support in three major civil society groups, the Nigeria Union of Journalists, the Media Rights Agenda and the Civil Liberties Organization. According to Ojebode (2011) in 1993, these organizations began to draft a document entitled ‘Draft Access to Public Records and Official Information Act’. With the help of international organizations such as the Article 19 Centre, the movement presented its first draft of legislation in 2000. The legislation was finally approved by the Senate in 2006 but vetoed by President Obasanjo. A new bill was eventually approved by the Nigerian House and Senate and signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan in May, 2011.

The law provides detailed procedures to enable every Nigerian to request information from any public official, agency or institution and if refused access, the applicant has the right to institute legal action to compel the concerned party to supply the requested information. The legislation also protects individuals and organisations from any recrimination for supplying information (Ojebode 2011). When the legislation was enacted, efforts to obtain information were instituted almost immediately by a number of civil society organizations and quite surprisingly, journalists were not in the forefront of the action. In almost every case, the action became bogged down in endless court litigation. To make matters worse, there is no government supervisory body enforcing the freedom of information legislation, and litigants have to shoulder all legal expenses (Ojebode 2011).

An evaluation of the impact of the legislation reveals that to this day, virtually no person or institution has successfully obtained the information they have sought. One of the most surprising issues is that several journalists are not aware of the legislation and very few have made an effort to use it (Ashong and Udoudo 2012). Journalists surveyed by Ashong and Udoudo highlighted that they have never requested information under the legislation and those who did were not willing to fight the stiff resistance. Asked why they did not go to court, the journalists argued that they did not trust the courts and were not interested in starting the long court process to make the government respond (Ashong and Udoudo 2012).

1. **Challenging the influence of ‘political money’ on journalistic expression**

The typical characteristic of neo-patrimonial governance is to ‘buy’ personal allegiance rather than support adherence to legal provisions (Diamond 2010). As illustrated in Terje Skjerdal and Muhammed Jameel Yusha’u’s chapters in this volume, this is a dominant ‘culture’ in Africa. There is widespread criticism of bribery in countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Zimbabwe, where there is an extremely high degree of concentration of power (Dirbaba and O’Donnell 2012). Equally, however, there is evidence that some journalists on the continent have been intelligent enough to find ways to maintain their integrity and commitment to express what they think has to be said to protect rights and democratic processes in given situations (Maugo 2012). This level of integrity has a number of examples on the continent. However, while several journalists uphold the value of refusing bribes, many recognize that they do not always live up to this ideal and they find justification for their acceptance of bribes in the poor salaries they are paid (Mpagze and White 2010).

In spite of the rejection of outright acceptance of bribes, there is much debate as to whether a journalist should accept monetary or other forms of assistance to cover a public event that is of public interest but is likely to favor the interests of the sponsor (Skjerdal 2010). The classical journalism ethics position is that a journalist should never take any assistance from the sponsors of an event because, inevitably, it will influence the nature of the reporting. Most newspapers in Africa are proud to say that they will provide their own financial assistance to give journalistic coverage to an event considered of importance and they absolutely forbid their journalists to take any assistance from the sponsors of an event. However, as Mwabueze (2010) observes, many African journalists now argue that there is no violation of ethics in accepting ‘gifts’ from sources because their employers cannot provide the assistance, and, without the help of the sponsor, the event would never be given media coverage. Many journalists thus readily admit that when they accept some kind of hospitality or other outright assistance in covering an event they will report the event in a way that is reasonably favorable to the sponsor. This, in their view, is only common courtesy (Mwabueze 2010).

Related to the issue of bribery and accepting or rejecting remuneration for covering events in ways that favor power elites, is the debate around the acceptability of ‘development journalism’. Much of the content of media in Africa is the publicity focused on development projects initiated by government and development agencies, closely allied to government planning. Information on the development planning and accomplishments of government can be helpful public information, but much of it is an attempt to convince the public that the faltering implementation of development programs is actually accomplishing something. It is simply a publicity cover-up of the continuing realities of corruption and the failure to improve rural poverty or effectively deal with massive unemployment in the urban slums.

1. **Investigative journalism training, the exposure of bad governance and the crippling demands for profitability**

In the face of pressures from neo-patrimonial governments, media organizations in Africa have developed a wide variety of institutions to improve the role of the media in the process of political democratization (Rioba 2012). The key question is whether these reformist institutions have enabled the public to reject concentration of power in Africa, especially given that the immediate goal of most media institutions is the profit on the investment that the owners, including public service media, try to make.

In the light of these challenges, universities that train journalists generally try to devise curricular that prepare their graduates to provide a public service in their professional practice, and often the graduates (especially those that find their way into the private press) are able to generate news that enables the public to evaluate their elected representatives. On the whole, however, young people in the media are not well-prepared to bring about the transition from a power-centred society to a more democratic society. Thus, are trained to treat the public as entertained spectators not as people active in a democratic governing process in their place of work, community or the nation at large. Writing about this scenario in the Western context, Bourdieu argues that the popular media tend to focus is on those things which are apt to arouse curiosity but require no analysis – information aiming only at entertaining and making only modest demands on the audience (cited in Macdonald 2003).

In his summary of the accomplishments in African journalism since the Windhoek Declaration on press freedom Berger (2011) concludes that the press councils, the continual pressure from organisations such as MISA, as well as the legal protection of journalists are important advances in journalistic capacity to criticize bad governance. Berger also places great hope in the continued improvement of university journalism education. However, so much depends on the skill of the journalistic leadership and media owners in discovering the key political issues that are of concern to leaders in the civil society (ibid.). Journalists must be able to ‘orchestrate’ a challenge to the concentration of power in the hegemonic leadership of a country by bringing into play the deep-felt symbols of public protest. Although journalists may struggle against neo-patrimonial governance, journalism schools and numerous workshops by civil society organizations have not been able to instill a clear political vision that can enable the profession to provide leadership for the radical change in systems of governance which Africa needs. This has partly been associated with the crippling demands for profitability within media organisations and the challenging economic environments in which they operate in Africa.

Newspaper journalism in particular, is hit by rising production costs and there is little or no funding for investigative journalism. Most newspaper space is filled by inexperienced journalism graduates who have little training in the investigative journalism that would dig out the injustices and violation of human rights that most countries on the continent face. This pervasive process of ‘juniorization’, the reliance on young and inexperienced ‘correspondents’ (Wasserman, 2010) is closely linked to the economic consequences of criticizing governments, which in most contexts scares away advertizing, most of which comes from government or sources close to government. Consequently, the trend is toward light, glamourus life-style journalism, travel, health tips, interior decoration and tabloid journalism which attract advertising (see Chapter 1). The continual exposure and attack on the corruption of political leaders is awash with sensationalism than serious analysis of good governance. The media are not reporting the major political decisions (or lack of such decisions) by parliaments and ministries that affect the basic conditions of education, health, housing and employment, but largely focus on internal personalistic squabbles among political leaders (Nyabuga, 2012) (see also George Ogola’s chapter in this volume). The increasing concentration of political power and economic wealth is also bringing major media organisations into closer association with neo-patrimonial elites who are blocking the reporting of bad governance (Ugangu 2011).

Despite challenging operational conditions, African journalists are not giving up their critical investigative analysis and exposure of injustices by autocratic governments. Rather, they are migrating to media platforms more effective in reaching leaders in civil society organizations. Good examples are the news magazines referred to above and other specialized newspapers with greater freedom of expression and the chance to work with teams skilled in research and political analysis. Equally, the Internet is offering space for radical alternative news outlets, often run offshore by exiled journalists (Mabweazara 2013). A study in Malawi reports the combination of open-discussion radio, mobile phone and social media that reveal issues of bad public services, injustices and public problems and gradually build support for public opinion that eventually forces government or private agencies to respond (Kaufulu and Burton 2013).

**Concluding reflections: engendering journalistic cultures for depowering neo-patrimonial governance**

It is the thesis of this chapter that despite the challenges faced by journalists (and their media organisations) in Africa, a committment to supporting the democratization of governance as well as the realization of human rights is evident across most countries as shown in the discussion above. What is lacking perhaps is the capacity to unite these journalists in movements such as those that emerged in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s or the support that senior journalists like Paul Ansah received in Ghana during the same period. Journalists who were able to mobilize public opinion found a relatively safe refuge in civil society, which remained untouchable to leaders bent on entrenching their political power. Such journalists could not yield to the pressures of bribery as so often happens today. They resisted the temptation and found ways to expose corruption by the political elite. It is our submission that contemporary journalists can learn from these efforts of the past in their quest to unmask the dictatorial strategies and institutions sustaining neo-patrimonial governance.

In pursuing this agenda, journalists need to forge ways of raising the critical consciousness of the public on the monopolization of economic, political and cultural power by cliques of families and business associates surrounding presidential figures. This is often difficult because the dirty tactics deployed by neo-patrimonial governance are to either buy off opposition or threaten dissenting voices with death or exile. As seen in the discussion above, journalists’ efforts have been nurtured and supported by professional associations and media organisations. Of particular importance are organizations specialising in investigative journalism training, critical analysis and media rights such as MISA and the protective umbrella of civil society organizations as well as human and civil rights movements.

Another key step is to find a voice in ‘alternative media’ that have wide acceptance and the confidence of the public, especially among popular movements. Neo-patrimonial elites usually control all the major media and attempt to give the impression of critical investigative journalism by revealing the tensions among the elites themselves, but without raising awareness of the control systems quietly operating through patronage, physical threat, and legal action against popular movements and dissenting voices. A major objective of alternative media is to expose the falsity of discourses that function as smoke screens which strengthen the power and welfare of neo-patrimonial elites.

Most journalists are involved in a range of media from those heavily controlled by political-economic elites to more radical alternative media. It is important, when there are critical moments of institutional change such as the introduction of a new constitution which provides possibilities for more civil society intervention in public decisions, to rally public opinion to push through these basic institutional foundations for democratization. Likewise, when there are major political moves to limit basic journalistic freedoms, it is important to unite all journalists, all media and all major institutions that are committed to defending constitutional rights and principles.

Financial security for both media institutions and their journalists is another major issue that shapes journalistic cultures in Africa (Wasserman 2010). Journalists are thus extremely vulnerable to the neo-patrimonial system of governance by patronage, illegal use of public funds and the manipulation of avenues of upward social mobility. However, no matter how much journalists may debate the influence of ‘brown envelopes’ and ‘freebies’ on their journalistic independence (Kasoma 2010), the dominant value is for them to maintain an independent critical stance. Both journalists and media managers increasingly understand that they cannot support themselves only by traditional forms of mainstream public media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television. Public communication has become an immensely diverse process, and all those involved must therefore explore diverse sources of income in the flow of information. This diversification of sources of livelihood and imaginative facets of public communication should be a central aspect of journalism as a social practice and, inevitably, a core element of journalism education.

Finally, there should be a concerted effort throughout sub-Saharan Africa to reform legislative instruments with roots in the repressive colonial past as well as lobbying for constitutional reforms that support responsible investigative journalism, media freedom and freedom of expression. Overall, the proposal foregrounded in this essay is that the strengthening of journalism to give it a stronger voice in the democratization of political, economic, and cultural institutions etc. should build on the existing ‘best practices’ that are an integral part of the journalism culture. Collectively, these best practices can help to disempower neo-patrimonial governance structures.

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1. A particularly good summary of the characteristics of neo-patrimonial rule in Africa is captured by Diamond in his chapter, ‘The Rule of Law versus the Big Man’ in the book *Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat* (2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Zim editor, journalist held over Mugabe 'health scare' story’, <http://www.news24.com/Africa/Zimbabwe/zim-editor-journalist-held-over-mugabe-health-scare-story-20170303> [accessed 30 July 2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Media Centre, an independent training organization for journalists, describes its mission as focused on assisting “in the realization of a Zimbabwe in which the Media and Civil Society are free to exercise their right to the freedom of expression, association and access to information” (<http://www.mediacentrezim.com/?page_id=413>: accessed 20 November 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In Zimbabwe, MISA runs a Media Defence Fund through which legal assistance is provided to media practitioners and institutions “that find themselves confronted with law suits”. The fund aims at “protecting media freedom and freedom of expression”.

   <http://zimbabwe.misa.org/who-we-are/what-we-do/> [Accessed 20 July 2017] [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Chinua Achebe is a Nigerian novelist and poet. His novels range in subject matter “from the first contact of an African village with the white man to the educated African’s attempt to create a firm moral order out of the changing values in a large city” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chinua-Achebe> [Accessed 20 June 2017] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)