Unfinished business: Tanzania's media capture challenge

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While Tanzania has gradually moved toward political pluralism and market economics, the development of independent media has remained stunted. This chapter argues that Tanzania's media sector suffers from a multi-faceted form of capture that is a product of government regulation, clientelism, economic pressure, and intimidation. The capture of Tanzanian media by the state and political elites takes place against the backdrop of an underfunded and discredited press ecosystem and amid power struggles in an increasingly vocal and politically diverse society.

Introduction

Media capture in transitioning societies and economies takes a variety of forms: it is driven by corporate and government influence, buyouts, and ownership monopolies. But as the case of Tanzania demonstrates, it is also manifest in regulatory frameworks and exacerbated by ad hoc intimidation, economic circumstances, skill deficiencies, and a host of other structural conditions. Media operating in Tanzania face a range of constraints, which include diverse and overlapping forms of media capture.

Due to its history, Tanzania inherited a legacy of media control by the state and elites. As a former British colony, it adopted colonial-era regulations that were then supplemented with a post-colonial socialist belief in media as subservient to a state development agenda. Since 1992, Tanzania has gradually moved toward a pluralist political system and limited capitalism, introducing privatization and market mechanisms to boost industrialization, and allowing private media ownership. But the legacy of Tanzania's history is written across its media sector.

Tanzanian leaders continue to argue that state control over the media was a necessary part of nation-building in the post-colonial period, in spite of the contrary evidence that excessive control hampers the institution-building necessary for growth and democratic progress (Acemoglu and Robinson 2010; Caliskan and Waldman 2016). Indeed, this argument is evoked as a defense against criticism that state-driven narratives dominate the media in Tanzania. Media capture is further enabled by structural conditions that impede journalistic growth and quality, and the development of a vibrant public sphere. Tanzania is only "partly free," according to Freedom House (2016), which cites "broad discretion to restrict media on the basis of national security of public interest" and recent legislation that is vague in wording and restrictive of freedom of expression.

This paper examines how the notion of "media capture" can be used to elucidate how the Tanzanian government can make overtures to political pluralism and privatization while still keeping a grip on the press. In light of Tanzania's political economic barriers and limited business environment, capture involves the government, which seeks to adapt to changing political circumstances. State media capture occurs both in private and public outlets. It is a product of economic dynamics, and a history and political culture that encourage centralized rent-seeking and clientelism. Believing that the news media, particularly newspapers, are influential and can generate debate, entrepreneurs use them to project their messages. Media, therefore, support what one Tanzanian professor of political science calls a "government of elites." Contemporary media capture in Tanzania involves elite figures competing in an environment of increased political pluralism and changing economic circumstances.

To make this case, I will first provide a brief history of the relevant media regulation and its recent manifestations as a mechanism of state capture. I will then

look at the structural conditions facing media houses and journalists. By focusing on media ownership patterns and media development initiatives, I will illustrate how media capture has persisted and developed even as the country is undergoing sometimes profound economic and political changes.

Methodology

In this report, I draw on three months of fieldwork across Tanzania.[1] My research used a mix of qualitative methods. This consisted of 10 formal and 60 semi-structured interviews with senior figures from state and private media, print and broadcast journalists, government officials, politicians, civil society and business leaders, as well as ordinary Tanzanian citizens. These were complemented with participant observation, focus groups, and a review of primary and secondary documents and newspapers. Observation took place in newsrooms and in contested political environments, namely in the region of Mtwara on Tanzania's southern border with Mozambique. I also participated in media development training days organized by the Tanzania Media Foundation (TMF), observing the quality of the instruction provided and the reception to the training of the journalists themselves.[2]

This descriptive and qualitative approach was supplemented by reference to newspaper archives, academic literature on the subject, and official reports by non-governmental organizations (NGO) and state organs on the state of the media and press freedoms. Newspapers accessed include *Nipashe*, *The Guardian Ltd.*, *The Citizen*, *Reuters*, *The East African*, and others.

Media capture and democracy

The state of the media and their role in democracy consolidation have been explored in theories on media and democracy, including with specific focus on Africa. As Hasty (2005) acknowledges, "everyday practices of journalism are shaped by historicized, cultural understandings of political authority and resistance, as well as notions of African sociality and discursive property." As stated by McNair (2009), journalism has been a "defining characteristic of democratic political and media cultures" (Ibid. 237). There is an imperative in media studies on the Global South to develop more endogenous analytical methods, as media studies often fails to acknowledge the agency of local actors in production, consumption, and circulation of media culture (Willems 2014).

Numerous scholars (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Corneo 2003; Besley and Prat 2006) assert that media capture manifests itself in multiple ways. It often occurs in contexts where corporate interests and governments are collusive in undermining the independence of the press, and often through ways that do not require a direct form of repression and control typically associated with authoritarian regimes.

Media capture occurs more often in countries with financial wealth concentration. This in turn increases the occurrence of media bias (Corneo 2003).

Furthermore, mass media is known to manipulate public opinion, and countries with higher inequality tend to have lower media freedoms, as the rich are able to influence information at a cost (Petrova 2008). However, for governments to exercise capture and influence political outcomes, they must have "cozy" relations with the media (Besley and Prat 2006).

Timothy Besley and Andrea Prat provide a highly relevant theoretical framework for understanding how and when government engages in media capture and what effect this has on political outcomes. In their model, outlets derive profits either from commercial relations (audience driven) or collusion with government—through bribes or more indirect forms of influence, such as legislative interventions in industries affecting the media owner (Ibid.). This framework links media capture and government accountability, as it affects "voters' information and hence their voting decisions" (Ibid., 721).

While this model is useful for many countries and examples of media capture, there are other forms of media ownership in democratic societies, such as non-profit outlets, as well as different ways in which political impact is shaped—namely through intimidation and stringent government regulations passed by politicians seeking majority influence. Furthermore, the model assumes distinct payoffs for each individual news outlet. In this model, it is assumed that media pluralism protects from capture, and that a confluence of independent media, or differing modes of ownership, also reduces capture (Ibid.).

In contrast to the Beasley-Prat model, where the government must "pay each [media organization] as if it were a monopoly provider of unbiased information" (Ibid., 721), Tanzania is an example where the regime deploys slightly different tools for information control, depending mainly on regulation and isolated cases of intimidation.

At the same time, the Besley-Prat model applies closely in its characterization of the political outcomes of capture, predicting that "the presence of media capture reduces political turnover," lowers the risk that politicians will be exposed, and enables elites to carry on with rent extraction (Ibid., 721). Indeed, political turnover is an important element of an analytical framework for understanding the broader issues facing Tanzania today, exposing the complexity of states' experiences as they undergo political and economic transitions. In Tanzania today, media capture is in large part "exercised in an attempt to retain the principles of the one-party state in a competitive authoritarian system" (Cheeseman 2016).

The evolution of Tanzanian media regulations

Tanzania's political and business environment is characterized by poor management of a transition to industry-led growth. Despite consistent increases in overall GDP growth rates, the transition has resulted in increased economic inequality and centralized rent-seeking in policy and regulatory agencies (Kelsall 2013). Today, Tanzania is undergoing a change in developmental targets to achieve middle-income status, led most recently by President John Magufuli (Kamndaya 2016). This push involves a broad shift toward industrialization and the promotion of state-owned enterprises. Political economy analyses of Tanzania indicate that this increasing clientelism, or the centralization of rent distribution, has increasingly afforded the government the capacity to manage decisions from a top-down, central position. It has also enabled heightened corruption in industries and areas of strategic importance to Tanzania's growth, such as ports, horticulture, and gold mining (Kelsall 2013, 72). In the absence of capacity to successfully implement industrial policy, the sustainability of equitable and long-term development could prove questionable (Ibid.).

At the same time, the media have fallen under the regulatory influence of a powerful and historically significant central government. Upon independence, the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, referred to as *Mwalimu*, or "teacher," enacted a vast program of state building based on the socialist concept of Ujamaa (familyhood). Initially, Nyerere adhered to British press ordinances, even though he had been a victim of colonial era sedition laws (Sturmer 1998, 164). This laid the groundwork for the institutionalization of government libel and falsehood prosecutions, in a climate of limited tolerance of criticism (Ibid.). According to Ayub Rioba, the director general of the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), "a nation created on foreign institutions" inevitably has trouble shifting to modern institutions such as a free press. In an interview, he stated that "in democratization processes, there should be censorship," as 50 years is not enough time to consolidate a nation.

Later, in 1966, Nyerere claimed in a speech that "freedom of expression had to be limited in the interests of more important goals since it could be perverted to promote attitudes and actions that would be detrimental to the country's socialism" (Sturmer 1998). This laid the foundations for the nationalization of print media. Over the course of the next decade, legislation was passed to curtail the expression of any analytical or critical opinion that did not echo government policies. According to G.L. Mytton (1976), freedom of the press in Tanzania "is a privilege that could be used against other freedoms, which were the property of the people as a whole."

In 1992, Paul Grosswiler conducted a study of 50 news and radio journalists in Tanzania to examine the changing government-press philosophy. He found that

a "third way" had emerged, "with a mixture of socialist, traditional, revolutionary and Western philosophies that are incompatible with authoritarian or development media philosophies" (Grosswiler 1997, 102). In effect, Tanzania's "socialist media policy" under President Nyerere was designed to achieve "cultural autonomy and minimize foreign cultural influences" (Ibid.).

In 1976, the Newspaper Act was passed, which still functions in its original form today. In concert with other legislation condemning criticism, which is said to be in support of nation building, the president is given the power, among others, to bar any publication that jeopardizes national interest, prohibit the importation of publications detrimental to public interest, and ban newspapers for not being in the interest of peace and good order. Ministers can cancel the registration of a newspaper if deemed unlawful or incompatible with peace and good government (Ibid., 169). More recently, the legislation has been used by President John Magufuli to shut down newspapers for criticism of the government, also described as "inflammatory" reporting (Carlitz and Manda 2016). Post-independence nationalism and ideology inform the contemporary media regulatory environment and conceptions of freedom of expression.

Media regulation in contemporary Tanzania

Characterized as an emerging democracy, in light of its recent transition toward a pluralist political environment and privatized media market, Tanzania needs self-regulation of the media, asserts media studies Professor Rioba (2012), although this pursuit is currently under threat by new legislation. In 2015, the incumbent CCM Party won the presidential election by a thin margin, with results actively contested, though peacefully, especially when compared to the violent aftermath of neighboring Kenya's contested election in December 2007.

In the early 1990s there was, due to the legalization of private media, an explosion of media outlets. This has created a "highly polluted media context," believes an employee of a government mouthpiece. According to an interview conducted at the time with Professor Rioba, Tanzania had limited capacity to build a strong media sector: there were only two schools of journalism with 30 students each; roughly half of the students weren't from Tanzania, and not all went into journalism. The consequences were that about 60 papers chased the same limited market for qualified journalists, owners reduced production costs, and anyone could become a "half-baked" journalist. Media infrastructure has recently improved with the establishment of bodies like the self-regulatory Media Council of Tanzania and the Tanzania Editors Forum, as well as the development of journalism programs—one with a doctorate-level degree—in five universities, which should increase media capacity and improve the enabling conditions for professional journalism.

Recent regulatory measures and legislative attempts, however, have raised concerns. Under former President Jakaya Kikwete in 2015, the Cybercrimes Act and the Statistics Act were passed. Critics have deemed both pieces of legislation

restrictive and prone to abuse. The Cybercrimes Act gives the government capacity to arrest anyone publishing "information deemed false, deceptive, misleading, or inaccurate, and to levy heavy penalties against individuals involved in a host of criminalized cyberactivities" (Freedom House 2016). This effectively limits the scope for digital publication and encourages heightened self-censorship. In 2016, one academic was charged with insulting the president in a WhatsApp message and prosecuted under offenses related to the cybercrime law (Reuters 2016). The lecturer was among nine others, including students and opposition politicians, who were prosecuted under the Cybercrime Act. One source said the new act has allowed too "much time policing speech, and not enough fighting crime."

More recently, a Media Services Act (November 2016) and an Access to Information Bill (2016) were tabled in parliament, but both were withdrawn for further review in 2015 after they were strongly criticized for being overly restrictive (Freedom House 2016). However, late in 2016, the Media Services Bill was re-tabled in a hurried manner and passed. This bill mandates a Journalist Accreditation Board and Independent Media Council. Effectively, the bill abolishes media self-regulation, introducing a government-controlled body that has the right to "ban newspapers and prohibit non-accredited journalists from publishing" (International Press Institute 2016).

The bill vaguely refers to "online platforms," and gives the accreditation board the power to expel any journalist for professional misconduct. Both the media council and accreditation board can enforce government-prescribed professional standards (Ibid.), overriding the much lauded self-regulatory board, Media Council of Tanzania.

Further concerns focus on the definitions of libel and defamation in the Newspaper Act of 1976, with a broadly defined "seditious intention," and large fines and imprisonment for any publication deemed "likely to cause fear and alarm" (Ibid.). The vague definition contained in this bill has traditionally been used against journalists when they offend the central government and its agencies. The founder of the social media blog JamiiForum, Maxence Melo, was arrested on multiple charges, including managing a domain not registered in Tanzania, based on the provisions of this bill, and rigid bail procedures kept him behind bars (John 2016). His arrest and subsequent detention set a strong precedent for the implementation of the new regulations and how this intersects with web-based forums. This was echoed in conversations I had with journalists and editors, who hoped for more ethical and quality journalism, albeit regulated by government appointees.

One telling case was the closure of the weekly investigative newspaper *Mawio* on January 15, 2016. It was shut down under the 1976 Newspaper Act for allegedly "inciting violence" when publishing a story on the Zanzibar elections. In a conversation I had with Simon Mkina, the former editor-in-chief, he iterated that the investigative outlet had 22 employees and high circulation numbers based on its

coverage of the opposition. He said the newspaper was deregistered, and that he was arrested. After spending a night in jail and being forced to visit a police station daily for five months, he eventually was charged with sedition. More recently, the Kiswahili weekly tabloid *Mseto* was suspended for three years over a "seditious" article that claimed President Magufuli received campaign financing from abroad (Namkwahe 2016). This abusive use of regulation instills fear in editors and journalists, while weakening what Cheeseman (2016) sees as ad hoc attempts to preserve unified post-independence democracy. These arbitrary practices also end up weakening institutional checks and balances.

To sacrifice democracy for development is a false trade off, as weak institutions threaten political and economic sustainability (Cheeseman 2016). Cheeseman suggests that while the one-off sacking of officials to stop corruption may appear effective, it exacerbates the problem by ushering in populism, which erodes institutional checks and balances and thus facilitates corruption.

Even while President Magufuli was nominated by Forbes Africa as its annual "Person of the Year" for his "strict approach to governance" and for "boosting the nation's economy" (Alfa Shaban 2016), the scope for press freedoms is narrowing. In this regulatory context, self-censorship and state control of narratives co-exist as forms of state media capture.

Constraints facing news media in Tanzania

Multiple factors are crucial for successful journalism, including decent pay, physical safety of journalists, and access to education and information. However, beyond the remit of regulations, structural conditions and cultural norms inhibit many journalists and editors worldwide from successfully producing critical news. Historical and cultural norms and political stability, societal demands for a robust and independent media, government effectiveness, journalistic professionalism, and other local attributes inform the context in which the media operate (Lohner et al. 2016).

A former reporter for government mouthpiece *Uhuru* stated that local journalists lack access and experience. "The government doesn't look at the journalist as a free man. What he sees is a story." The reporter also alluded to the fact that power sees journalists as instruments.

News media in Tanzania consist largely of reprinted press releases, shallow business reporting, and superficial coverage of important issues such as gold mining, according to Omar Mohammed, a Knight Journalism Fellow from Tanzania. Mohammed says that Tanzania's best and brightest do not go into independent journalism. Students of journalism tend to join either *Uhuru* or *Daily News*, both government mouthpieces, which offer no room for critical investigative reporting, according to an interview with the editor-in-chief of a weekly newspaper.

In field interviews with journalists, a recurring theme was that most students of journalism and successful reporters turn to more secure, lucrative fields. A form of "brain drain" sees investigative reporters leaving the field of independent journalism for the "commercially profitable world of government and corporate communications" (Cooper-Knock 2014). Sources in Tanzania acknowledged that many journalists transitioned to public relations, political risk consulting, or NGO work. Furthermore, newsrooms tend to be dominated by older reporters and editors, according to one reporter from *Daily News.* However, quality journalists still provide incisive analysis on difficult topics in many instances.

Media capture is embedded in structural conditions. Beside the overall poor educational conditions for journalists already mentioned, even seasoned reporters may lack specialist training. Several journalists interviewed for this article mentioned that, after they had received specialist education, their editors took them off their beat to cover more pressing issues. This is primarily the case in extractive industries: following the recent discovery of natural gas in the Mtwara region of Tanzania, for example, reporters received specialized training. The Tanzania Media Foundation, which supports investigative journalism, funded a wave of training for journalists on extractive industries in 2016. Thanks to funding from media development foundations, Albano Midelo, a successful reporter, was able to concentrate on extractive industries and analyze them in depth. As journalists are not well paid, they often lack incentive to report on stories involving high-stakes issues.

Journalists are faced with non-regulatory threats as well, such as overt censorship. The political culture in Tanzania often leads citizens to support the government, while they fail to see other sides of the story, according to Bashiru Ally, a political science professor at the University of Dar es Salaam. Journalists are attacked without reason. Police will harass journalists and people do not interfere. In 2012, a policeman killed photojournalist Daudi Mwangosi while he was covering an opposition party rally. Absalom Kibanda, editor of the Swahili newspaper *The Tanzanian*, was attacked and beaten outside his home because of his work, while another journalist, Erick Kabendera, was reportedly harassed for testifying against his former employer, a media mogul in Tanzania, in a case of libel (Greenslade 2013). These cases are among the few documented instances of violence against journalists, and represent only a fraction of the non-regulatory obstacles faced by Tanzanian reporters.

While conditions are difficult, many journalists remain committed to investigative reporting, and they mitigate threats, to the extent they can, by making sure they reflect all sides in their stories and at times avoiding bylines.

Media ownership

Examining news media ownership is crucial to understanding state media capture. Politicians and business entrepreneurs are often leading owners in the media ecosystem. Government mouthpieces, such as the *Tanzania Broadcasting Company*

(TBC), *Daily News*, and *Uhuru*, are known for their egregious support of government lines. A former TBC director general, Tido Mhando, was commended for his impartiality and for establishing a creative and balanced state broadcaster, and for setting up debates ahead of the 2010 election, although the CCM candidate eventually backed out (Stringer 2014). After his relations with the government soured—allegedly because of TBC's active election coverage and debates as well as concerns about its relations with the British media development organization BBC Media Action—Mhando's contract was not renewed (Ibid.). Another example is *STAR TV*, owned by the CCM chairman and former Minister of Tourism. According to one *Daily News* reporter, STAR TV did not broadcast a single item on the opposition during the 2015 election campaign, which is representative of the capture of private news media by state politicians.

With assets such as *Mwananchi* and *The Citizen,* Mwananchi Communications Ltd. is a large media group, acquired in 2001 by Kenya's Nation Media Group. A profit-driven news service, it recorded a 29 percent growth in operating profit by the end of 2013 (Mutegi 2014). *AzamTV*, a new, innovative television station launched in Tanzania and owned by business tycoon Said Bakhresa, is providing decent election and international football coverage, and it has poached senior reporters from BBC's Swahili service. However, according to one academic, most of these innovative media entrepreneurs operate in isolation and the broader media ecosystem lacks vibrancy.

Tanzania also faces the phenomenon of news media ownership for political ends. According to Ally, newspapers emerge during election periods, and then disappear. "Electoral politics dominate the media industry," he said, highlighting the social and political influence of the media. Furthermore, media ownership, like civil society, revolves around the capital, Dar es Salaam, strengthening what Ally calls a "government of elites."

The nature of political influence on the media, both through regulatory constraints and intimidation, has a contingent effect on the relationship between editors, who are closer to power, and their journalists. Managing editors in newsrooms do not trust their own journalists, worrying about what they are doing, according to one former Guardian Ltd. reporter.

Media capture is further embedded in the economic circumstances in which journalists operate. According to a report by Tanzania Legal and Human Rights Center, 80 percent of journalists in Tanzania are freelance. They work without insurance, job security, or employment benefits. Press releases for local and international organizations are published without further reporting, simply conveying unvarnished messages. Multiple sources, both among journalists at the receiving end, and among NGOs and companies who issue statements, claimed that the publication of press releases and corporate stories sometimes involve payments to the media or journalists that enable the transactions. A consultant working for

a Norwegian petroleum institute, for example, wrote articles that later were published under a journalist's name.

Consequences for media development

Local journalists, who have limited resources, seek funding from foreign donors, even as they are wary of donor influence. They criticize media development programs like BBC Media Action and Tanzania Media Foundation. In particular, they complain that while important issues such as energy, business, and gold prices reflect everyday local preoccupations, donors want reports on specific issues, such as the difficulties faced by albinos and the repercussions of climate change. Coverage tends to be driven by funding rather than the journalists' news instincts.

Training sessions and ad hoc direct support to media organizations through measures such as story funding have had limited impact. One reporter for a national daily newspaper complained that journalism training on the petroleum industry was extended mainly to Dar es Salaam-based reporters, while journalists from areas like Mtwara, where oil was discovered and unrest erupted, were left out. Furthermore, reporters have to adapt to the changing digital and social media-driven news landscape, focused on media such as WhatsApp, as well as face new security concerns following the introduction of the Cybercrime and Media Services acts.

Conclusion

Media capture has multiple faces in Tanzania. While regulation inhibits freedom of expression and promotes self-censorship, reporters are also confronted with other forms of censorship, such as intimidation, unfavorable economic circumstances, top-down economic and political development, and self-interested ownership patterns. Limitations on freedom of speech and freedom of the press weaken institutional checks and balances, and inevitably support the government's goal of centralizing power (Cheeseman 2016) and pursuing rent seeking activities (Kelsall 2013).

The multiple constraints facing the media in Tanzania limit its vitality, although critical and analytical reporting does take place. Government control is entwined with business interests in an attempt to retain political power. The overall environment produces a forum of media capture dominated by the centralized state, an emerging democracy marked by rent- seeking and corruption, in a wider context of inequality and exclusion enabled by elite-driven privatization processes and global capital.

To date, many pressing questions about Tanzania's political arena remain unanswered. How will the government negotiate policymaking and regulation with an

increasingly powerful political opposition in a more pluralistic public sphere? Can a system of "governance by elites," with its attendant rent-seeking and clientelism (Gray and Khan 2010), be reformed in the pursuit of democratization, industrialization, and steady economic growth? And finally, who has control over the information ecosystem and how does it affect political cohesion and sustainable development?

This report shows that, so far, the authorities have favored a regulatory environment that suppresses the free expression of opinions, thus undermining the role of the press, and they have shown no willingness to change. However, it remains to be seen if democratization and economic growth can be sustained in the current atmosphere of censorship. With censorship and intimidation of journalists on the increase, and new legislative proposals for more centralized regulation, there is cause for concern.

ENDNOTES

[1] Fieldwork for this research was funded partially by St. Antony's College, and by the Oxford Department of International Development.

[2] Participant observation is a unique method of collecting information while interacting with people in everyday life to investigate experiences, feelings, and activities of human beings, and the meanings of their existence (Jorgensen 2015).

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