CHAPTER 2

Colonialism and the Development of the Press in Zimbabwe

Introduction

This chapter maps out a history of the private press in colonial Rhodesia. It does this by identifying and elaborating four different phases and domains of activity in the development of the African press. The first phase was dominated by missionary press and a few newspapers the colonial government established. The second phase is contextualized by events in South Africa and was shaped by how major benefactors, Bertram and Cedric Paver, became involved in the press in Rhodesia by buying off government stake in early newspapers for Africans. I discuss their ideological groundings and modus operandi in South Africa, and how this influenced the organisation they were to run in Southern Rhodesia. The third phase focuses on the birth of African newspapers in Rhodesia in 1936, when the Paver Brothers purchased the weekly *Native Mirror* and renamed it the *Bantu Mirror*. This phase is important as it offers a rich background to the financiers of the newspapers, the political temperatures obtaining in the country that in the long run had a bearing on the performance of the *Central African Daily News*. Finally, the fourth phase identifies key personalities who helped transform African newspapers into a force with which to be reckoned. Prominent figures include the Paver brothers, journalists and editors like Lawrence Vambe, Jaspar Savanhu, Nathan Shamuyarira and Bill Saidi. These African journalists would, in a later period, also be vital agents in the country's struggle for independence. How they shaped and were themselves shaped by

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African newspapers is a significant part of my account. The fourth phase was a period of consolidation and preparation towards the launch of a daily newspaper.

In all these phases I am interested in mapping out an overall understanding of how the private media shaped politics and how politics in turn shaped the media. I argue that the missionaries laid a strong foundation for the birth of an African press by encouraging Africans to attend schools that they had founded. This saw the emergence of Africans who were eager to read and write, and to consume and disseminate information about what was happening in a racially divided but nationalising geographical space. It was the missionaries in collaboration with the government in the late 1920s who started a newspaper specifically for Africans. The government offered an annual subsidy that contributed to expenses met by the missionaries in producing the newspaper. It was from these humble beginnings that African newspapers became prominent and an important feature of African politics up to the mid-1960s. In my account, I also outline the transformation of a missionary press to an autonomous press owned by private, white capital in a colony that backed white interests. This chapter therefore explores the emergence of a newspaper that spoke to African interests with African voices. Colonial state efforts to gain economic and political domination, and promote Eurocentric cultural, religious and social influences, set the parameters for press development in the region. The colonial press in southern Africa almost exclusively represented the interests of governments, missionary societies and settler communities. Yet I question the observation by Nyamnjoh that press production for settler communities necessarily left black readership at the mercy of an irrelevant content and/or in search of alternative channels of communication.[1]

In Southern Rhodesia, the key player in the development of the press was a private white-owned company called African Newspapers Limited, formed in South Africa and owned by the Paver Brothers with the aim of producing a newspaper for Africans. Because it was supported by capital from South Africa, operating in Southern Rhodesia with the tacit approval of the colonial government during a period when African nationalism was rising, that put African Newspapers Limited in an ambiguous position. In this environment, the major question for the Paver Brothers was what kind of policy the company would pursue without arousing the wrath of both the colonial government and African nationalist organisations. In addition, being associated with South Africa,

where communist party membership was growing, put its newspaper production under the scrutiny of the Rhodesian colonial government. As is shown later, the result was that the company would try to take a middle of the road approach and often failed to avoid antagonising both "natives" and "settlers." This left space open for alternative political voices to emerge.

Missionaries and the Press in Rhodesia

Missionaries played a pivotal role in the emergence of African newspapers in Rhodesia in the second decade of the twentieth century. These missionaries had established schools during in the first years of the twentieth century so much so that by the second decade the first generation of literate Africans had emerged. The main "news" the newspapers published was predominantly Christian teachings and moral instruction aimed at "civilising" Africans. As Cecelia Chinembiri writes, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) missionaries at Morgenster Mission near Fort Victoria (now Masvingo) were probably the first to produce newssheets for their black converts in 1913.[2] Their bi-monthly newsletter, *Munyai Washe,* is still published today. In 1918 the American Methodist Church in Old Umtali followed the example of the DRC by publishing a regular newsletter entitled *Umbowo Hwe Ukrist,o* edited by Rev. E. H. Greeley. These missionary publications, wholly funded by the missions, were seen to extend the evangelical work, and most pages of the newspapers contained sermons by priests. These two publications filled a vacuum created by the lack of reading material amongst Africans. The most important features were on the evil of beer drinking, strengthening the faith and general education for the Africans, paying tithes, world events, events at the missions and their outposts, and articles on the relations between the missions and the government. They did not focus on national politics, and the most glaring omission was any kind of reference to the 1922 referendum, a key event in the history of the country.

In the middle 1920s, concerted efforts were made to review the educational needs of the Africans. This had positive spin-offs as far as the growth of newspapers for Africans were concerned. The 1925 Phelps Stokes Commission called for more government-missionary cooperation in the field of education, as the government wanted educated Africans who could perform clerical work, oversee labour recruitment and act as agents.[3] The commission's brief was to undertake extensive studies of

educational facilities for blacks in Southern Rhodesia and to establish official cooperation between the government and missionary organisations. Terrence Ranger and John Weller argue that as a result of the findings of the commission, it was seen necessary to appoint a director of Native Education and an advisory committee on which the missionaries would be strongly represented.[4] R. J. Challiss argues that the commission recommended that all Africans should receive an education based on the notion that European rule was essential for the promotion of African progress, with little or no room for independent African initiative. He further points out that

> Only Europeans knew what was in the 'best interests' of Africans, and so it was essential that Europeans should monitor gradual African progress based on a racially differentiated educational policy which placed 'emphasis' on what Europeans felt was most suitable for a 'primitive people'.[5]

It is within this context that the drive to provide newspapers for Africans was made. It also allowed the government to be in cahoots with the missionaries to determine what content was suitable for the Africans. Following the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes Commission, the DRC in 1926 formed a semi-secular press called the *Rhodesia Native Quarterly*, then *Mashonaland Quarterly* and later *Rhodesia Quarterly*. According to Diana Jeater, the main purpose of the *Quarterly* was to provide reading material for converts, but more importantly, to help missions move toward a standardisation of the vernaculars.[6] The government, through the Department of Native Education, commissioned the DRC to produce this newspaper for Africans. Under the arrangement the government paid a grant of 25 pounds, which would cover the total costs of publishing each issue, while mission personnel carried on the business of editing and printing the paper.[7]

As far as the content of the *Quarterly* was concerned, Jeater notes that the newspaper represented an alliance between missionaries and government officials as a means of communicating state policy to literate Africans.[8] Contributors were therefore predominantly of European descent whilst the voice allowed to African contributors was very limited. Thus, the newspaper served its instrumental role of making things easier for employers and administrators. For example, many pieces were contributed by Emory Alvord, the agricultural editor of the *Quarterly,* who made regular contributions in English and Chindau, providing detailed

information about ploughing and other farming techniques. Alvord, as Jeater notes, regarded the publication as a useful means of disseminating vernacular teaching materials to support his agricultural demonstration program.[9]

Further motivation to have a newspaper for Africans can be seen in the correspondences between the Native Department, leaders of the DRC church, the colonial secretary and the Southern Rhodesia Advisory Board between 1928 and 1930. This correspondence also shows the alliance, though a fraught one, between the state and the missionaries in this endeavour, especially in the aspect of sharing costs and more importantly spreading what was deemed to be the acceptable content to Africans. By 1928, during the time of the global economic depression, the DRC raised concerns that it would be unable to continue printing the paper unless the government increased its annual subsidy to cushion the church against the rising printing expenses. However, the director of the Native Department, H. Jowitt, believed that the paper was still relevant to the needs of the country then. In a letter to the secretary, Department of the Colonial Secretary in Salisbury, Jowitt advised:

> I suggest that since the paper has obviously served a very useful purpose; since there is a distinct need for its retention; and since the mission concerned can only proceed with its issue if relieved of the financial burden, such burden should be borne as far as necessary by the Administration. That the paper should also be regarded as a semi-official organ for the dissemination of Government news or policy, it would therefore be necessary to increase the size of the paper and I would suggest the inclusion of the following sections for which the respective departments concerned would be responsible: Legislation affecting natives, native agriculture, native education, the Native Affairs Department and its work, native medical needs.[10]

Jowitt suggested that the paper should be open to topical news, inspirational articles and to items of general interest affecting natives. Noting that the periodical was to be issued to all native schools, missionary superintendents, native commissioners and inspectors of native schools, Jowitt suggested that it was imperative that the cost of this newspaper be borne by the government. This, in his opinion, would raise the circulation from an unspecified number of copies to 2000 copies.[11]

In making these suggestions, Jowitt was convinced that with adequate government support the *Mashonaland Quarterly* would be of

inestimable value in "uplifting" the African people and in spreading among them sound doctrine rather than treacherous propaganda from private publishers. The Zionists were considered to have subversive influences among the Africans and in 1936, a sedition act was introduced to combat the Watch Tower movement, a religious sect that was deemed to be subversive. Also communist party literature was finding its way into the country and this greatly alarmed the authorities to act. In these debates, Rhodesian colonial authorities compared notes to other African colonial administrations. Drawing parallels with the Kenyan British colony, Jowitt added that the newspaper, *Habari*, for the "natives" of Kenya, was published by government authority and was a bilingual paper of a scope not very dissimilar to that of the *Mashonaland Quarterly*.[12] As a result, the government continued to support the publication of this newspaper. This setup continued to 1930 when the issue of publication capacity by the DRC was raised in light of the demand for the paper.

The increasing demand for the paper by the Africans led the DRC to approach the Citadel Press of Cape Town so that they would publish the newspaper as their printing press could no longer cope. By then, the name of the periodical had changed and was now the *Rhodesia Native Quarterly*, reflecting its national character and circulation. A misunderstanding ensued between the government and the DRC, and the matter was taken to the Southern Rhodesia Advisory Board of the Native Development Department. The government thought that the DRC wanted to inflate costs so as to appropriate some of the funds for its own use. Rev. H. W. Murray from Morgenster, who was responsible for printing the newspaper, wrote to the government with an attachment showing a quotation from Citadel Press charging them £36 per issue to which it was necessary to add postage and incidental expenses, making a total approximately of £42 per issue.[13] Murray stated clearly that the DRC "is unable to finance the newspaper in any way, and the amount received from subscriptions is a negligible quantity."[14] Murray was intimating that his board was entirely dependent upon the government grant for the further publication of the newspaper.

The board recommended that the government ask Murray to submit a definite statement regarding the cost involved and that this then be considered on its merits, rather than that government should undertake in a general way to meet the total expense of production when this remained undefined. However, this recommendation did not stop the director of Native Development to castigate the DRC for the complications that had arisen. He said:

> I cannot help feeling that the DRC is somewhat at fault here, since the sum of money granted in support by the Government was based upon their own estimated cost and upon local production at Morgenster. From this they are now departing, apparently, because of the local labour entailed, the additional cost being the result. This means that the mission concerned becomes responsible for editing and circulation of the paper, but that the Government becomes responsible for its cost, and that it is produced by a third party. This would appear to be unsatisfactory arrangement, but it may be necessary pending our own production of a journal to replace the 'Quarterly'.[15]

The declaration by the director "that the government becomes responsible for its costs" in essence shows how reluctant the government was to bear the costs of newspaper production for the Africans on its own. It would seem that the conflict was solely on costs as there was no mention of conflicts over the content of the newspaper. However, because the director intimated that the government was prepared to launch its own journal, one assumes that its relationship with the DRC had broken down.

In some sense one could say the Southern Rhodesia Advisory Board was pressuring the government to continue financing the production of the *Rhodesian Quarterly*. In recommending that the government be urged to meet the expenses of the newspaper production, the board noted that the newspaper had played a fundamental role in propagating the recently unified Mashona language. Jeater notes that there was increasing interest at the state level in a unified Chishona vernacular in the late 1920s.[16] The recommendation, Jowitt suggested, was to last for a year and would be revised based on the performance of the Citadel Press as well as any decision that government would make regarding the publication of its own periodical.[17] In spite of these recommendations, the government refused to increase its annual subsidy to cushion the DRC. The colonial secretary wrote to Jowitt, saying:

> I think a government subsidy of 25 pounds per issue is all that we can do for this publication. If the DRC Mission ceases the production of the *Rhodesian Native Quarterly,* the subsidy might be given to some other mission who may produce such a publication, and failing another Mission doing this, the Native Development Department might consider bringing out one themselves, in conjunction with the Native Department.[18]

The subsequent collapse of the *Rhodesia Native Quarterly* signalled the birth, in 1931, of another publication called the *Native Mirror*, also known as *Chiringiriro* in Shona or *Isibuko* in Ndebele. This *Native Mirror* was neither produced by another mission nor the Native Development Department as suggested by the colonial secretary. The man who was responsible for compiling content material for this newspaper was ex-missionary turned parliamentarian and housing agent F. L. Hadfield.[19] It was printed and distributed by the Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company at the *Chronicle* offices in Bulawayo.[20] The paper was printed in Karanga, Zezuru and Sindebele, together with English. Important government notices and reports continued to be translated into all three languages up to the time it was replaced (under new ownership) by the *Bantu Mirror*. The *Native Mirror* was a quarterly and, like the *Native Quarterly*, it was supported by the Native Education Department, which bought copies for African schools.[21]

The idea to launch the *Native Mirror* was to inculcate a kind of education "suitable" for the Africans. Chief Native Commissioner C. L. Carbutt, in a message to welcome the newspaper, expressed the hope that it would "take an important place in the education and general advancement of the people [Africans] for whose benefit it is published."[22] The *Rhodesia Herald* saw the coming of the *Native Mirror* as significant as it bore "testimony to the spread of education among the natives" and that it ensured the commencement of a native press on the right lines.[23] It would seem that the newspaper was targeted at those who had attained a certain level of education that was deemed to be not so advanced. At the launch of the *Native Mirror*, it was stated that "all advanced natives and others interested in native affairs should read the *Native Affairs Department Annual* (*NADA*)," a journal which was founded by the department in 1923.[24] Because it was for the less advanced Africans, it was not uncommon to find fables in almost every copy of the newspaper.

It also carried stories and competitions on culture. For example, in 1931 it sponsored a "lobolo" competition for "native girls." Another competition was on how to rear a baby. Through these writing competitions as observed by Stephanie Newell in the West African setting, African readers actively helped to set the agenda in their local newspapers, responding eagerly to the invitation of editors to "freely

express their views and intelligent opinion' in the letters pages of the press."[25] However, it is important to note as argued by Jeater that the voice allowed to African contributors was very limited.[26] Contributions on seemingly important topics on agricultural demonstration work in the reserves were penned by Alvord, in which he encouraged Africans to abandon traditional farming methods so as to increase their yields.

The *Native Mirror* on the whole represented that alliance between the government and the missionaries that had started from the days of the *Rhodesia Native Quarterly*. However, that alliance was not without its troubles as the missionaries sometimes attacked the government for allowing the publication of letters from Africans that "discouraged" other Africans from going to church. In July 1933, the *Native Mirror* carried a letter from an African who was expressing his disappointments over the mushrooming of church denominations in the country. The writer pointed out that due to the "disorder" in the churches founded by Europeans, he would never become a Christian. The missionaries deemed this letter offensive and said it should not have been published. One missionary is reported to have refused to distribute the copy of the newspaper because of the presence of the so-called offensive letter.[27]

What can be learnt from the era of the missionary influence is that there was strong, though conflict-burdened, collaboration between the church and the state in the production of reading materials for the Africans. Though their short term interests were different, their broader goal of making informed and "civilised" subjects featured prominently. This is evidenced by the stories, news and announcements the papers carried. Church news featured more often, carrying moralizing campaigns against beer-drinking, laziness and polygamy. From the side of the government, legislations affecting Africans were disseminated and messages from the native commissioners in the interest of maintaining law and order. Newspapers for Africans in this period were not representative of African voices or interests. In spite of a plethora of public grievances that Africans had, none of them found their way into the newspapers. When criticism from Africans found its way into the newspaper, it was solely directed towards the missionaries.

South African Influences

The lacklustre performance of the missionary press, coupled with rising costs mainly as a result of the great depression, opened the doors for foreign investors to come into the newspaper industry of Southern Rhodesia. This phase in the development of the African-oriented press was heavily dominated by the South African influence. It began in 1936 with the influx of South African investors, buying off the *Native Mirror* and renaming it the *Bantu Mirror*. However, as W. D. Gale has explained, South African involvement in the Rhodesian press had started almost together with colonialism when, in the 1890s, the Argus Group from Cape Town sent its representative to produce newspapers for the English-speaking settlers north of their border. The Rhodesian press was directly an outpost of the South African white press, just as the colony of Rhodesia itself was largely a product of one of South Africa's prominent politicians, Cecil John Rhodes, who himself had links with the Argus Press. The press established a branch in Salisbury in 1891 and its representative, William Fairbridge, began to produce news for the settlers on 27 June 1891 when he launched the *Mashonaland Herald* and *Zambezian Times*. These newspapers enjoyed wide readership among their target settler public. In October 1892, the *Rhodesia Herald* was formed and this was followed two years later by the Bulawayo *Chronicle* in 1894.

These two Argus Group newspapers were to enjoy a monopoly as opinion makers for the European population in Southern Rhodesia. The *Rhodesia Herald* stated that its policy was "to advance to the fullest of their powers the mining and agricultural interests, to discuss and criticise moderately, but without fear or favour, the topics of the day or hour, and to promote fellowship and unity amongst all classes and sections of the white community."[28] The *Chronicle* described its

> wholesome and independent policy pursued by its elder sister, the *Rhodesia Herald*. That is not by any means a policy of opposition or of captious criticism of Powers that be. On the contrary, it will be the aim of the Chronicle to promote the rule and the success of the wonderful organisation which was born of the genius of Mr. Cecil Rhodes.[29]

These two papers are the excellent chronicles of settler history in the country as they gave considerable coverage to white social, political and

economic life. They were accused by some sectors of white Rhodesian society, especially the farmers, of being pro-government (British South Africa Company) when the issue for responsible government in the early 1920s was being debated. Mararike notes that both the *Chronicle* and the *Rhodesian Herald* strongly supported joining the union as a result of the links between the Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company and the parent company, the Argus.[30] However, with Southern Rhodesia attaining Responsible Government status in 1923, these two newspapers had to painfully readjust their policies and voice in support the new government.

The Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company enjoyed a monopoly over the publication of newspapers for African publics for many decades, but this monopoly was challenged by the African Newspapers Limited when it launched the *African Daily News* in 1956. From their founding, in contrast to the Argus papers that represented white, colonial interests, African Newspapers Limited would come into champion African interests. This reflected the polarisation accompanying racial state projects of separate development that were taking root in every sphere of life in Rhodesia. It was separate development, especially in regards to the press, that was to inform the state's treatment of the African press. By the 1960s, Rhodesia had two monopoly newspaper groups, one for "whites" and the other for "blacks." This was to have significant political ramifications because one appealed to the powerful but minority group, whilst the other to the disadvantaged and restless majority.

Factors shaping the development of the African press in Rhodesia took place far away across its borders in South Africa. The men who were to become the main actors in the development of the African press in Rhodesia were the Pavers, Bertram F. G. Paver and Cedric Paver. According to Les Switzer, Bertram Paver was a failed farmer and advertising salesman, who founded Bantu Press (Pty) Ltd., and launched its national newspaper, *Bantu World*, in April 1932.[31] Paver was a racial segregationist with liberal leanings, a progressivist, who, like many of his ilk, believed that different classifications of humanity were at different stages on a pre-determined cultural evolutionary path. He wanted to "provide the Native people with a platform for fair comment and the presentation of their needs and aspirations." He tried to attract black investors, and by the end of 1932 more than half of the 38 shareholders in the company were Africans.[32] Richard V. Selope Thema, a veteran journalist, and I. J. le Grange, a Johannesburg businessman and the company's first

major shareholder, were on the board of directors along with Paver. The problem of capital led Paver to approach the Argus Press seeking for help and this eventually led to the takeover of the Bantu Press, making the Argus Printing and Publishing Company the biggest press monopoly in Africa.[33]

Bantu Press, the first monopoly in the history of the black press, had interests in South Africa, the High Commission Territories (now Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland), the two Rhodesias (now Zimbabwe and Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi). More significantly for the future of the black press, however, was *Bantu World's* status as a centre for training black aspirants in the new skills and to fill occupations needed to run a successful business—including printers and truck drivers, typist/clerks, salesmen and advertising personnel. *Bantu World* became a kind of training ground for fledgling African journalists who were trained the art of separating news and opinion. However, white editors and journalists were defining the agendas of black news. A variety both of white liberal organizations and of governmental agencies— including the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Department of Native Affairs—began to supply Bantu Press with news deemed suitable for a black audiences.[34] However, Paver's *Bantu World* strove to become a newspaper of record for literate Africans.[35] As such, it was first and foremost a news medium covering a hitherto unprecedented range of activities affecting Africans under white rule.

Bertram Paver had a grand vision of buying out African-owned newspapers and in July 1934, he bought a majority shareholding in *Mochochonono*, (The *Comet*), one of the earliest black-owned, black-edited newspapers in Lesotho, founded by the Tlale family of Maseru in 1911.[36] In January 1935, Paver bought the well-known black newspaper in South Africa called *Imvo Zabantsundu*, which had been founded by John Tengo Jabavu in the late nineteenth century, as well as buying into the Zulu-language Natal newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal*, founded by John Dube.[37] As part of this buying trend, in 1936 Paver bought the *Native Mirror*, published by the Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company, for £900 and changed the name to *Bantu Mirror*.[38]

In the 1950s, Bantu Press began to experience profit challenges as a result of other black-audience papers that had come to the fore. Whilst Paver believed that the best way to beat the new competitors was to join them, other directors thought otherwise. They believed that salvation lay in launching a daily newspaper. Paver reflected on his convictions thus:

> I didn't believe that the time was ripe to start a daily. I didn't feel the African had got to the stage where sufficient news could be generated to produce a balanced daily and that pressure on reader interest would change the whole structure, the whole nature of the newspapers, which were gradually growing with the people. It would introduce a lot of disturbing factors too soon – they would have to inevitably compete for news, would have to carry all sorts of articles which would have been counterproductive.[39]

But conflict with other board members signalled that Paver's time at the *Bantu World* in Johannesburg was over. His leadership came to an end at a board meeting in March 1956, when the post of managing director was dismantled and the board committed itself to the project of a daily newspaper, to be called the *World*. Paver resigned as managing director to take up full-time duty as chairman of African Newspapers Limited in Salisbury, although he remained a director of the press and was granted a pension of £500 per annum for three years.[40]

Notes

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