# Audio file

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# Transcript

**Everett Ndlovu:**

Welcome to the talking point where nothing is out of bounds.

And today we are looking at media and democracy and social justice.

With me in the studio Sibusisiwe, both a political activist and an academic, and together with me is Bheki a journalist lecturer and an academic.

Like these two, including myself, come from all the way from the United States of Africa, where we disregard all the political boundaries put by our colonial masters.

And ironically, we really get surprised our own politicians are hold those boundaries, which to me I find to be insulting because we were once free people from Cape to Cairo and dreaming of a time when that freedom is going to be according to us.

Now today therefore, like I mentioned, we are looking at social justice and Sibusisiwe and Bhecki, welcome to the program.

**Bheki Ncube:**

Thank you very much.

**Busi Bhebhe-Ndlovu:**

Thank you everyone.

**Everett:**

Now to start, I want to say, there is no social justice without democracy and there's no democracy without free media, the 4th estate watching over those who with absolute power.

And such, power usually corrupts, absolutely.

I remember this Zimbabwe fought a protracted liberation war which lasted over 15 years, and this war was about democracy, equality, human rights, freedom of expression and freedom of identity.

43 years later after independence.

What is the situation on the ground?

Do we have those freedoms we fought for?

Can I open the debate and then maybe ask Sibusisiwe to kick start our deliberations?

**Busi**

Thank you very much Everett.

It's quite a sobering question because it calls upon us to introspect as a people as a country.

Individually, as journalists, not much has changed.

Unfortunately, we could claim that maybe flesh wise at the surface level, what people see with their eyes may seem like it has changed, but at the skeletal, foundational level little has changed.

We still have the repressive systems.

We still have the laws that curtail what journalists can do.

It may have changed in the strategies or the style, but the reasons for doing it, and sometimes the way of doing it remains the same.

And the benefits remain the same and the benefits are to keep those in power, in power, to increase their power to take away power from the public, to take away scrutiny from the public.

To lessen the extent to which the public can ask questions to lessen the extent to which the public has information because information is power, so now, we have people who are leading.

They are leading.

They have weapons of power in terms of military and police power.

But they also want to have knowledge, power, information, power, to know where to go to get what, to know, how to access certain moneys, who to talk to.

When the public doesn't know those things, the public cannot ask questions, the party cannot demand certain things.

And by taking away that freedom and taking away the media's ability to inform the public, those that in quotations are leaders, have managed to stay in power, and that is largely because of the systems that were there pre colonially, the laws that were there, have just been changed in terms of names moved around like on a chess board or on a checkers board.

But they are still there when the board we're still playing the same political media game.

We're still playing the same political economic game within the media.

Those who own the means of production and control the media.

You know the state of development media that we would want to see where the public gets to say what they need and the media is inputting into the development of a new state of a growing nation.

A growing democracy that we have not seen.

**Everett:**

Oh my God.

**Busi**

And that's unfortunate.

**Everett:**

That's very unfortunate.

Bhecki, you teach journalism, and journalism is intertwined with human rights.

What is your take on this?

**Becki:**

I think I would agree with you.

You know I always, I think I feel pity for those who went to war this war that we are talking about that there was a protracted war of liberation in Zimbabwe where people were fighting for democracy, equality, human rights, and freedom of expression.

I think people who are doing it think, that they were fighting for those things because, immediately after independency those things are not there.

And if they are there, the question is, for example, what is democracy?

What exactly were they told it cost to Democrats when they went to war?

What exactly were they told that constitute equality because as long as there was Ian Smith moving in a convoy and then we remove Ian Smith and replace it.

And replace him with pay also driving like also having a convoy protected from the very same people that put him into power, he becomes, it becomes very very problematic, but the situation in Zimbabwe, it's very confusing so to say.

It's confusing in the sense that unlike other African countries, for example, we because first let me say the major problem is that when people look at democracy, human rights, before even top of the media before even top of the role of the media.

People acting narrowly in elections as the sum in total of democracy.

This is the same thing that the government in Zimbabwe is actually leans towards to say that this is the mark of democracy.

Why am I saying that?

The government in power is babies and PF. To be specific we always tell you that or if you read books and tell that one of the key tenants of democracy is free is regular, free and fair elections and some people will come out and say Zimbabwe has helped elections since 1980. They have never missed a single period where this whole election, which means they've built regular elections, how free and fair AU has said that they are fair?

They are free and fair.

Some can say they can say free and fair.

And some Caribbean countries have also said the same thing.

So when EU, the Americans come and say no, they're not free.

No one listens to them because the argument is that we have held elections in the free and fair, so that's why I'm saying Zimbabwe is a confusing country.

And if you compare it for example with countries, maybe in Nigeria or, in a way, you hear that someone was caught literally running away with ballot papers and so on.

Those things happen don't really happen.

You won't see them or you won't hear about them, but the bottom line is that those who fought for democracy, equality, members, and expression actually were doing those things are not there, in the sense that it is only a few who are benefiting the majority are not partaking in the cake and the media therefore has a very huge role to play in trying to expose that.

But as we will discuss later, the media is limping in Zimbabwe, actually, for various reasons I mean economic and also political.

Yeah, I can say that.

**Everett:**

Yeah, actually Bhecki, it's interesting.

You should talk about elections and it looks like whoever votes does not determine the government that is going to come out of the elections, but the most important person is the one who counts the votes.

Am I right there.

**Becki:**

Yes, you might be right, you might be wrong.

There is no right or wrong, but the issue is elections are clouded in a lot of mystery.

If you are following the debates now, there is the issue about the voters, in Zimbabwe, for example, you have people who died they're still in the voter's role we have got.

We have got strange names.

They are still in the voter's role.

Some they are the same age, all those kinds of things.

So, the actual even the census has been in Zimbabwe.

The census is now looked at as part of the elections although almost a year before elections, but it's a precursor to say this is the voting is going to follow this census results.

So at the end of the day, that's why in Zimbabwe the youths don't vote that they don't reach it because they've lost hope in the in the ballot.

**Everett:**

We hear the government saying there is freedom of expression in Zimbabwe.

What is the problem then Sibusisiwe?

**Busi:**

I think there is freedom of expression.

The ideal in Zimbabwe and there is freedom of expression, the reality.

So the government is going to say there's freedom of expression in the sense that people can write what they think on social media.

They'll probably go for civil society meetings and say what they think and criticize government.

But the problem is if those things are officialized by being quoted in a newspaper, immortalized by being recorded on television or radio, such that they can be quoted and they can go viral to other platforms, especially when it's someone prominent.

Someone that has a voice that can move clouds, that can, you know, make people take certain decisions or see things in a different way, like what we can say about, I think what has become of journalist or poaching on now to the government.

Then that freedom of expression becomes a problem to the government and the question is will there be freedom after that expression?

We've seen the government arrest, you know.

We've seen him government arrest the likes of Enututu Zimatutu, to the enact laws find they've apparently repealed iPad but replaced it with the freedom of Information Act, they have laws like the criminal law and quantification and Reform Act.

They have the Broadcasting Services Act and the cyber security.

All these policies that when they bring in, they claim that they are trying to make the media more expressive, more free, to get information and the public safer because apparently media in Zimbabwe is a threat to public safety because they cause alarming despondency and things like that, and so all these laws come in under the guise of protecting the public and protecting the profession.

But the truth of the matter is these laws, they seem to give with the right hand while they are taking with the left hand, because when you go to the nitty gritty of those laws, there's a lot of red tape.

Journalists will get arrested.

Journalists will be curtailed.

There will be a lot of fines and restrictions.

We were even hearing of a law that would require journalists to register with government, from what I hear, which means that you cannot, for example, practice citizen journalism.

Then you cannot open a freelance platform online, because if you start to ask questions and you're not, they like there's going to be a body that actually tastes that you are worthy.

Just like maybe I think the Law Society of Zimbabwe.

And the doctor's association where you have to have certain qualifications and so forth.

But journalism hasn't always been like that.

Journalism has been about giving people information and there are people who are not qualified to be journalists but are very good at accessing information and are very good at interacting.

**Everett:**

There is another question I just wanted to ask you.

I wanted to ask if at all, are we therefore saying, we have got the same devil but in a different town?

The one we chased across the pond using our AK rifles fighting for our independence.

He will replace the same devil with the devil.

He has placed the devil with the same devil but in a different town.

**Busi:**

Someone put it better and said a lot of people want to get into power not because they want to remove the oppressor, but because they want to enjoy what the oppressor is enjoying at the moment.

So you find that those who claim to want to liberate us even currently when you look at the opposition parties, when you look at people that want to take over power from Zanu Pier in as much as they use the language of freedom of wanting to get the public freed and you know, in a state of being able to exercise their self expressions, freedom of association.

Once they are in power they start to use the same tools and the same language that those they are trying to remove have been using.

We have seen it even before they get into power.

We think they are all political parties.

The mud sliding, slinging the pulling and pushing for political positions.

It shows you.

**Everett:**

After themselves and not after.

**Busi:**

Exactly everyone is looking out for their interests.

Now it's independence.

**Everett:**

I remember maybe Bhecki can shed light on this one.

It's independence.

There was one broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation.

And in newspapers run by the paper group within papers group.

Now there is evidence of a proliferation of independent radio stations and newspapers.

If I remember last year there were about 5 national radio stations.

Two of which were owned by independent broadcasters, there are also 10 licensed regional and provincial radio stations, but the cry for freedom of expression is still loud and clear.

Yeah, now how do you explain this Bhecki when you're standing in front of your students?

How do you stand this?

**Becki:**

Yeah, yeah, that's why I was saying, Zimbabwe is a very confusing situation.

Very few people will actually understand it.

You are right.

As of last year there were five national radio stations.

Star FM, ZFM.

And these are the two so that you are you are referring to as private apart from the ones from ZPC.

But if you look, if you look at the ownership patterns of those radio stations, who own Star FM.

Star FM is owned by Zimpapers the same company that owns it here at the same company that owns chronic, so it it's an it's so it's an extension of the government.

It's an of mouthpiece so to say so but to an outsider when you tell them we have an independent or privately owned radio station.

They say yes, yes, you're right, but it's not because it's part of Zimpapers and Zimpapers history is well documented.

I mean they support the government of the day and they don't miss their words about that.

Similarly, ZFM stereo is owned by a former government minister, former Zanu PF minister. So definitely it's compromised, I mean in terms of its outlook compromise of its outlook, and obviously some fearful hide behind things like you cannot have foreign ownership of the media, which I gained another challenge because what or foreign?

You cannot.

You can't be foreign funded.

To start a meeting project, so.

It means those without money cannot start media or radio project and why radio because radio is unlike newspapers.

It's very it's very easy to register a newspaper.

I don't think I don't think you can take even a month to register.

In your paper and publish it and and the reason is very simple because newspapers are circulating in towns and the towns are known to be anti government.

People, but those people in towns are fewer than those in the rural areas, so that people are worried about the rural population and not the town population.

So anything that happens in town does not.

They don't care much about it, they are more worried about that, for their is their power base, isn't there, right?

Yeah, that's why

**Everett:**

Yes, there are power bases in the rural areas.

**Becki:**

That's why they are worried about radio who is supposed to broadcast to the rural populace.

So as long as that's why you are talking about that, I can claim all the government can claim there is freedom of expression precisely because the mental organization people can say anything in town.

People can say anything on Twitter.

But the moment you go to the rural areas and say those things, yeah becomes a different ball game altogether.

**Everett:**

Now, if I may ask and say yes, after the adoption of the 2013 Constitution, which contains a universally accepted Bill of Rights.

There has been there. There's not been any meaningful shift in the country's statutory media regulation, legislation and policies to make these constitutional gains a reality. And I wonder what those things here access to information and the protection of privacy at Hyper is still impacting media freedom in a in a supposedly free country.

Are we therefore living a lie in Zimbabwe?

**Busi:**

Interesting question.

I would say yes and no and it goes back to my earlier point about giving with the right and taking with the left.

So for example, we need to acknowledge the steps and gains that have been achieved.

Let's say in the past ten years, these national radio stations that you're talking about that have been licensed were license licensed in 2012, so that means 10 years now, and between then and now we've had commercial, regional community radios. We've also had community radios that have been licensed.

For many years during the Mugabe regime, there had been talk of we're going to license ratios, we're going to license televisions, but for decades we only had one television station, and those four radio stations owned by the same state media platforms ZPC.

In the last 10 years we have seen a growth in plurality numbers.

However, they have given the plurality, but they've kept the diversity they have not given us the diversity of voices, which is what Peggy talks about.

If, for example, you look at all these media platforms that now exist, ZPC owns about half a dozen of them, 7 to 8 of them zimpapers, which is also state owned and owns your herald chronicle owns about six of them. ABC Communications, which is run by Zanu PF MP's former broadcaster and a business person owns 1/2 a dozen as well and one national radio station.

And then you have fetal communications which is owned by Kubani Moyo, former SEC Commissioner and now candidate for Zanu PF. So when you look at all those and then when you look at even the community radio station.

If you really scrutinise, you will find that there is a hand of the ruling party there or the state there because like Peggy said, these should be very much community based, linked to the chief.

They have to toe the line.

They have to understand the party politics.

They have to know what to talk about and what not to talk about and they were licensed exactly precisely along those lines and therefore while we have been given with the rights they have taken with the left.

But we need to look at the future and say OK, they've given us half the pie.

In as much as it's not doing for us what we want it to do, hopefully sometime in the future we can transform these existing polarized platforms to be rehabilitated and even the people in there who seem polarized as well.

And then they can be rehabilitated to realize the true purpose for them working for the public.

**Everett:**

This brings me to another person.

As far as I know, politicians always come to the people every five years to say, can you please employ me to be your representative here and these are my credentials.

We employ those people but immediately they are in power.

They become our bosses.

What is happening here?

Because those people are not productive, but we pay them with our taxes.

But for some reasons we now start worshipping them like an idol, a golden cow we create and start kneeling before it and asking for blessings.

What's happening here?

**Busi:**

We have, maybe I could say we have democracy on paper but not in practice.

Remember, democracy is hundreds and hundreds of years old has been practiced by the by the West for centuries and in Africa only for decades.

We are still mastering what it is.

Our cultural background is one of kingship pass from men to men, to men through the blood.

So us giving power to a whole group of other people to then come and tell us what to do as a group of us voting for them has not sunk in.

We think once we give them power they have to be kings over us and then that document called the Constitution becomes just a paper.

But once we start to understand that some countries in the West have that document, called the Constitution is sacred and holds the power to your liberty, holds the power to you, telling that public servant that you voted into power, that I'm paying your salary, that you are where you are because of me.

Then you will never be free.

Also, we have a problem with the fact that once they are in power they also have the power to use the state resources and the state machinery to silence us, the army, the police, the Central Intelligence officers.

They pay their salary.

To them, it's the leaders who pay the salaries, not the taxpayers.

So until there's an understanding that once I brought you into power and I tell you what laws I want and I don't want, and that I can lobby and protest against the things you are doing in Parliament and therefore take away the resources that you're using against me.

We will never be able to use the power we have in the vote.

It becomes like what Bhecki said.

Just a recurring exercise to wrap us them.

What I have always said is people who have already been chosen and we are just wrapper stamping them.

**Everett:**

And now to go to another question which is really troubling me is the number of quality journalists who have turned the gap back on?

Zimbabwe because they could not express themselves.

Now they're living all over the world doing different jobs and so on.

Now, why is the government so much afraid of a journalist to the extent of wanting a journalist, either dead or out of the country?

**Becki:**

I think I will take that you, you have to look at the history of Zimbabwe to understand that or to answer fully your question.

Where is Zimbabwe coming from?

I mean it's all then it's long back of course, for the two years after independence.

But those journalists that you are looking that we are talking, we are referring to.

Have been labeled for example, maybe as traitors.

And if you look at the, we started by talking about the protected war, what happened during the war, those people suspected to be traitors were actually summarily executed, killed in living in the rural areas people were actually killed for me.

For me, a suspicion that they were traitors.

So this has been inherited and is still being practiced today.

Of course people are no longer summarily executed in public, but when the opposition comes and it has got links to the Western world, the government will then reinvoke the spirit of pre independence.

And say the opposition is trying to bring in the Western countries to recolonize us, and therefore we have to defend ourselves.

So generally, journalists who are supporting change, as it were, are now labeled as change agents.

People who want to change a spec so that.

That's one way you can see the reaction to generalist.

**Everett:**

Actually, it's interesting we should talk about change because to me sending my attitude called change without change when it was referring to Zimbabwe and therefore we can see the rulers, the current rulers being more brutal than the British colonial masters were, because they don't respect human rights at all

Now because of time maybe I may ask one question to Bhecki and another one.

The first one to beg is what advice would you give to anyone wishing to work as a journalist in Zimbabwe?

And for both, what changes would you like to see happening in Zimbabwe in as far as media democracy is concerned?

Let me leave this this to you guys.

**Becki:**

OK, thank you Everett.

I the best the advice basically to journalists is compared to basic practice journalism compared to what journalism is fair balanced counting everyone concerned in stories.

And also be very careful, I mean but not to say that they must not cover stories that are.

Actually inquiring about the excesses of the elite they have to cover their stories, but try to also understand the media laws in Zimbabwe such as the cyber security laws and also all the laws that are related to media so that they don't find themselves in trouble, although of course.

If you are a good journalist, you will somehow find yourself in trap, but it's always better if you understand the laws, because if you check carefully, Zimbabwe does not necessarily chase journalists like other countries like Egypt and Cameroon and so on.

But they will harass this scare, where they were, they know if they harass one and the thousands of them will actually be afraid.

So they just have to do their journalism and.

We hope one day they'll be taken seriously, and journalism we try for a better democracy.

**Everett:**

Or maybe they should remember this prayer which I discovered.

In 1990 our father, who art in State House, had looked at him.

So he worshipped the State House then.

**Busi:**

You know, you know, as big is talking about how Zimbabwe doesn't necessarily jail journalists, I'm reminded of something I was reading about how journalists actually die in countries where they are.

They are actually killed, and yet it's they are not covered in war situations.

In Zimbabwe is exactly such an environment when you look at the death of the likes of Italians and Tamara Chicoma, you know, you ask yourself Zimbabwe is apparently not at war.

Is a peaceful country, but we're having this journalists started dying in the line of duty and you ask yourself, is there a hidden war?

So what I'd like to see really for me is the opening up of a freedom and spaces of expression.

You know we now have a beautiful thing like the Internet and a wide platforms and spaces of expression.

I'd like to see more plurality more voices, more ideas coming out through those platforms, and Zimbabwe is missing in the global village because people do not have access to the Internet.

And then when they do have access to the Internet, they are afraid to share their ideas.

And this has now seeped into even innovative.

Things you know, brilliant Zimbabweans are afraid to share their brilliant ideas because they are afraid that someone in power is going to steal that idea and run with it and they won't see the light of day, so I'd love to see laws that allow young people to thrive to be innovative, to have access to information.

And that information will allow them to thrive and make better decisions and become better citizens.

That is what I look forward to.

**Everett:**

Unfortunately, time is no longer on our side and thank you very much.

Thank you so much for this illuminating insight into media and democracy and social justice in the beloved continent of Africa.

With Zimbabwe as our case study, thank you for opening up this debate robustly without fear and unless things are said, they will never be known unless they are known they can never be addressed.

Only when they are addressed will solutions be found.

That is our talking point and.

Thank you so much, timing it again next time with another case on another topic.

Please have a lovely great day and thank you very much for joining me.

Yours truly everything.