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From platform jumping to self-censorship: internet freedom, social media, and circumvention practices in Zambia

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ABSTRACT
This article describes the complex media environment of urban Zambia based on qualitative interviews with 42 active ICT and social media users in Lusaka. After a contextual discussion of media censorship and Internet freedom, the article draws upon interview data to delineate four circumvention practices: (1) platform jumping; (2) anonymity; (3) self-censorship; and (4) negotiation of legal challenges. Rather than approach circumvention as a set of techniques disseminated from the information capitals of the world to those in the "global south," this study approaches it as a set of cultural practices that emerges within particular sociohistorical conditions and platforms of communication.

Increasing Internet and mobile phone use in Zambia during the past decade has emboldened the state to implement new strategies designed to control citizens' online communication and restrict political expression. On 24 June 2013, President Michael Sata's Patriotic Front (PF)-led government allegedly hacked Zambia's popular online newspaper, *Zambian Watchdog* (*ZWD*). *ZWD* had offered staunch critiques of the ruling regime, exposing PF corruption and characterizing Sata as an "ailing dictator."[1] Sata's government responded by arresting *ZWD* journalists, filing lawsuits against *ZWD*'s editor, and jamming its website. In further efforts to impeach the credibility of the news source, PF officials claimed that *ZWD* had a reckless approach to journalism, used anonymous sources, and published stories for which it could never be held accountable. *ZWD* retorted that anonymity was key to protecting its journalists and sources from the PF government's wrath. The Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Sans Frontières agreed and provided legal assistance to *ZWD* staff, who were arrested, harassed, or intimidated by PF forces. To this day, Internet users are unable to access *ZWD* through a Zambian Internet service provider, even though Sata has died and a new President, Edgar Lungu, has been elected.

The high-profile *ZWD* controversy is significant because it conveys a broader set of struggles that have emerged with digital technologies, online news, and social media in Zambia, where 2.7 million (or 18 percent) of the country's inhabitants have Internet access, and more than 327,000 have Facebook accounts.[2] Zambian ICT penetration is

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relatively low by international standards, but active use of these technologies in urban areas has ushered in new concerns about Internet freedom. Thus far, research on this topic in Zambia has adopted a regulatory perspective, focusing on the country's postindependence media policies.[3] Few have critically examined how Western liberal formulations such as "free speech" or "Internet freedom" have been conceptualized and negotiated in the context of everyday life in Zambia. While no legal definition of Internet freedom exists, the concept is often articulated with universal human rights, including the right to free speech and association, the right to free press, the rights of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, the right to privacy, and the right to access information technologies.[4] Understanding what "Internet freedom" means is not only a matter of reading national policy documents; it also requires direct engagement with people who are using ICTs everyday to circulate dissident viewpoints, report on controversial topics, articulate the perspectives of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, or participate in creative work. Much more than a policy template, Internet freedom is a dynamic constellation of epistemologies, policies, and practices that play a key role in shaping and regulating the capacity to express, access, and share information via networked technologies.

This article explores Zambian struggles over Internet freedom based upon qualitative interviews with 42 people in and around the capital city of Lusaka in 2013.[5] Working with local partners, we selected a diverse group of informants of 18 women and 24 men, aged from 18 to 72, representing various organizations, professions, and affiliations. These informants include professional journalists, bloggers, radio DJs, social media experts, editors, activists, lawyers, political officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, artists, scholars, and students.[6] Though their identities have been anonymized throughout the article, these informants are among the most active ICT users in Zambia and are keenly aware of, and in some cases immersed in, free speech struggles in the country. As such, they can be understood as *influencers* who help shape cross-platform patterns of ICT use in Zambia and set agendas based on their reporting, political interventions, and activist and educational projects. To engage with them, we used an open-ended interview method, which enabled informants to speak in-depth about their experiences, concerns, and interests. Interviews were conducted in English and informants were encouraged to render thick descriptions of their professional work and digital media use and offer thoughts about or experiences with the ruling regime as well as social, economic, and political conditions in Zambia. After fieldwork, interviews were transcribed, and a close analysis of the transcripts was used to extrapolate and define practices of circumvention.

The goal of this article is to describe the complex media environment within which information sharing and censorship happen in contemporary Zambia and to highlight specific circumvention tactics and free speech struggles. Building upon previous research on the social and political dimensions of Zambian radio by Debra Spitulnik and the cross-platform organization of media in Zambia by Wendy Willems, this study explicates how struggles for Internet freedom take shape across analog and digital platforms and in relation to various hot button issues.[7] It opens with a brief contextual discussion of media regulation and government censorship in Zambia, and then, drawing on interview data, describes four circumvention tactics adopted by Zambian citizens: (1) platform jumping; (2) anonymity; (3) self-censorship; and (4) the negotiation of legal challenges. While circumvention is often thought about in relation to the use of proxy servers,

virtual private networks, and encryption software, it is important to recognize the broader array of practices adopted to contend with repressive regimes in low-income, postcolonial societies. Circumvention is less a set of techniques disseminated from the information capitals of the world to those in the "global south," and more a set of cultural practices that emerges within particular sociohistorical conditions and platforms of communication.

Media regulation and censorship in Zambia

Since the 1960s, newspapers and radio and television stations in Zambia have been subject to strict government regulation. While there was no unified media policy during the 27-year tenure (1964–1991) of Zambia's first President, Kenneth Kaunda, journalists were expected to promulgate the socialist principles of his regime, resulting in propagandistic reporting.[8] In 1991, when the new *Movement for Multi-Party Democracy* government took power, incoming President Frederick Chiluba promised to liberalize the Zambian media sector. After Chiluba took charge, it was believed that state-run media such as *The Times of Zambia*, *The Daily Mail*, and the *Zambian Broadcasting Corporation* would be privatized, but these outlets never became independent from governmental influence and continued to act as "mouthpieces of the ruling party."[9] Quick to realize that a freedom of information law could result in politically embarrassing critiques of the regime, successive governments chose not to privatize media organizations.[10] Instead, they kept longstanding outlets under government control and created new private media to exist alongside them, resulting in a version of media pluralism that was more perfunctory than persuasive.

When the Internet was introduced in Zambia in 1994, concerns about press freedom, pluralism, and privatization intensified. In February 1996, Zambia experienced its first act of Internet censorship. The Zambian government ordered *The Post* to remove a banned edition from its website under the Preservation of Public Security Act and threatened to sue its web host, *Zamnet*, Zambia's major Internet service provider. This banned edition of the newspaper featured a report based on leaked documents that indicated the government was secretly planning a referendum for a new constitution.[11] When the Zambian government ordered Zamnet to stop hosting the online version of *The Post*, the Internet service provider refused to comply and instead encouraged the ruling party to publish online versions of the media outlets under its influence (*The Daily Mail*, *The Times of Zambia*).

During the late 1990s, the government aggressively financed state media in an effort to out-compete the independents, but this strategy has not been successful. Former Zambian Information Permanent Secretary, Emmanual Mwamba, urged state-supported media to raise their "online game" as their page views and popularity lag behind those of newer online news portals such as *Zambian Watchdog* and *Zambian Eye*, which are integrated with social media platforms such as Facebook.[12] These independent sites have filled the gap in critical news in Zambia and attracted significant readership in recent years.[13] The journalists and bloggers we interviewed echoed this point, expressing particular concern about the deteriorating quality of *The Post*. Historically, *The Post* spoke for the voiceless and hammered on the government, but things changed in 2008 with a corruption scandal. *The Post*'s editor-in-chief, Fred M'membe, formerly the codirector of Zambian

Airways, had received a loan from the Development Bank of Zambia only by misrepresenting the value of the company's assets. In 2009, a state investigation related to the loan accused M'membe of "fraudulent misrepresentation," but President Sata, many believe, shielded M'membe from prosecution and *The Post* largely supported Sata's regime.[14] In May 2012, Sata suspended three judges for their ruling against M'membe in the loan case, and several employees of *The Post* were inducted into the Sata government, exemplifying state-media sector entanglements in Zambia.

Many of our informants, including journalists and bloggers, stated that it has become nearly impossible to run an independent newspaper in Zambia, and pointed to the December 2013 arrest of Richard Sakala, the managing editor of *Daily Nation*, and two of his associates. Sakala's newspaper had criticized the Sata regime on a number of issues, but the final straw was a report that the Zambian police had not been transparent in recruitment processes. After the report appeared, Sakala was detained and charged with publishing false information and causing public alarm.[15] Sakala was one of at least six journalists arrested in 2013, positioning Zambia as the 72nd country in the category of press freedom.[16]

In light of such events, independent online news media such as *Zambian Watchdog* (*ZWD*) have become crucial news sources in Zambia, covering issues ranging from political elections to state corruption to economic development programs. Yet as *ZWD* critically interrogates governmental activities, it has also been accused of being "overly provocative and lacking in ethics" as its reporters tend to sensationalize stories to attract wider audiences and sponsorships.[17] Devra Moehler and Naunihal Singh note that in several African countries nascent commercial news media often "inflame passions through unprofessional and inflammatory broadcasts" rather than simply challenge state-owned media.[18] Such practices can be understood as part of struggles over Internet and press freedoms, as emergent news organizations work to inform publics and foment sentiments around particular issues ignored or suppressed by state-controlled media. Shifts in media ownership and the emergence of independent online news in Zambia have generated a media environment in which free speech, public debate, and professional ethics are frequently renegotiated.

Given the history of state meddling in Zambian news media, citizens have adopted various tactics for circulating and accessing news and information using a combination of platforms. As Debra Spitulnik explains, Zambian citizens use "small media" to exchange information and gossip in informal communicative networks. "Small media" are forms of alternative media controlled and accessed by small groups that can help foster community solidarity in repressive media environments. They include protest leaflets, underground cassettes, Internet listservs, and jokes, which continue to be deployed alongside innovative uses of mobile phones.[19] Herman Wasserman has argued that mobile phones are helping ordinary Africans to exchange political rumors, gossip, and jokes among themselves and has hailed such media practices as the "latest incarnation of the well-known trope of *radio trottoir*," the popular and informal medium of street-level discussions of politics in Africa.[20]

Other communication practices have emerged in relation to particular free speech struggles during the past decade. According to our informants, Zambia's most urgent and controversial free speech issues include: press or public critiques of the ruling party, government, and President, and related corruption; gender/sexuality/LGBTQ issues; military or police work; and ethnic separatism.[21] In the subsections that follow, interview data is presented to describe circumvention practices that Zambians have

adopted to contend with government repression and engage in online and public discussion of such issues.

Platform jumping

The term "platform" is often used to refer to the computational infrastructure or hardware that supports games, applications, search engines, and mobile phone environments.[22] The term also includes digital media intermediaries such as YouTube, which enable users to share video content. As intermediaries, platforms connect producers, consumers, and advertisers. Because of this, platforms are not neutral; they are implicated in macro- and microlevel political processes.[23] At a macrolevel, for instance, Dal Yong Jin has argued that transnational corporations like Google and Facebook control the computation technologies used in platforms, and through them dominate non-Western countries, advancing a kind of "platform imperialism."[24] At a microlevel, one can see that different platforms are also innovatively appropriated to diversify political expression and circumvention practices in the non-Western world.

In Zambia, ICT users often cross multiple platforms each day, shifting from analog to digital, desktop to mobile, and audio to text-based systems as they participate in social and work-related communication and information exchanges. Our informants indicated that their daily platforms range from word of mouth to radio, blogs to social media networks, and print newspapers to text messaging. The range of platforms accessed each day by Zambian ICT users is contingent upon a variety of factors, including income level, technological literacy, occupation, location, and personal preference. Whenever news or information is blocked in Zambia, the number and range of platforms used increase, resulting in a practice of *platform jumping*—users tactically shift their practices of sharing or consuming information from one platform to another in an effort to facilitate broader access to that information. Such practices can only emerge within an *intermediale* culture where users are accustomed to hopping from one platform or format to another as they participate in mediated communication. It is important to focus on the "medial" (and not just "media") portion of intermediality.[25] The move from "media" to "mediality" makes one more attuned to connections, conjunctions, and intersections in media flows and practices: espousing an intermediale approach means not thinking of one media practice in isolation, but rather, visualizing different medialities in cooperation with one another as part of a complex media system.[26]

Informants shared a variety of platform jumping scenarios. Radio DJs not only transmit news via the airwaves, but also use social media to post content or solicit discussion that may be too controversial for broadcast. To ensure their online access, journalists carry multiple Internet service subscriptions for their different devices, such as MTN for the mobile phone, iConnect for the office computer, and Zamtel for the tablet. The intermediale dynamics of journalistic practices and mobile/electronic devices are radically entangled together. While journalists have the capital and professional motivation to justify the cost of multiple network connections, Zambians in rural communities do not and thus use radio listening, text messaging via mobile phone, or word of mouth as predominant modes of sharing and accessing information.

Given these intermediale practices in Zambia, when content is censored in one platform it often finds expression in another. The case of a print journalist who maintains

a blog to circulate content censored by the newspaper that employs her helps to clarify this point. This journalist remarked that issues of sexuality are often censored by press in the name of Christian values and morals. Many Zambians know that homosexuality exists, she explained, but are afraid to discuss it publicly. Recalling a story she hoped to publish in the newspaper, she asked: "Why are they not distributing condoms in prisons? ... if you talk about it, 'oh ... encouraging homosexuality.' But why are we pretending? That is why blogging is a very effective platform because ... most of us in Twitter want to talk about these issues."[27] In this case, a journalist working for a major newspaper jumped to an online blog and Twitter to discuss homosexuality and condom distribution in Zambian prisons, a topic that newspapers refuse to cover.

If and when such stories do get published in newspapers, the passages and pictures explicitly concerned with health and sexuality are removed. This journalist also notes the hypocrisy implicit in the censorship of details about male homosexuality. Despite the fact that Lusaka's streets are filled with posted advertisements for penis enlargement creams, she faced difficulty in trying to publish pictures of these displays with an article. Censorship also operated on the term to be used for "penis," and euphemistic synonyms were suggested:

> When you walk around the town [Lusaka], you see a lot of posters, advertising for penis enlargement creams. I had a feature, 800–900 word article ... My editor says you do not write the word "penis." So I said, "dick," he says no, write "manhood." The poster says penis enlargement creams. On my blog, I have got the pictures. We cannot publish the pictures [in print] because the pictures have penis written on them.[28]

Platform jumping these stories involves posting them on blogs and social media where issues of sexuality can be explicitly discussed. Some journalists indicated that they maintain semianonymous blogs to avoid being monitored by government authorities when discussing such issues.

By working across platforms, journalists are able to support themselves financially while addressing the issues they deem important. As a journalist-blogger remarked:

> In terms of free speech, generally, for women, I would say ... you have to be very careful about what you say. If I stood up and say the government is not doing anything for us women or whatever. If I am a nobody, I will be probably taken in or something. If maybe like I am a media person, I can say, you know in a way, maybe through a blog or Facebook that this government is not doing anything for women ... .[29]

According to this journalist, ordinary citizens feel scared to criticize the government, and, if they are women, they feel doubly intimidated of being "taken in" or arrested. At the same time, there is apparently some leeway afforded by the government for women journalists as long as their critiques are confined to social media platforms, and not expressed within professional news outlets.

Journalists elsewhere have also jumped platforms and taken to Internet blogging when they have found their voices suppressed. Nagwa Fahmy explains that during the authoritarian regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, professional journalists who were blacklisted by security officers for dissenting against state activities turned to blogging, as they were denied work in mainstream news organizations.[30] Compared with Egypt, the practice of journalists' blogging takes place in Zambia with some contextual differences: in Zambia, there is not as radical a break between journalism and blogging as there appears to be in

Egypt. Journalists express their opposition in mainstream newspapers to the extent possible and then, when motivated to be further critical, jump platforms to blog and tweet. Unlike in Egypt, one does not have to choose between mainstream media and blogs but can participate in both, highlighting and driving different agendas in each forum.

In 2012 the Zambian Blogger's Network (ZBN) formed to encourage further blogging by journalists and citizens who are committed to writing about important social and political issues ignored in mainstream news media.[31] The blog was publicized as a vital platform that Zambian journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizens could "jump to" when they sought to cover or draw recognition to a sidelined issue. Some of the Zambian bloggers we interviewed consider themselves to be radical activists. One had served time in prison related to his activism and indicated that he used his blog and social media platforms to publicize his political viewpoints, even though he risks arrest in doing so. This activist explained that an invented charge of "drug trafficking" was brought against him, and he was imprisoned because he "had mounted an advocacy [campaign] that the Internet be opened up."[32] Another blogger affiliated with the ZBN explained her efforts to highlight LGBTQ rights in Zambian mediascape:

> There are certain issues which we cannot share in our organizational platforms but I also must hasten to say that I am also one of the most liberated persons … If you look at my blog … I post about things that affect people. If you look at issues of homosexuality in Zambia. Those are very sensitive issues. Those are issues that I put on my Facebook wall just to start the conversation and getting people to start talking about it.[33]

Several members of the Zambian Bloggers Network mentioned that the Internet footprint does not exist much beyond Lusaka and other cities, but they hope that whatever they write in their blogs is also being summarized in text messages or via word of mouth and reaching remote corners of the country through mobile phones. One blogger described such SMSing as a form of "microblogging," indicating that most Zambians do not have a desktop or word processing software, but often use text messaging to circulate information from newspapers, social media, radio, or word of mouth to those with more limited platform access.

Anonymity

In addition to highlighting platform jumping practices in Zambia, our informants foregrounded different motivations for and gradients of anonymity in online environments. Anonymity is critical to online identity construction, and social media provide different possibilities for maintaining anonymity.[34] Alice Marwick and danah boyd have noted that while in offline situations people know the context within which they are conversing, in social media sites there is often a "context collapse" in the sense that users are unsure who exactly is viewing their *performance of self* and are unable to restrict this performance to a particular audience segment.[35] Anonymity provides a way to negotiate this context collapse. The desire for anonymity depends on the user's perception of a particular news site, blog, or social media platform and the kinds of people and social groups the user thinks will frequent the platform. As users gauge varied online contexts, they enact anonymity in the process of making their views public, and they may either critique or endorse the status quo.

In Zambia, practices of anonymity are linked to values as varied as free speech, on one hand, and a lack of professional ethics, on the other. Our interview with an exiled *Zambian Watchdog* journalist sheds light on some of the ways that anonymity takes shape within Lusaka's digital culture. Some have praised *ZWD*'s courageous critiques of the Sata government, but others object to the online publication's use of anonymous sources and lack of a physical address for accountability and verification, which has led *ZWD* to lose credibility among some readers. When we asked one of its editors about this issue, he replied:

> They have always been saying we are losing or have lost credibility but everyone [still] logs on our website. Having no physical address does not affect verification because it is us who verify stories using email and mobile phones. Those who want us to have a physical address want it *to* [sic: be used for] sinister motives. They want to serve us with police summons. If we were not working anonymously, by now they would have silenced us.[36]

This editor insists that anonymity is vital to *ZWD*'s ongoing operation and claims that the popularity of the online news outlet is a testament to its credibility among particular Zambian publics. By 2012, *ZWD* became the most read news source in Zambia and had a global reach with over 850,000 unique IP address hits per month.[37] By December 2014, *ZWD* was receiving more than 8 million page views per month from nearly 400,000 users.[38] This informant is convinced that *ZWD*'s tactical use of anonymity enabled the organization to continue its reporting with minimal interruption. To bolster this position, he pointed out that prestigious international news organizations regularly use anonymity in their reporting, including *The Economist* and *Africa Confidential,* which has reported on the basis of strict anonymity since the 1960s.

Staff from another online publication, *Zambian Eye*, insist that its practices differ from *ZWD* as they "are not hiding" and people know exactly where to reach them if needed. *Zambian Eye* staff expressed a different concern with anonymity: how to deal with user-generated content that is anonymous and defamatory. This is a dilemma that media houses across the world face as they transition from print/broadcast to online platforms that aggregate and filter user-generated content on discussion forums.[39] *Zambian Eye*'s policy is to allow anonymous posting in response to news stories and in its discussion forum. Comments on the news website are moderated by volunteers in and beyond Zambia, but the anonymous comments in the discussion forum are not usually filtered (unless they are deeply offensive). These practices, according to *Zambian Eye*'s staff, distinguish it from political party-controlled social media accounts, where parties and their affiliated organizations host political discussions. Such forums tend to be more biased than deliberative or constructively critical. *Zambian Eye* staff have worked very hard to avoid this base level bias, stating:

> … *Zambian Eye* is not aligned to any political party. As a result, people who belong to different political parties are free to post, whereas in other pages and other groups on social media, they are inclined to certain political parties. As a result, people who are against such parties, they are either insulted or deleted or banned from the group. So, this is the difference that *Zambian Eye* has brought about in the social media.[40]

Zambian Eye has been able to successfully host political debates precisely because it allows comments, anonymous or otherwise, from members of every political group. The website's moderators have also found that "political parties have recruited their

members to specifically come to this group *Zambian Eye* to air their views."[41] Stressing objective journalistic standards, *Zambian Eye* provides explicit instructions to moderators, indicating that they should not discriminate against any political perspectives conveyed by user comments. Beyond circulating diverse political views, *Zambian Eye* staff claim that the organization has created an open platform where controversial issues in Zambia such as gay rights can be discussed, and indicates that there were 8–10 articles published about this issue in 2013, which were then vigorously debated on the forum. This informant believes that the technical capacity to support anonymous comments ultimately helps to generate more balanced, pluralized, and wide-ranging political discussions on *Zambian Eye*.

Finally, informants commented on the varying degrees of anonymity and privacy that they perceived within different social media platforms. A social media marketer and leading Twitter user pinpointed the differences between Facebook and Twitter:

> I think with Facebook … if you want to friend your friends and have a family … then eventually you are going to have an active Facebook profile, you have to like a personality attached to your real life. Whereas on Twitter, you do not have to have any of your real life attached to your Twitter profile and because of that people are more open.[42]

She regularly platform jumps and prefers using Twitter when posting controversial content because she thinks it provides more anonymity. She admitted that she also engages in self-censorship when using Facebook: for instance, she deliberately did not post LGBTQ issues on her Facebook profile because she knew that some of her family members would not approve. However, she posts stories and comments related to LGBTQ issues, and women's rights, on her Twitter account. Unless you are a famous figure, she maintains, it is possible to tweet on controversial topics without having to fear negative consequences or reprisals. Twitter affords more anonymity simply because it is not as popular as Facebook in Zambia. In 2014, Facebook partnered with Zambian mobile service provider Airtel to provide free Facebook access for subscribers, redefining experiences of the Internet in Zambia.[43] In Zambia, Facebook *is* the Internet for most people, as it has become the main portal to a select number of websites.[44] While such partnerships are celebrated in business circles as extending Internet access to those who cannot afford it, these deals ultimately compromise Internet freedom by dramatically reducing the range of websites and information that users can access.

Self-censorship

Beyond practices of platform jumping and anonymity, Zambian ICT users also participate in self-censorship when they use online platforms. Self-censorship can result from an individual's socialization into a particular political subjectivity or informational culture, or from his/her careful assessment of whether and how to post potentially controversial news or information in online environments. Most informants indicated that they often choose not to post news stories or comments that may arouse controversy or garner negative attention from family, friends, or state officials. As indicated earlier, critiques of the President and his party, sexuality and LGBTQ issues, and discussion of military and police are topics that most people shy away from or use circumvention tactics when discussing. Another sensitive issue in Zambia is the Barotseland separatist movement, a political movement based on struggles over ethnicity and territory.

Barotseland is a region in Western Zambia and home of the Lozi people, who have long campaigned for political autonomy and separate statehood.[45] A radio announcer we interviewed indicated that she shared a Facebook post about the Barotse movement, which was critical of President Sata's government, and consequently pulled it down after a friend cautioned her. She explains:

> There was a story that was running … and, I put it up because I thought I had all the information. But then, somebody from ZNBC, because I have friends like from every media house … came into my inbox, and told me, "what is that you have put, you know you have to be careful. Don't put that up. Like just remove it!" So, I had to remove it … [] … The story that I had removed was talking about Barotse activists and what has been happening … And I just put up a comment … because I am also from Barotseland, my tribe is Lozi. So, people were kind of thinking that I am siding with them because they are my relatives because I was saying something bad about the government.[46]

Even though this radio announcer had fact-checked before sharing this Barotse-related news story, she still decided to take it down, revealing that self-censorship occurs *relationally*—due to pressure from others—and *retroactively*—deletion of online expression that has already occurred. In this case, a comment from a friend brought forth the social norms of Zambia's political/informational culture—that is, "it is not normal to side with the Barotse"—and the radio announcer applied these norms to her own social media practice despite her contrary opinions. The radio announcer's Lozi background made her vulnerable to the charge that she is biased in favor of her ethnic community and their separatist movement. Such self-censorship is unfortunate, as there is a need for reporting on such issues given the unequal treatment of ethnic minorities by the state. Many in the Western Province (part of Barotseland), and in particular the Kalabo District, are the poorest in the country with inadequate water and power supply. Zambian political officials, historians, and activists we met noted that vast regions of the country have been left out of Zambia's development story.

Stuart Allan proposed a cultural studies of journalism by asking media scholars to question the false dichotomies between journalists and the sociopolitical contexts within which they operate.[47] This radio announcer's story clarifies how journalistic practices are embedded within cultural practices and state power relations in Zambia. Though she is a talented journalist skilled in using different digital devices, state sanctions against her ethnic community inhibit her online expression. While trying to comprehend and negotiate press freedom and Internet freedom within the cultural context of Zambia, journalists cannot be distinguished from ordinary people. Ethnic differences and inequalities (the plight of the Lozi community) constrain and impinge upon self-expression online and in journalistic practice.

Returning to the proclivity to self-censor, we have to ask: where does such a tendency come from? The issue of self-censorship is challenging to investigate as it often occurs unconsciously and is embedded within broader processes of socialization and social interaction that transpire on- and off line. When discussing this issue, many interviewees characterized *ZWD*'s work as too provocative and positioned it as exceptional and not representative of online news reporting in Zambia. Still, some, such as the cofounder of an influential IT innovation hub in Lusaka, speculate that when Zambian citizens witness what has been done by the state to *ZWD* staff, they become afraid to speak out. He believes that people in Zambia tend to "self-censor themselves out of fear and not

because of the system itself."[48] This paradoxical pressure for citizens to restrict their speech—or self-censor—at the very moment digital platforms proliferate enables the state to continue to informally regulate citizens' communication.

Negotiating legal challenges

Though freedom of expression and press freedom are technically guaranteed by Zambia's Constitution, there are other vague and open-ended laws that supersede these rights in the interest of "public order." These laws, the defamation law in particular, are often exploited as a means to censor journalists and others who question or critique the President, his administrative staff, or the ruling party. Brian Chama's account of the Zambian government's targeting of satirist and newspaper journalist, Roy Clarke, in 2004 is instructive.[49] After publishing a satirical piece comparing the then Zambian President, Levy Mwanawasa, and other government officials to animals in *The Post*, Clarke (a British citizen married to a Zambian woman) was charged with defamation and was ordered to leave the country within 24 hours under the Immigration and Deportation Act. Clarke described his piece to us in the following manner:

> It was a story, it was more of the *Animal Farm* variety, I think because it was about animals in a game park … There was a big elephant in charge of the game park who was a bit oppressive. All the monkeys weren't getting mangoes that they were promised … This elephant was called Welei Welei, which made the same sound as (President) Mwanawasa.[50]

Authorities claimed that Clarke's piece was insensitive and insulting to leaders and that it was a threat to peace and order. The ambiguity and the polysemous quality of Clarke's satire, his marriage to a Zambian, and his having spent the majority of his life in Zambia were among the 10 grounds on which the court rejected the government's charge against him.

Clarke's case is just one example of the pervasive government censorship and harassment of press workers in Zambia and reveals how the leftover British colonial defamation and deportation laws can be used in tandem in an attempt to silence critics or dissenters. Given the Zambian government's difficulty in taking action against political satirists, satirical media have played a significant role in negotiating legal challenges. A Zambian artist and social worker we interviewed published political cartoons satirizing many problems with the Sata administration alongside Roy Clarke's articles in *The Post*, and then later in magazines such as *Flip* and the online initiative, *New Zambian*. This informant claimed that small Zambian publishing houses were pressured by the Sata regime not to print satirical publications, and rather than openly admit this, they would tell their clients that they had run out of ink.

Along with intimidation, sometimes the state uses arrests, detentions, and protracted legal proceedings against journalists who are marked as problematic. Such journalists and their case histories are meant to serve as exemplars for others about what not to do. Among the ways that journalists are persecuted and falsely charged, there exists a pattern involving personal digital equipment. One journalist gave us a detailed account of his arrest in July 2013. He was convinced that his phone had been tapped because Zambian authorities knew about his movements. As he recounted,

> They were controlling my phone. Because what it is you know, we register our SIMs. And then it is regulated by the Zambia Information and Communication Technology Authority

(ZICTA). And this is a government institution, but it has been infiltrated by political interests. And so if they want to monitor your calls, who is calling you, it is easier to tap. They easily tap the phones of those people they suspect to be critics of the government.[51]

The police also carried out a thorough search of this journalist's house and confiscated all his digital devices, including USB drives, entertainment DVDs, desktop computers, cameras, and videos. Authorities rustled through his belongings, seized anything that could store data, and tried to determine whether the journalist possessed any seditious material. Such investigations inflict double damage upon journalists: the same devices that are seized as part of the state's legal process are also those that journalists need to continue carrying out their work and earn an income. In addition to intimidating press workers, police confiscation of their digital equipment has left some Zambian journalists unemployed and economically displaced since the equipment is costly to replace. Citing such incidents, several members of the Zambian Bloggers Network explained that they advise and train their members to protect their digital equipment, using password protections, because it is the first thing that authorities seize.

Regional organizations such as Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) support journalists and bloggers facing state investigations and legal charges. MISA also lobbies for legal reforms that protect and promote press freedoms in the constitutions of countries throughout southern Africa. As a leader of MISA's Zambia chapter explains,

> We have linked them (journalists facing legal cases) to lawyers that provide support for legal fees, who help them in terms of legal aid … We also quickly again send the alerts around. The importance of the alerts is that we share the story with the rest of our colleagues from there. We draw sympathy, we draw advice. We share those experiences especially with people of southern Africa and out of that we learn on how to approach certain issues.[52]

This transnational organization is helpful as countries across southern Africa—Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, South Africa—have similar (post)colonial histories, broadcasting institutions, and constitutions; thus, the sharing of stories and tactics among journalists working in these countries helps to build regional awareness and solidarity around issues of press and Internet freedom. Journalists report varying degrees of satisfaction with the services that MISA provides, as the Zambia office has faced corruption allegations and other problems in recent years. Despite this, the consensus among journalists and bloggers we interviewed is that MISA is slowly building a record of important free speech advocacy work in Zambia.

As one of MISA's leaders indicated:

> We have now gotten them (online news contributors) on board through the bloggers … and we wanted to see how we can design training programs for them … For the next coming years, they will be an important source of information and they must be accountable for it. Institute some sense of responsibility on them through training and capacity building, that is exactly what we are saying.[53]

MISA has also provided its office space for members of Zambian Bloggers' Network to physically meet and discuss legal reform and responses to state repression.

Whether the Zambian government can effectively regulate its media sector or deter press workers from criticizing government leaders and policies is an open question. Our interview with a former Zambian Minister of Information revealed that President Sata's regime failed (or deliberately decided not) to repeal colonial laws that restrict

information sharing. This former minister of information lost his job because the Sata government grew suspicious about the way he had granted community radio station licenses, some of which went to ethnic and religious minorities in rural communities. The minister, regarded by some as a top public intellectual in Zambia, wanted to support more community radio stations so they could spread public health and agriculture-related messages in rural areas and help promote Zambian development. However, the ruling PF party viewed this progressive radio licensing policy as a tacit strategy for allowing political opposition parties to spread their propaganda through these same rural radio stations. Then President Sata feared that community radio stations would provide a platform for the opposition parties to air their views against his government and publicly condemned and shamed this former minister.[54]

Characterizing that government's thinking as "behind the times," the former official insists that policy-making in Zambia has not kept pace with advancements in information technology. The computer and mobile phone, he suggests, have fundamentally reconfigured Zambia's mutually imbricated media and political landscapes, and in doing so have bypassed the government's archaic law. In August 2013, ZICTA reduced the transmission strength of the University of Zambia Radio from 1000 W to 260 W, effectively limiting its reach to the campus itself. The official does not see any logic in doing so since now each mobile phone is a potential (and actually is a) radio transmitter and receiver as part of the telecom network. This perceptive point is reinforced when one considers that people who have heard the news through a radio station can platform jump, as discussed earlier, using their mobile phones to transmit it to other people beyond the station's ambit of influence via call, SMS, or Facebook. The circulation of information is no longer restricted by how far radio waves from a station can reach. Given the intermediale aspects of digital technologies, the government, the bureaucrat reasoned, cannot control online or mobile media as it used to (and still does) manage print and broadcast media.

There is a long history of radio reception in Zambia, and radio listeners have offered feedback, including responses critical of the state, through letters, and now increasingly through text messages and live phone calls during the show.[55] Debra Spitulnik's vivid ethnography of radio reception in Zambia testifies to its imbrication in the everyday lives of Zambians. Given the history of radio's popularity, its reach, and its political appeal, the government's regulatory anxiety is not completely misplaced. If anonymous comments made by quarreling actors belonging to different political parties on social media sites is a problem, call-in radio programs allow ordinary citizens to offer their unedited, and sometimes antagonistic, opinions live on the air. The kinds of state efforts to control the content and form of media discussed above continue to persist in Zambia, and have arguably intensified in the digital era, making circumvention practices a necessity for those committed to communicating about and advancing particular social and political agendas.

Conclusion

Zambian journalists, activists, and citizens have used tactics of platform jumping, anonymity, self-censorship, and the negotiation of legal challenges as part of their efforts to report and consume news and information, address issues of public health and sexuality, discuss the viewpoints of ethnic minorities, and critique state power and corruption. These

circumvention practices have emerged as part of a longer history of struggles over free speech and free press in Zambia and have helped to generate alternative and oppositional media cultures. As we have demonstrated, the meanings of Internet freedom and circumvention in Zambia are not abstract universals; rather, they are articulated with citizens' efforts to publicly discuss homosexuality, ethnic separatist movements, state corruption, policing, and women's and LGBTQ rights. In addition, Internet freedom and circumvention in Zambia are linked to the capacity to use both analog and digital platforms and to express oneself in multiple discourses, whether reporting, blogging, social media posting, text messaging, or engaging in political satire.

We want to conclude by highlighting and clarifying three interventions of this article. First, this case study of digital cultures in Zambia suggests that Internet freedom and circumvention should not be understood as monolithic concepts. Rather, they should be anchored and situated in relation to the experiences and voices of people living in different parts of the world. There is a compelling need to study circumvention practices across a broader range of national contexts including in Africa, where many state leaders have bolstered surveillance practices and clamped down on Internet freedoms in recent years.[56] Sub-saharan African contexts such as Zambia are often underanalyzed as scholars and activists have tended to fixate on sites in news headlines such as Egypt, Iran, and China. As a recent Human Rights Watch report on Ethiopia reveals, repressive practices, including online surveillance, are intensifying in response to citizens' growing Internet and mobile phone access.[57] In addition to analyzing Internet freedom challenges in more sites, it is important to recognize that addressing such challenges requires more than a technical fix–whether, a new application, digital process, or software. Research on the ground shows conditions to be much more complicated. One needs to acquire a sense of the contours and specificities of free speech issues among different constituencies in different countries before developing technical fixes or political solutions that can help to resolve them.

Second, if the work of journalists and activists has the potential to inform publics and shape political opinion about key issues of the day, then there is a need for deeper understanding of the specific tactics that journalists and activists use in the process, the constraints in which they operate, and the measures that the state adopts in response to their actions. These obstacles faced by press workers and treatment of this high-profile constituency can serve as a bellwether—a telling indicator of whether others who exercise free speech will be able to affect change and how they will be treated by the regime in power. The platform jumping practices of journalists mentioned in this article could be considered as being far more sophisticated than those espoused by ordinary Zambians. Yet we have also argued that it would be erroneous to create outright demarcations between journalists and other citizens. Journalists have the professional responsibility of interrogating power, but they also have political, ethnic, and sexual identities and choices, just like any ordinary citizen, and such identities and choices do make them vulnerable to state sanctions and self-censorship.

Finally, we have argued that the field of communication and cultural studies needs to examine circumvention within an intermediale framework. Such a framework points to the emerging relations between different media platforms used by different users: we have demonstrated how journalists shift from one service provider's SIM card to another so as to surf the Internet efficiently, which helps them in gathering information for their FM radio program, and we have mentioned the connections between radio

audiences' text messages and FM programs. Interrogation of power cannot be only about the ideologies of media content, but should also be about cultural techniques of navigating the relations between different media technologies. How these cultural techniques take shape in various parts of the world demands further exploration.

Notes

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Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement