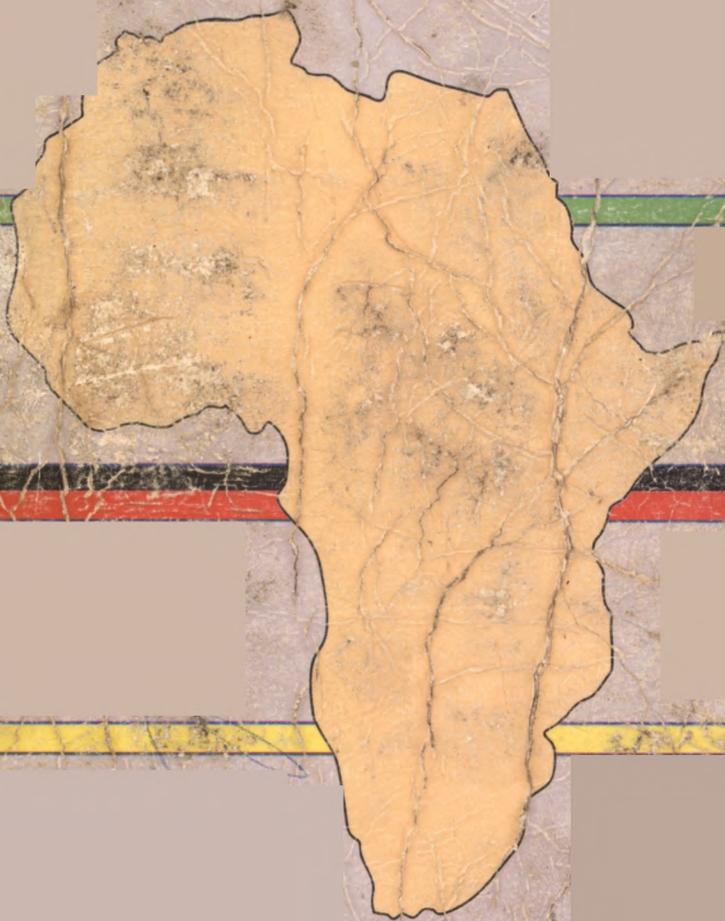


The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa



Edited by

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and

Claude G. Mararike

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The Human Factor, Media and Politics in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

Claude G. Mararike

Introduction

A historical overview of how the media in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, started and developed, shows that there can be no such thing as 'independent' or 'free' media. All media serve particular view points and interests. Behind these view points are people whose Human Factor (HF) content has been trained to focus on the needs and aspirations of the owners of the media.

This historical and HF legacy has continued to influence how the media in Africa should be managed. At the centre of media control by the West, is also the domination of Africa's own HF. The following history of the media in Southern Rhodesia shows how the media becomes embroiled in national power struggles, politics and conflict and thus making nonsense the claim of the capacity of the media to be independent, free and above politics, economics, race, colour or creed.

Media and colonization

The media in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, traces its ancestry to the colonization of the country in the late 1800s. But for the purpose of this analysis, 1875 is a good starting point. It was in that year that two young Britons, Cecil John Rhodes and Francis Joseph Dormer, took a voyage in a ship known as the *Teuton* on their way from London to Cape Town, South Africa. Rhodes, son of an Anglican vicar, had in 1872, visited South Africa and had already started laying down foundations of his fortunes at the newly discovered diamond fields of Kimberley. He had, however, returned to Oxford to continue his education. He was returning to South Africa after a term at Oxford in 1895 when in the close confines of the *Teuton*, he met Francis Joseph Dormer, a school teacher who was on his way to a school in Roeland Street, Cape Town. The two young men became friends. When they parted in Cape Town, Rhodes requested Dormer to visit him if, and when, he ever found himself in Kimberley (Gale, 1962).

Francis Dormer, says Gale, was thrown out of teaching following a squabble with the principal of the school where he was teaching in Cape Town. He eventually took up a job with the Port Elizabeth Municipality, still in South Africa, but left to join the *Queenstown Representative*, a local newspaper. When the Zulu war of 1879 started, Dormer became a war correspondent of the then *Cape Argus* newspaper. When he returned from this assignment, he was promoted to the post of sub-editor of the *Cape Argus*. When the then editor of the paper resigned, he was the obvious choice for the editorship post.

We should note here that the *Cape Argus* had been established in 1857 with a man called Saul Solomon as its printer. Solomon later became the paper's proprietor. In 1881, Solomon decided to retire from business and put up the business for sale at six thousand British pounds. Francis Dormer decided to seize this opportunity. All Dormer needed was six thousand pounds. He did not have that kind of money at that time. He then remembered his friend, Cecil John Rhodes, whom he had met aboard the *Teuton*. Rhodes had by then become a wealthy man as a result of his diamond-field activities and was to enter the political stage. He became a candidate for the Cape Parliament. When Francis Dormer approached him with the request to lend him six thousand pounds to buy the *Cape Argus*, Rhodes decided to make use of the opportunity of enlisting the support of a newspaper in his political campaign. But he insisted that their talks should be conducted in the greatest secrecy (Gale, 1962: 2).

Rhodes agreed to advance Dormer three thousand pounds in cash which Solomon demanded and then agreed to guarantee the remaining three thousand. The balance was to be paid in the form of bills falling due at intervals of a few months.

In the years which followed, the two men progressed in their respective careers. Dormer established the Argus Printing and Publishing Company in November 1886. Two or so years later, he established a newspaper in the Witwatersrand area; *The Eastern Star* which had, in fact, been moved from Grahamstown by the Sheffield brothers. The Cape Town Company and the Argus Printing and Publishing Company merged in 1889. During the same year, the word 'Eastern' was dropped from *Eastern Star* and *The Star* newspaper began its life as a daily newspaper on the 1st of July, 1889. Rhodes was a shareholder in the new company.

While Francis Dormer was busy expanding his newspaper interests, Cecil John Rhodes was busy setting up the British South Africa Company (BSAC) under a Charter which Queen Victoria had granted him. The Charter entitled Rhodes to exploit the mineral riches of Mashonaland and Matebeland — in fact the whole of what later became known as Southern Rhodesia now Zimbabwe. Rhodes tasked the Pioneer Column to take physical possession of Southern Rhodesia. The Column left Northern Bechuanaland (Botswana) at the end of June 1890 and after nearly three months of travelling, arrived at what the settlers called Fort Salisbury (now Harare) on the 12th of September, 1890.

Rhodes' company had vast powers — in fact, so vast that the company could have established newspapers if it wished, but Rhodes decided to leave this venture to his friend, Francis Dormer. So, in May 1891, the Chartered Company (BSAC) decided at its meeting to offer no facility to establish newspapers to any other firm except Francis Dormer's Argus Company.

At the Argus Company's annual meeting in 1891, Dormer reported that the company had been very strongly urged to go to Mashonaland and had considerable indirect inducement offered to go there. The company did not, however, take up the induced offer. It instead, decided to keep an agent - William Fairbridge - as its representative in Salisbury (Harare).

The Argus company comes to Salisbury (Harare)

From June 1891 to October 1892, William Ernst Fairbridge kept the settler community in Southern Rhodesia 'informed' through a cyclostyled information sheet which he called *The Mashonaland Herald* and *Zambezia Times*. Fairbridge himself had been born in Port Elizabeth, served in the Basuto War of 1890, became a trader in the Cape frontier village of Macleor and later became a bank clerk in Kimberley. He became a regular news contributor to the *Cape Argus* and later spent a few months on the *Johannesburg Star*. This was his experience in journalism when he was sent by the Argus company to represent it in Fort Salisbury (now Harare).

Our main interest is not with the cyclostyled information sheet which Fairbridge produced, but with the introduction of a printed newspaper in October 1892.

The newspaper policy was stated in its first leading article as follows:

The aims they (the publishers) will keep steadily in view will be 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 of sections of the white community (Gale, Ibid: 19).

In October 1894, the first issue of the *Bulawayo Chronicle* appeared. It described its policy as:

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 the 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 born of . . . Mr Cecil Rhodes . . . (Gale, 1962: 25).

Important issues stand out clearly from the policies of these two colonial newspapers:

1. to support the agricultural ventures and mineral exploitation of Southern Rhodesia,
2. to particularly support the political ambitions of Rhodes and British interests and,
3. to unite all whites, rich and poor.

How were these aims to be fulfilled? It is clear from the accounts given so far that those who were appointed to run the newspapers had to be either close friends or relatives of Francis Joseph Dormer, or trusted friends of Cecil John Rhodes or those who had served in one of the wars to suppress black uprisings. It is clear then that:

1. those who pioneered the media in the then Rhodesia were not necessarily professional journalists but adventurers motivated by the desire to expand their personal interests as well as British interests,
2. the media in Rhodesia was an extension of the media in South Africa and that the media in the latter, was in turn, an extension of the media in Britain,
3. once the media was established, using new found wealth, it supported all efforts by settlers to 'go it alone.' This 'hungry dog' approach dominated the Rhodesian media up to the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the Rhodesian Front party led by Ian Smith, and that

4. the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company enjoyed media monopoly for a long time.

It should also be pointed out that the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company (formed in 1927), was not only involved in publishing and printing newspapers. The company also acquired other properties. It acquired 30 000 morgan of land; 12 000 morgan in Mashonaland and 18 000 morgan in Matebeleland, that is 70 000 acres. William Fairbridge and Francis Dormer were at the forefront of this land acquisition campaign. Their commitment was to enhance the wealth of Cecil Rhodes and to promote and glorify British political and economic interests.

As more and more settlers came to Rhodesia, the competition for property acquisition increased. This, in turn, brewed more and more conflict, first among the settlers themselves, but notably between Rhodes' BSAC, the administrators and other settlers. On the other hand, the indigenous black people became more and more disgruntled with the activities of the settlers - mainly the land acquisition. This culminated in the Uprising of 16 June 1896 which ended in October 1897 after hundreds of black people had been killed.

It is worth noting here, how the white media of the time reported the uprising in particular, and the affairs affecting the black people in general. This should help us illustrate that the media is never neutral, but committed to the political, economic and even cultural welfare of a particular people or group. An issue of *The Rhodesian Herald* of 29 June, 1896, following the uprising of June 16, carried an editorial which called on:

Every man from Mr Justice Vincet (deputising for the Administrator) down to the youngest boy bearing arms and for that matter, every woman in our community, to do their best according to their rights and capacities. The three things required in the present situation are firmness, good working order and careful thought on the part of the authorities. Mashonaland and its colonialists have got to make the best of a truly cruel trial (Gale, 1962: 49).

The same stance was taken by the Bulawayo based daily, *The Chronicle*, on the Mashonaland and Matebeleland uprisings. This, of course, was in line with the stated policy of The Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company.

The black/white confrontation remained a dominant issue over the years, with the media strongly supporting the view of the white settlers. Such a media cannot be said to be independent, free or fair.

From 1921 through to 1922, the BSAC was faced with a crucial political decision to make; that is, either to join the Union of South Africa under General Smuts or to assume the status of a British colony with what was called 'a responsible government.' The matter was put to the whites only referendum of 1922. What is interesting in this regard is to note that both *The Chronicle* and *The Rhodesian Herald* strongly supported joining the Union. This was understandable considering the link which existed between the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company and the parent company, Argus. It was disappointing, however, to the two newspapers that the white voters rejected the idea of a union with South Africa. When the new government came into office in

September 1922, the two papers had to readjust their policies from the pro-Union stance to that of 'responsible government'. Here again, the media was neither 'free' nor 'independent'. The people who managed the newspapers supported and served certain political and economic positions.

From Federation to UDI

From 1953 to 1963, the Central African Federation, otherwise known as the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was in existence. The Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company was now firmly established as a subsidiary company of the Argus Company.

In December 1962, the Rhodesia Front party (RF) led by Ian Smith, won an election. The RF was dedicated to keeping Rhodesia in white hands for all time. At the same time, African political leaders were becoming more and more vociferous in their demands for political independence. During the same period, changes also took place in the country's print media.

The Thompson Group of newspapers introduced the *African Daily News* in 1962 which James Coltart, a British owner, described as a paper which was not pro-anything, but sought to inform the Africans. The RF was particularly happy that the *Daily News* should devote all its time to giving news to the African readership.

Eugene Wason, who had been on the staff of the Argus Group (The Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company), became the Editor of the *Daily News*. He laid down six principles upon which the *Daily News* would insist. These were as follows:

1. support for the legitimate aims of the African nationalists,
2. urge for moderation,
3. get across to the Africans the fact that the only solution to the country's problems was a constitutional conference,
4. set a good moral tone,
5. denounce violence at every opportunity,
6. stop any illegal declaration of independence (Barton, 1979).

It should be noted, here, that when the main African political party of that time, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), was banned, most of the African leaders were detained or had already been locked up. *The Daily News* had Willie Musarurwa as its news editor. He was detained before the paper was banned. Nathan Shamuyarira, another news editor, also became a victim of the political convulsion which was going on.

We need to stress that the *Daily News* decided to support Joshua Nkomo and his Peoples' Caretaker Council (PCC) which had replaced ZAPU. The newly formed Zimbabwe African National Union ZANU, led by the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, was regarded by the *Daily News* as an extreme, violent organization.

The PCC/ZANU clashes continued throughout Zimbabwe. Ian Smith's regime banned the *Daily News* in August 1964 accusing it of supporting people who indulged in violence and intimidation. James Coltart flew from London to Harare to try to get the decision reversed. His attempts fell on deaf ears. Like their West African operation, Thompson's Central African Safari had ended up in severe financial losses. However,

Ian Smith later requested the Thompson group to reopen the *Daily News*, but with government control on editorial policy. The request was, of course, rebuffed by the group.

A number of important issues need to be noted here with regards to the Thompson Group, but particularly the *Daily News*:

- 1 It was a business venture which was aimed at the African community. The Thompson Group had planned ahead hoping that sooner or later, an African government would emerge. They attempted to read into the future and come up with the right African political leadership, hence their decision to support Joshua Nkomo.
2. The *Daily News* wanted to speak for the Africans and at the same time believed that it would train African journalists to speak for themselves and on behalf of their people. This was one of the reasons which brought about misunderstanding between most African journalists who were working for the *Daily News* at the time, who complained that there were too many white people who occupied senior editorial positions. Although the owners of the paper accepted the criticism, they believed that the Africans needed further training and experience, a euphemism for creating the sort of journalists who would serve the interests of the white owners of the media.

Before we review further the events which followed Smith's UDI, we should at this stage, refer to the contribution of the church to the development of the media and political change in Rhodesia. Generally, the record of the Christian church, or indeed any other church in the African struggle for political independence, is not good. Despite the fact that missionaries performed 'good' medical and educational roles throughout the African continent, to a great extent, they have always been identified with the colonial establishment. Whether the authorities were agents of Cecil John Rhodes' BSAC as it moved into Central Africa as we outlined earlier, or the administration of Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Belgium, as the colonial scramble carved tropical Africa into sections, missionaries have rarely made any significant stand against the abuses of the Europeans over the Africans (Barton, op.cit). Instead, most of them were in the forefront to create new colonial clients out of Africans.

The explanation for the *sotto voce* of the religious press lies between the nervousness of the church leadership to get into the political arena, which brave commentary on injustice would lead to, and the sheer experience of missionaries in running anything better than parish magazines, whose aim was to create clients for the church.

But what may appear as an outstanding exception to the servility of the religious press occurred in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). In 1961, a Swiss born missionary, Michael Traber, arrived in Rhodesia and established a Roman Catholic Newsletter, *Moto* (Shona word for fire). Traber outlined *Moto's* main principles as:

1. To promote Christian principles in present-day conditions in the social, economic and political fields,
2. To give a particular voice to African opinion and help the African people to assert their God-given rights according to Christian teachings;
3. To be the fearless conscience of its readers, condemning evil and acknowledging good regardless of where they might be found (Barton, 1979: 234-235).

Moto's principles may, on their face value, appear to be noble. 'Christian principles' and 'Christian teachings' are assumed to be generally good and neutral values which stand on their own. And yet, behind them was the desire of the Roman Catholic Church to create clients as the following explanations will show.

When the *Daily News* was banned in August 1964, *Moto* moved into the position of principal voice of African aspirations. Its circulation rose from 15 000 to nearly 30 000. Gradually, *Moto* attracted the eye of the white minority regime's censors. In 1969, the Smith regime decided to amend the country's constitution so that it could ensure that government would for ever remain in white hands. *Moto* published a cartoon depicting a pair of large white hands squeezing small, struggling black bodies. This cartoon was enough to attract a charge against the editor of *Moto*, Father Traber who, obviously, was seeking personal glory. He was dragged to court under the Law and Order Maintenance Act for publishing a subversive statement. Traber was found guilty by the Gwelo [now Gweru] magistrate, but on appeal to the High Court, the six months imprisonment suspended sentence was quashed.

The deportation of Father Traber provoked a divided reaction from Roman Catholic church leaders with some condemning the publication of the cartoon and others supporting it. Bishop Donald Lamont's reaction was:

This is not the first time a priest has been removed because of conscientious convictions. When I was a student in the nineteen thirties my professor was given forty-eight hours to leave Italy for criticising the Mussolini regime, and another friend of mine who refused to spread Hitler's propaganda died in a dog kennel in Dachau (Barton, 1979: 236-237).

The Smith regime continued to terrorise *Moto* until the paper was permanently banned on 18 November 1974. *The Rhodesia Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *The Chronicle* and *The Sunday News* did not have an easy time either, during the early days of UDI. Their white editors who also were seeking personal glory, confronted Ian Smith's regime. For example, as editor of *The Herald*, Malcom Smith wrangled with the Smith regime with almost every issue of *The Herald* which he produced until censorship was brought in. Every time the censor removed a story, Malcom Smith left a white space in the newspaper equivalent to the size which the story would have occupied. Malcom Smith was never taken to court, probably because the High Court judges of the time were not behind the Ian Smith regime.

Generally, the UDI period saw many white journalists thrown out of Rhodesia by the Smith regime. The white controlled Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company's newspapers eventually appointed editors who sympathised with the illegal regime of Ian Smith, in the same fashion as William Fairbridge and Francis Joseph Dormer did with the Administration of Cecil John Rhodes, a point which clearly shows that in practice and even in theory, the media is never independent or free.

The electronic media

The history of broadcasting in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) is comparatively shorter than that of print media since its origins date back to 1933. It was, however, not until 1941

that a 'professional' broadcaster was engaged. The then Imperial Airways installed a transmitter at Belvedere (the present site of the meteorological station in Harare) to provide radio guidance and weather reports to three or so aircraft a week which flew the England-South Africa route.

Three post office technicians sought permission to use the Belvedere transmitter for public service broadcasting. When such permission was granted, the three inaugurated public broadcasting. The service was really an attempt to fill in leisure time on the part of the three technicians. The point to note here is that broadcasting started, not as a serious way of disseminating important information, but rather as a part time leisure job.

In the early days of the Second World War, the first new studios were constructed in what was then Manica Road, now Robert Mugabe Road. The then African Service was also a war time venture with its birth place in the then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). When World War Two broke out in 1939, Portugal remained neutral and, since there was a large number of German settlers in Angola, the then Northern Rhodesia government was concerned that a band of armed Germans might attack the Copperbelt. So, to meet the supposed threat, the Northern Rhodesia Regiment was sent to the Angola border to destroy all the wooden bridges on the roads leading into Angola.

With troops deployed on the border and district commissioners isolated, it was decided to use radio as a means of passing information. The Northern Rhodesia Government turned to the copper mine companies for assistance. Three transmitters were built; one at the Roan Antelope, another at Nkana and the third at Nchanga. Amateur broadcasting began with morning and evening programmes; with news bulletins as the main feature. District commissioners recruited African broadcasters so that bulletins could be read in Bemba, Lozi and Nyanja. It was not until 1941 that the Northern Rhodesia government established its own broadcasting organization, with its first studios in Lusaka. In 1948, in terms of a Central African Council recommendation; Lusaka became the focal point for broadcasting to Africans of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, while Salisbury became the centre for European broadcasting in the region. From about 1950, African programmes could be collected and packaged and then sent to Lusaka for transmission. The first building specifically designed for broadcasting was opened in Rhodesia in September 1958. The colonial government was in control of broadcasting.

Privatizing the media

At this point, we need to refer to the question which has been raised in present day Zimbabwe, namely the privatization of broadcasting. This is not a new question. In May 1951, a motion was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of the then Southern Rhodesia requesting that broadcasting be privatized. A company called Broadcasting Relay Service (Overseas) Ltd., had apparently convinced some members of parliament to pressure government to privatize broadcasting. The company had other similar operations in the West Indies, Canada, Europe, Asia, The Far East and other parts of Africa. It was proposing to set up a local subsidiary company.

David Richards who responded to the proposal to privatize broadcasting on behalf of the Southern Rhodesia government said:

Those who advocate the handing over of the broadcasting service to so-called private enterprise do so in the wholly mistaken belief that listeners of Southern Rhodesia will thereby receive a greatly improved broadcasting service . . . It would seem, therefore, that, in order to achieve an apparent saving in expenditure of a comparatively small sum of money, a valuable national asset is to be thrown to the tender mercies of financial exploitation, and the ultimate destruction of those standards which broadcasting should contribute to the cultural development and life of the people. This situation is all the more shocking when it is realized that because Southern Rhodesia is a young and developing country with so little opportunity for appreciating culture, the one national service that could help to fill the gap is to be skinned (1952:2).

We have quoted this rejection to illustrate a number of points. These are that:

1. individual politicians of that time who had business interests could easily connive with companies to establish business ventures after convincing government that it would be profitable to privatize certain government enterprises;
2. the question of privatizing broadcasting in Zimbabwe was rejected by the white minority government in more or less the same fashion as it is being rejected by the present black majority government,
3. it is a contradiction in terms that the white community which rejected the privatization of broadcasting when it was in power is now asking for the same privatization from a black government. This makes nonsense of the much talked about independence of the media.

After the rejection of privatization, the Southern Rhodesia government set up a commission headed by Sir Hugh Green, to advise it (government) on how broadcasting was to be run. The commission recommended the establishment of a broadcasting corporation which was to be an 'independent' statutory body and on 1 February 1958, the Federal Broadcasting Corporation came into operation. This was succeeded, at the break-up of the Federation, by separate corporations for Rhodesia, Malawi and Zambia. On 1 January 1964, the Southern Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation came into existence.

The media from 1980 and after

At independence in 1980, the new state of Zimbabwe inherited the media as outlined earlier. The Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company was still a subsidiary of the Argus Group. The government acquired the majority of the shares in the company, with money borrowed from Nigeria. The government then set up the Mass Media Trust to run the news agency, ZIANA (Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency) and Zimpapers, as the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company was then renamed.

The people who were appointed to run the Trust and Zimpapers were largely drawn from ZANU-PF or should have been at least well known to the leadership of

ZANU-PF. The same strategy which was used by Cecil Rhodes was also used here; that of rewarding friends for their support of military or political interests or both.

Conclusion

Our conclusions should be clear by now, that:

1. There is always a very close relationship between the media and the ruling class or ownership. The talk which we sometimes hear of an independent media should, therefore, be dismissed as political nonsense.
2. Owners of the media are in most cases interested in a political agenda. Their reasons for setting up newspapers are to promote their political agendas and those of their friends or particular groups of people.

Within any society, the structure of legal order influences how power is distributed. This power may take any form, either political, social or economic (Mararike, 1995). But power is not a neutral variable. At the centre of the power equation are people and also at the centre of the media are people. The questions to be addressed in relation to the role and function of the media in Africa are: How committed to the development of the African HF is the media in Africa, be it government owned, private, or so-called independent? The agenda of the media should be to develop the type of HF content which would promote the development of the generality of the people of Africa rather than just a few individuals who wield economic influence and political power.

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