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## Succession Politics and Factional Journalism in Zimbabwe: A Case of *The Chronicle* in Zimbabwe

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is a critical exploration of the emergence and manifestations of a phenomenon we refer to as “factional” or “succession” journalism within the state media in the context of the tussle over the succession of the late former Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe. Using the state-controlled *Chronicle* daily newspaper as a case study, we seek to examine the role and influence of editors and journalists in the negotiation of power in the context of reporting a contested succession of Mugabe in 2016. We locate “factional journalism” in the context of the capture of the state media by the ruling party and the virtual erosion of journalistic agency in the state media institutions. We argue that whereas the onset of the “Zimbabwe crisis” spawned the creation of different and polarised forms of journalism in the country (i.e. oppositional and patriotic journalism; see Ranger, 2005. “The rise of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe and its possible implications”. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 2: 8–17; Chuma 2008. “Mediating the 2000 elections in Zimbabwe: competing journalisms in a society at the crossroads”. *African Journalism Studies* 29 (1): 22–41), within the “patriotic journalism” camp also emerged a new strand of “factional journalism” linked closely to the fierce contest for the succession of Robert Mugabe within Zanu PF. We also argue that the succession issue presented a poignant moment at which political journalism at the public media became subordinate to whichever faction held sway in the information/media portfolio in government, and which faction deployed its allocative powers to reward and punish specific forms of political reporting. We apply a limited qualitative content analysis of news stories on the succession issue and complement this with qualitative in-depth interviews with journalists reporting on the subject. This approach arguably provides a much more holistic picture of the factors at play in the production of political content on the subject.

### KEYWORDS

Factional journalism;  
succession politics; agency;  
hegemony

### Introduction and context

There is a fairly established body of work on the relationship between the state and journalism in Zimbabwe, especially on the ways in which the Zanu PF government has reconfigured the practice of journalism in the country in the past three decades as its political

legitimacy and control of state faced significant threats (see, for example, Chiumbu and Moyo 2009; Chuma 2008; Ndlela 2003). While much of this work has focused on either content analysis of newspapers, or an overall assessment of media policies promulgated, there is arguably still too small a body of work that engages journalists ethnographically as part of methodology.<sup>1</sup> This paper adopts content analysis as well as in-depth interviews with journalists at *The Chronicle* newspaper with a view to establishing the socio-political and professional dynamics that shape their framing of the succession issue in Zanu PF.

While it is not within the competency of this paper to explore all facets of the debate and developments around the battle for the succession of President Robert Mugabe as leader of his Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu PF) party (prior to his forced resignation in November 2017), it is important to highlight some of the core issues as they relate to the succession debate and its mediation in the public press. Mugabe emerged as leader of his party in 1975, and five years later, after winning an election in the context of a negotiated transition that followed a decade of liberation struggle, became independent Zimbabwe's founding leader. His policies within the first decade of independence—especially health, education and reconciliation, among others—have often been cited as exemplary (Muzondidya 2009; Raftopoulos and Mlambo 2009). However, when his government decided to adopt the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-prescribed structural adjustment programmes, many of the social and economic benefits of the 1980s were reversed, leading to a spiralling rate of unemployment, a decline in the quality of social services, and a build-up of public dissent against his leadership within the party and the country (Makumbe 2009; Moore and Raftopoulos 2012). This resulted in the escalation of protests in the late 1990s, mostly led by the country's biggest trade union, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which eventually played midwife to the creation of the main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. Even within Mugabe's own party, calls for succession were emerging. In 1997, one of the party's Members of Parliament (MPs), Dzikamai Mavhaire, was suspended after openly declaring in Parliament that "The President must go" (Chikuhwa 2004: 145).

The period following the launch of a formidable opposition (MDC) and the controversial land redistribution programme saw the governing party unite around their single candidate for the President (against the context where the party for the first time stared defeat in the face), in the process muffling any voices around succession (Compagnon 2011; Sachikonye 2011). In 2004, an attempt led by one of Mugabe's long-time aides and then Minister of Justice Emmerson Mnangagwa, along with Information and Publicity Minister Jonathan Moyo, to secretly lobby party provincial structures to push for Mugabe to be succeeded by Mnangagwa flopped spectacularly.<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath, Moyo was fired from Zanu PF, while Mnangagwa was demoted to a peripheral cabinet portfolio. Moyo was

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<sup>1</sup>This does not discount the contributions of researchers such as Hayes Mabweazara, who has written fairly extensively on Zimbabwean journalists' appropriation of digital technologies, and used ethnographic approaches as part of methodology (see Mabweazara 2010, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>Moyo organised a meeting at Dinyane School in his Tsholotsho Constituency, Matabeleland North province. The meeting, which has become known as the Tsholotsho Declaration, was drawn up of the party's provincial chairpersons and has sought to elevate Emmerson Mnangagwa to the post of Vice President ahead of Joice Mujuru. Among the plot was that the party's and subsequently country's leadership was supposed to be made up of the four key ethnic groups—Ndebele, Karanga, Zezuru and Manyika. However, when the plot was unearthed, Moyo was fired from the party while other party members, including Mnangagwa, were demoted.

eventually readmitted to Zanu PF in the run up to the 2013 elections, assuming back his Information and Publicity cabinet portfolio shortly after the election, which Mugabe won. However, his term of office was characterised by renewed public attention to his increasingly frail physique and age (Kwaramba and Mbiba 2015), all this in the context of an economy that kept deteriorating.

Within the party, the contestation for Mugabe's succession became real and fierce during this term. From media accounts and from Mugabe himself making public statements at political rallies—also known as “youth interface” rallies—there were two factions jostling for his post. The one was linked to Mnangagwa and was known as Team Lacoste. The other was known as G40 or simply “Young Turks”, and was linked to Mugabe's wife, Grace, Jonathan Moyo, second vice President Phelekezela Mphoko and others. The Mnangagwa faction had the backing of the army and some war veterans leaders, the most vocal of whom was Zimbabwe's former ambassador to China, Christopher Mutsvangwa.

In the age of the mediatisation of politics, this paper takes interest not in the dynamics of the succession issue within Zanu PF but in the ways in which these party developments impacted on journalism practice in the state-controlled media. It is important to note that each of the factions battling to succeed Mugabe at the time sought to shape the political narrative through controlling, at the very least, the state-owned media, i.e. the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and Zimbabwe Newspapers Limited (Zimpapers).<sup>3</sup> The exercise of this control was made possible, in the main, through control of the Ministry of Information and Publicity. This meant that, at least during the tenure of the Mugabe government, whichever faction superintended over this key ministry had unfettered access to the state media and in a way controlled the succession narrative.

One of the core tasks for a political economy of the media, as Graham Murdock and Pater Golding remind us, is to investigate “how changes in the array of forces that exercise control over cultural production limit or liberate public cultural space” (2005: 67). Similarly, in this case, albeit on a micro level, we seek to demonstrate how changes at both at the leadership of the Ministry of Information and Publicity and at the editorship of a specific newspaper at a particular moment within the political continuum of succession contestation resulted in overnight narrative switch from one succession narrative to the other.

Following his reappointment into cabinet in the aftermath of the 2013 election, Moyo returned to the Information, Media and Publicity portfolio where he set to, among other things, restructure and reshape the state media to his liking. He instantly made senior editorial appointments at key newspapers such as *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Chronicle*, arguably filling the posts with personnel he could trust. This paper particularly focuses on *The Chronicle*, where Moyo appointed a trusted friend as editor and who, we argue, helped advance Moyo's factional agenda while at the helm of the paper, in many demonstrable cases. What is interesting is that when Mugabe did a cabinet reshuffle and moved Moyo from the Information portfolio, the new minister instantly moved Moyo's appointee at *The Chronicle* (they gave him a weekend to leave) and replaced him with someone amenable to the new bosses. Within days of the new appointment, the political narrative of the newspaper shifted substantially from one faction (G40) to its nemesis, Team Lacoste.

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<sup>3</sup>Zimpapers is a listed company, but since independence it has been an appendage of the ruling party where the Minister of Information has a direct influence on the operation of the stable through appointing like-minded editors of all the papers that fall under the stable.

The sudden switch in editorial framing of the succession was characterised by, among other things, a consistent vilification of the new “enemies” and well as the “manufacture of scandals” around the opposing faction, and others.

## Background to the journalism–politics nexus

The relationship between journalism and politics has been one of the most debated in modern times, largely because of the influence that the journalism has or supposedly has in the era of mediated politics, and also because of the influence of political power structures on journalism practices (see, for example, Dahlgren and Gurevitch 2005; McChesney 2009; McNair 2003).

One way of understanding the journalism–politics nexus in an African context such as Zimbabwe would be to appropriate elements of Philip Napoli’s (1997) “principal–agent” approach to the study of media organisations. Although applied at the micro-level of media organisations, the same can arguably be applied more broadly to the study of media practices and media–power relations at a macro, national level. Borrowing from the agency theory of the media firm, the principal agency relationship is characterised as:

... a contract under which one or more persons (the principals) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision-making authority to the agent. If both parties to the relationship are utility maximisers there is good reason to believe that the agent will not always act in the interests of the principal. The principal can limit the divergences from his interests by establishing appropriate incentives for the agent and by incurring monitoring costs designed to limit the aberrant activities of the agent. (Jensen and Meckling 1976: 30)

Napoli reminds us that in this relationship, the ultimate aim is to advance the interests of the principal, which may include maximising profits for the organisation, or some other ends such as advancing particular political causes and agendas. The agent, while expected naturally to advance the interest of his/her principal, may do so but also from time to time engage in what Napoli terms “shirking” (1997: 208). This is where the agent decides to deviate from his/her brief and act entirely or partly out of self-interest (including in some cases, professional/ethical interests where such interests are in conflict with those of the principal) and therefore at variance with the terms of his/her brief. When this happens, of course, there is conflict and the principal may replace the agent. However, it is interesting also to note that monitoring the agent to ensure consistent compliance is not a costless exercise, so a strategy some principals adopt is to ensure the least expenditure in monitoring through hiring agents who share their worldviews (Napoli 1997). Hiring practices serve as a kind of “censorship in advance” in the sense that the agents engaged in new responsibilities on behalf of the principal with whom they share a similar worldview are unlikely to stray into political territory that brings them into conflict with the principal. That said, it is also true that the principal–agent relationship—like all hierarchical relationships—is a much more complex one in which external factors also play a part in shaping.

Croteau and Hoynes (2003) argue that journalism practice in most cases occurs in a context that is defined by both opportunities and structural constraints. These constraints,

they argue, influence the behaviour of media professionals “by making some choices more attractive, some more dangerous, and some almost unthinkable” (p. 121).

Many studies of the relationship between journalism and politics have generally come to at least two dominant conclusions as regards power dynamics in the relationship: the first being that the media wields the most power, especially in the era of mediated politics (Dahlgren and Gurevitch 2005); and the other being that the media are actually subordinate to institutional political power holders (Herman and Chomsky 1988). Other studies find the relationship a more complex and multi-dimensional love–hate relationship, characterised by careful manoeuvring (Larsson 2002). As Larsson notes in a study of the journalist–politician relations in Sweden, journalists enjoy substantial leeway in the relationship because they can rely on the Freedom of Information Act to access state-held information with relative ease (2002: 25). However, in the case of Zimbabwe and in many other parts of the continent, the hierarchical principal–agent approach best explains the relationship, and when it comes to newsmaking, by their location in the broader scheme of things politicians (principals) would strive to be (or enforce their way into being) what Hall et al. (1979) refer to as the “primary definers” of news. In the 1980s, in Zimbabwe, for example, the government successfully steered journalistic coverage of state-sponsored atrocities in the Matabeleland region in the direction of the official, sanitised narrative (Nyarota 2006). As the editor of the major daily state-owned newspaper in the Matabeleland region at the time, Geoffrey Nyarota, wrote in his memoirs; “the government took advantage of the fear and gullibility of the local media, mostly controlled by the newly appointed and inexperienced editors ... to literally get away with murder” (2006: 136).

## Methodology

This study analysed the framing of selected succession related stories by *The Chronicle*. This Bulawayo-based newspaper is one of the daily newspapers under Zimbabwe Newspaper’s (1980) Ltd group, which since independence has been used as an ideological tool by the ruling party to drum its support (Chuma 2008; Moyo 2004; Ronning and Kupe 2000; Windrich 1981). The selected copies are for the six-month period before and after the then *The Chronicle* editor Mduduzi Mathuthu left the paper on 23 May 2016. Purposive sampling was used to select editorials and front pages stories for qualitative content analysis with purposive sampling having helped to provide “information rich cases that hold the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon” (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006: 66). Editorials were selected because they constitute the newspaper’s “institutional voice” (Stonecipher 1979: 41) and hence they represent the paper’s standpoint on a particular issue and this suggests that on succession issues, they represented the faction the paper supported at the time. Hence, on political issues, which are the focus of this study, editorials are a newspaper’s position on political and social questions (Wahl-Jorgensen 2008: 70). Front-page stories were selected because their location suggests that they are important and they are the “prime editorial real estate” (Weldon 2008: 30) As such, editorials and front-page stories will help fuse together “objective, fair and factual” information with the editorial opinion on succession politics in Zimbabwe by the state media. During the Mathuthu editorship of *The Chronicle*, 56 stories were published on Zanu-PF factionalism and succession and of these stories, three were

editorials, 28 were lead stories while the remainder were inside stories, which are not the subject of analysis for this study. For the post-Mathuthu era, 20 stories were covered and among those stories two were editorials while 12 were lead stories.

While content analysis has mainly been associated with quantitative research, it has also become a common qualitative method of analysis. However, criticism that has been levelled against quantitative content analysis is that it misses the syntactical and semantic information embedded in the text (Weber 1990). Hence, qualitative content analysis was used because of its ability as a “sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton 1990: 453). Through this method, the paper managed to examine meanings, themes and patterns that were both manifest and latent in the texts under review. Interviews with journalists within *The Chronicle* news desk were also used to support information obtained from content analysis. Interviews were aimed at helping us gain a deeper understanding of the meanings derived from qualitative content analysis. Such information would include rationale behind framing sources in a particular manner, or reasons for supporting a particular faction in the course of reporting. The study used purposive sampling to recruit journalists for interviews. The study mainly focused on the news desk which comprises reporters who wrote political stories on the succession subject. The desk has 15 reporters, seven of whom were selected for interviews for this study. The then *Chronicle* editor, Mduduzi Mathuthu, was only partially available for an interview and he did not divulge full information pertaining to succession journalism during this era. Similarly, Innocent Madonko, who during this era was on an acting basis, was non-committal to be interviewed. For ethical reasons, the research preferred to keep the identity of the respondents as anonymous due to the volatile political environment and the dire consequences that tend to be faced by journalists who pass views and statements that are against the establishment. More so, respondents asked to remain anonymous for the purposes of job security, hence the study had to adhere to respondents’ requests.

## Themes

Within the factional battle pitting Team Lacoste and G40, *The Chronicle* published news content that sought to denigrate both factions during and after the Mathuthu editorship of the paper. During the Mathuthu era, prominent stories were mainly from the G40 faction and supported their political position regarding the succession. The same can be said when Mathuthu was fired from the newspaper. Mathuthu’s dismissal came after he published an article entitled “Gukurahundi Row erupts ... VP fumes over Coltart Book” (*The Chronicle*, 23/03/16) and a series of stories that drew the ire of some government officials, especially those within the Team Lacoste camp, pushing for Emmerson Mnangagwa to succeed Mugabe as President. Mathuthu was replaced by his deputy, Innocent Madonko. In our analysis of *The Chronicle*’s coverage of the factional succession battles within Zanu PF, we identified three dominant themes under the following topics: scandalising factional members, selective sourcing and use of derogatory terms. These themes appear prominent in the newspaper’s endeavours in pushing a factional agenda during Mathuthu’s tenure and after him. Responses from journalists interviewed were also used in the analysis section to determine the extent of factional reporting in *The Chronicle*.

### ***Scandalising rival factional members***

In its endeavour to scandalise rival factional members, the newspaper takes a stance that supports members of either the G40 or Team Lacoste faction. The Mathuthu era that also saw Jonathan Moyo heading the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services shows how the newspaper supported members of the G40 faction associated with the minister. In its quest to pursue a factional agenda during this period, the paper reported on “scandals” centred on the Team Lacoste faction. Firstly, the newspaper scandalises Mnangagwa, who leads the Team Lacoste faction, consistently portraying him as a power-hungry leader who is unfit to succeed Mugabe. The stories *Plot to kill Chatunga: Zanu-PF, military fingered* (*The Chronicle*, 13/02/2016) and *Gukurahundi Row erupts ... VP Fumes over Coltart Book* (*The Chronicle*, 23/03/16) are an attempt by the newspaper to scandalise Mnangagwa. The stories portray Mnangagwa as a “murderer” as he and his factional members are presented as having reached an “agreement” to “kill” Robert Mugabe’s youngest son, Bellarmine Chatunga. This was allegedly a way of instilling fear in Mugabe, forcing him to resign and paving way for Mnangagwa to take over. The same story also states that “the faction roped in members of the military to carry out demonic acts including the bombing of Alpha Omega Dairy Plant in Mazowe”. The military in this case is also insinuated by the newspaper to be inclined to the Team Lacoste faction. In the same vein, Mnangagwa is portrayed as having participated in the Gukurahundi genocide, and the newspaper suggests that he is a murderer as he is continuously tagged as a “Gukurahundist”—a term that Jonathan Moyo also regularly used to describe Mnangagwa.

*The Chronicle* during the Mathuthu era reports on key members of the Team Lacoste Faction such as Justice Mayor Wadyajena. Wadyajena, MP for Gokwe-Nembudziya and an unapologetic supporter of Emmerson Mnangagwa, is covered and scandalised by the newspaper three times (*The Chronicle*, 02/02/16, 22/03/16, 22/12/15), a clear indication that the newspaper was aligned to the G40 faction. One of the lead stories, *Wadyajena in G40 Storm* (*The Chronicle*, 01/09/16), is framed in a way to soil his image as he is portrayed as a rogue individual who sought to go against key members of the G40 faction vying to succeed Mugabe. The stories detail how Wadyajena referred to G40 members as “idiots” after insulting former first lady and Women’s League leader Grace Mugabe (*The Chronicle*, 02/02/16). It is important to note that the Midlands province where Mnangagwa hails from became a battleground for succession politics at the time. Besides Wadyajena being scandalised, other key Team Lacoste members such as Owen Ncube (former provincial youth league secretary for administration and now Minister for State Security) and Edmore Samambwa (former Midlands Youth provincial chairman) were accused of victimising fellow party members in the Midlands Province who belonged to the G40 faction and supported Grace Mugabe. Political party members caught in the ire of this victimisation who belonged to the G40 faction included former ministers Makhosini Hlongwane (Sports and Recreation Minister), Anastasia Ndhlovu (Tourism and Hospitality Deputy Minister) and Tapiwa Matangaidze (Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare Deputy Minister). These members were allegedly “victimised” by Wadyajena for supporting Grace Mugabe. The story also details that Wadyajena “threatened to hire thugs” and chanted derogatory slogans towards members of the G40 faction with words such as *pasi ne G40* (down with G40); *pasi naMakhosini* (down with Makhosini, Anastasia and Matangaidze). In such stories, voices of the accused were stifled whereas the narrative of G40 was modulated.

Such factional positions taken by the newspaper confirm what reporters interviewed said about the former editor (Mathuthu) who they viewed as Minister Moyo's "blue-eyed boy" tasked with promoting the G40 agenda at the *Chronicle*. One *Chronicle* reporter interviewed said:

What you see on our pages, be it on the front page or any other, is what the doctor would have ordered. We could not go against the editor's demand. We met the editor at least twice a day and we would be giving him an update on the stories to be published especially the ones promoting or scandalising G40 members and getting further instructions on how to frame stories. Stories that promoted the G40 faction and soiled Team Lacoste were the trump card that we would use to get lead stories and also get promoted. (Reporter 1, 25/ 09 /2017)

The newspaper also selectively aligns itself with war veterans from the G40 faction during the Mathuthu era. Stories covered during the Mathuthu era showed that war veterans said to belong to the G40 faction such as George Mlala are mostly given coverage to legitimise the G40-driven agenda that does not portray them as a "faction" but a group of "loyal cadres" who are "sons and daughters" of the soil supporting Mugabe's rule. Stories such as *Mutsvangwa's woes mount: War Vets Drop Chris* (*The Chronicle*, 07/03/2016) show how Mlala, who was not in the war veterans structures at the time, is given space by the newspaper to ridicule Mutsvangwa. Mlala calls Mutsvangwa a "drunkard" and adds that "Mutsvangwa should return to his senses ... because only a drunkard can utter such statements about President Mugabe who is trusted by Africans at large". His statements come after Mutsvangwa had previously said he no longer trusted Mugabe and compared him to a frog in a sink that "adjusts as the water gets hotter". War veterans who belong to Team Lacoste such as Christopher Mutsvangwa are seen as "bad apples in Zanu-PF attempting to ordain Mnangagwa as the heir to the throne". This is exhibited by stories under the headlines *Politburo boots out Mutsvangwa* (*The Chronicle*, 04/03/2016), *War Veterans threaten demo against Mutsvangwa* (*The Chronicle*, 09/01/16), *Mutsvangwa loyalists ousted* (*The Chronicle*, 10/03/16) and *War Vets kick out Mutsvangwa* (*The Chronicle*, 13/02/2016). The stories detail an alleged boycott of Chris Mutsvangwa by his fellow war veterans and subordinates when he visits the Bulawayo war veterans' structures on a meeting to address their welfare. Mutsvangwa and those aligned to the Team Lacoste faction are vilified for allegedly insulting Mugabe and the first family. Reporters interviewed confirmed the G40 alignment was adopted by *The Chronicle* and said they were a G40 "conveyor belt" aimed at winning consent from party members and fellow citizens, as they could not object to stories aligned to G40 which the editor imposed on them. Mutsvangwa is largely scandalised during the Mathuthu era, and in effect portrayed as a "rogue war veteran" leading a splinter war veterans faction. Another journalist interviewed said they were "pawns" advancing succession issues. The journalist further added:

Stories that did not meet the editor's expectations especially on factional issues would be spiked. Because the editor was promoting a factional agenda, we were wiped into line that is supporting the G40 faction even though in some cases it was not necessary to cover issues related to G40. (Reporter 2, 27/09/2017)

However, the post-Mathuthu era when deputy editor Innocent Madonko took over the post on an "acting editor" capacity shows a shift in the way succession stories and members of factions were framed. Members from G40 are mostly scandalised, yet those of Team Lacoste are predominantly glorified. The change of ministers, however,

confirms the shift in factional stance, where the paper takes a factional standpoint of supporting Team Lacoste members. Reporters interviewed said the editorial shift in the newspaper was because the new minister who replaced Jonathan Moyo, Minister, Christopher Mushowe (who was also perceived to be a member of the Team Lacoste) “did not align himself to the *mafikizolo’s* ideology (G40)”, hence the reason for the change in tone of story narratives. One of the articles entitled *VP Unmoved... Mnangagwa shrugs off Chimene diatribe* (*The Chronicle*, 29/07/16) attempts to scandalise one of G40 stalwarts and staunch supporter of Grace Mugabe, Mandy Chimene (Former Manicaland Provincial Affairs Minister) who had previously told party members that Mnangagwa fanned factionalism and identifying him as the leader of Team Lacoste. Members of the Team Lacoste faction like Mnangagwa who were not given space to respond to allegations levelled against them during the Mathuthu era were now having their agenda driven by the same newspaper under a new editor. This is also seen in the above-mentioned story where Mnangagwa is given a voice while Chimene is silenced. Reporters interviewed said the former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity, George Charamba—previously sidelined by Moyo, but now calling the shots under the new Minister—was insisting on state media coverage that relegated war veterans aligned to G40 to the periphery, “reducing them to mere political spectators”. Also supporting the shift as evidenced by the content analysis, one reporter interviewed said “conventional wisdom at Zimpapers tells you that the Minister of Information is the shadow editor-in-chief or the man in charge” and as the Minister changes, the newspaper’s trajectory also changes as the minister shapes political discourses.

In the post-Mathuthu era at *The Chronicle*, former Minister Moyo (moved to another cabinet portfolio and became an active G40 leader) was covered negatively by the paper. In the month of October, for example, *The Chronicle* ran a series of stories that implicated Moyo in what was known as the Zimdef scandal. This scandal involved the Minister’s alleged diversion of funds meant for student training (manpower development) towards political party activities. During this period (October 2016), six lead stories in *The Chronicle* (10/10/16, 13/10/16, 21/10/16, 25/10/16, 28/10/16) promote the interests of the Team Lacoste faction while in general most of the story narratives in the articles published were an effort to vilify Moyo, who is a key G40 ally. Moyo is portrayed a “thief”, “who steals from the rich” and the newspaper plays the role of both the judge and jury in an endeavour to scandalise him. *The Chronicle* uses the Zimdef scandal as a political battleground for scandalising Moyo. There are constant calls for his arrest via stories and he is continuously vilified by the newspaper.

The factional positioning by the paper highlighted above shows how story narratives during the Mathuthu era supported the G40 faction. The post-Mathuthu era, which saw Madonko take over the reins, also shows different story narratives that supported the Team Lacoste faction. Such shifts demonstrate the phenomenon we have deemed “factional journalism” where journalists were easily swayed to pursue and serve a new order from their political principals without exerting any agency of their own.

### **Selective sourcing**

Factional reporting is also seen in the sourcing of stories. The Mathuthu era shows how *The Chronicle* through its sourcing and placement supported the G40 faction. The majority of

*The Chronicle* stories on succession and factionalism were placed on the front page and the importance of such placement is that front-page stories set the tone of the rest of the paper (Weldon 2008: 6). Major sources of the newspaper's information were key members who constituted of the former G40 faction. These members included Patrick Zhuwao, who in one of the stories called for the "*Expulsion of War veterans leader Christopher Mutsvangwa*" (*The Chronicle*, 14/12/15). Former Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko is also another member of G40 who constantly features in the newspaper in support of the G40 faction. For example, in the story *Karanga lineage no key to Presidency* (*The Chronicle*, 13/02/16), Mphoko thwarts the Lacoste faction which wanted a Karanga (Mnangagwa) to succeed a Zezuru (Mugabe). In the same Mathuthu era, war veterans such as Mutsvangwa (chairperson) and Victor Matemadanda (secretary-general) who were openly supporting the Team Lacoste faction were accused of bringing in tribalism in factional politics and where to be denied space in the newspaper. In stories such as *Mutsvangwa's woes continue to mount* (*The Chronicle*, 07/03/16), rival war veterans such as George Mlala are given space in the newspaper and are viewed as reliable sources of information when commenting on issues related to war veterans. One reporter interviewed said:

We hold meetings with the news editor to discuss the framing of the story and also its sourcing. In such meetings, the news editor will be telling us what could have transpired in their meeting with other editors. He will also be telling us what the editor wants and how to do it. (Reporter 3, 04/10/17)

Such revelations confirm the pattern of sourcing during the Mathuthu era that saw the newspaper become biased towards the G40 faction. Overall, sources used in story narratives glorified the G40 faction as safeguarding the interests of Mugabe as entrusted to him by the electorate. The newspaper also legitimised another faction of the war veterans called the Council of Elders, composed of war veterans such as George Mlala and Mandy Chimene (Manicaland Provincial Affairs Minister).

In the post-Mathuthu era, the sourcing flipped, with the majority of sources now coming from the ranks of the Team Lacoste faction. Mnangagwa is given more space to explain his alleged involvement in factionalism and succession politics, where he stated that "the unsubstantiated allegations encouraged him to work even harder for the development of the country" (*The Chronicle*, 29/07/16). Mnangagwa is also continuously referred to as the "Zanu-PF Second Secretary", which shows that he is a senior member, second after Mugabe, and celebrates that "there will be no leadership change in Zanu-PF" (*The Chronicle*, 28/07/16) as pushed by G40 which sought to have Mnangagwa removed from office. In their quest to rebrand Mnangagwa and present him in the best possible light, the paper also devotes some positive coverage to the command agriculture policy—a government policy to address food security—which Mnangagwa heads. Under the previous editor, the policy had either been muted or given negative coverage by the paper. Another interesting feature of the post-Mathuthu coverage was that most prominent stories in the paper were now outsourced from *The Herald* in Harare. This was in sharp contrast to the Mathuthu era where most stories were written by *The Chronicle* journalists and took the position of supporting the G40 faction. One reporter interviewed confirmed that:

The paper is a product of the editors because they have the final say and what we write is what they could have ordered. Editors also help you to gather data through telling who to look for

and how to structure the story. This includes issues to do with who to talk to and who to leave out. (Reporter 4, 06/10/2017)

Sourcing, however, determines story narratives and there is a sharp contrast in the sources used in the two periods during which *The Chronicle* was edited by Mathuthu and Madonko. These partisan shifts in sourcing highlights the phenomenon of factional journalism.

### ***The deployment of derogatory terms***

The newspaper occasionally resorted to using derogatory terms in its bid to soil the image of the rival factions during the tenures of both editors. Derogatory terms like “conspirators”, “successionists”, “factionalists” and “individualists” are common terms used to scorn a rival faction. These terms were used to denounce other party members as “individualists and factionalists who have no place in the Zanu-PF government” (*The Chronicle*, 01/02/16) because they are aiming to topple a “patriotic, people oriented and a selfless leader” (*The Chronicle*, 31/03/16) in the mould of Mugabe. During the Mathuthu era, the newspaper condemned Team Lacoste members as “successionists”, especially war veterans who openly endorsed Mnangagwa as their preferred successor. Some of the terms that are also used include “murderers”, “tribalist”, “rogue”, “demonic” and “violent”. Such terms are seen in stories such as *Gukurahundi row erupts: VP fumes over Coltart book* (*The Chronicle* 23/03/16), *Zanu-PF Midlands dumps 8 officials* (*The Chronicle*, 19/03/16), *Karanga lineage not key to presidency (...)*, *First lady Supporter felled with fury: War Vet leader faces arrest* (15/03/16). The use of such terms was meant to present the rival faction as illegitimate and therefore incapable of taking over the leadership after Mugabe. When local lawyer and politician David Coltart released his book entitled *The Struggle Continues: 50 years of tyranny in Zimbabwe*, in which he highlighted one of Mnangagwa’s incendiary speeches in Bulawayo at the height of the Gukurahundi genocide, the newspaper came out in support of these claims and revealed that “we dug into our archives and we can reveal that the statements attributed to Cde Mnangagwa were indeed published in *The Chronicle* between March and April 1983” (*Chronicle*, 23/03/16). In some of the stories published by the paper during this period, Mnangagwa is portrayed as a “murderer” and “tribalist” who seeks to divide the Zimbabwean nation along ethnic lines. As such, Team Lacoste members were also broadly described as “successionist” to denote “individuals seeking to stampede President Mugabe out of power and replace him with their preferred candidate” (*The Chronicle*, 11/02/16). The editorials page, which normally highlights the newspaper’s stance on a subject or topic, lays bare the newspaper’s factional inclination by denying the existence of the G40 faction and claiming that war veterans leader Christopher Mutsvanguwa had “gone rogue” for going after “the purported G40 faction” (*The Chronicle*, 14/03/16).

Despite clear evidence of factional positioning in coverage, when interviewed, Mathuthu dismissed the findings by claiming that his team was “supporting the government”, before refusing to explain or support his position in the political matrix. This claim was contested by the *Chronicle* reporters interviewed, as highlighted earlier. In separate interviews, journalists said they were instructed to frame stories using specific terms meant to soil factional rivals and this was the only way for a reporter to seek glory as their stories would land on the front page. Reporters also confirmed that the use of derogatory

terms by the newspaper showed the way it had lost ethics by supporting a specific faction in pursuit of pushing a factional agenda. Reporters also said at times their stories would be “spiked” and what they would have written would appear different when the story was published.

After Mathuthu’s departure from *The Chronicle*, derogatory terms were now redirected to the G40 faction, which was described by the paper as being composed of “successionists claiming to be behind the first family when in actual fact they harbour their own presidential ambitions” and they were “mere chancers pursuing personal enrichment agendas at the expense of national development” (*The Chronicle*, 06/08/16). Grace Mugabe, who was associated with the G40 faction, is spared the vilification. But fellow G40 members, especially Jonathan Moyo and Saviour Kasukuwere, are presented as the “factionalists” who are being attacked for pushing a factional agenda as the “First Lady cannot discuss the succession of her husband” (*The Chronicle*, 29/01/16). Bitter war veterans, some of whom had been fired from the party (like Mutsvangwa and Matemadanda), are no longer identified as rogue. In the post-Mathuthu editorial dispensation, they are given ample space to articulate their views in the paper. G40 members are seen as the “Mafikizolo” (an isiNdebele word denoting newcomer; in this context, it is used to refer to party newcomers, those with no liberation war credentials, and therefore having no legitimate claims to succeeding Mugabe) who are being used by the party’s enemies to “tirelessly divide Zanu-PF” (28/07/18). The paper also takes the stance of describing the war veterans’ faction supporting G40 as “ill-disciplined” because of their continual peddling of unfounded allegations on Mnangagwa involvement in factionalism. One of the journalists interviewed said framing stories that denigrated G40 was a way of “pleasing the editors as this is where their bread was buttered”. These findings show a change of editors influenced the papers framing of succession issues within the ruling party.

## Concluding discussion

The findings suggest that there are substantial limits to journalistic agency and professional independence in a context characterised on the one hand by an authoritarian political establishment and on the other by a comatose economy where jobs are nearly impossible to come by. In such a context, journalists are made to believe they are perennially indebted to their employers for the mere fact of being employed. Because of this, they inherently produce content which genuflects to centres of power in ways reminiscent of Herman and Chomsky’s deterministic and problematic “propaganda model”. As both the content analysis and interviews with *The Chronicle* journalists have demonstrated, the newspaper played a key role as a platform for the articulation of factional agendas in the battle for succession of Mugabe. The paper gave salience to one faction in the period before the ouster of both the Minister and the editor, and then almost seamlessly switched sides to the so-called “Lacoste” faction as soon as both were moved. This suggests a hopelessly malleable media that can very easily be directed to switch sides at short notice. There is no suggestion of a professional cohort of journalists with values and political ideologies with any staying power beyond the tenure of office of the current Minister of Media, Information and Publicity. These findings also throw into question whether the normative roles often ascribed to the press (see Christians et al. 2009) are

applicable in contexts such as this, where journalistic activity is almost completely at the beck and call of political centres of power.

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