

Experiences of female journalists in Zimbabwean male-dominated newsrooms

ABSTRACT

Baseline surveys on the gender distribution in Zimbabwe's media industry indicate a male dominance in newsrooms in general, as well as in media leadership positions. This gender disparity reflects the persistence of patriarchy and heteronormative beliefs in the Zimbabwean society, despite the country's constitution upholding gender mainstreaming and principles of equality. However, there is a dearth of systematic academic studies exploring the experiences, aspirations and attitudes of female journalists in these macho newsrooms. The article is theoretically guided by Raewyn Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected female Zimbabwean journalists to discuss their experiences and struggles in such environments. Findings indicate that gender remains an unresolved question in Zimbabwe. Due to alleged unprofessional conduct by some male journalists, Zimbabwean newsrooms resemble phallogocentric and misogynistic "carnivals". Women experience and battle against various forms of sexual harassment despite the presence of mechanisms to protect victims. Despite this violence, female journalists persevere and also find ways of speaking back to power.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, media industry, patriarchy, sexism, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

This article explores the experiences and struggles of selected female journalists in male dominated Zimbabwean newsrooms. Critically, patriarchal relations present in Zimbabwean society permeate the media industry, resulting in women experiencing various forms of marginalisation (Morna & Rama, 2009; Radu & Chekera, 2014, Zhou 2015). This is an argument that this article is completely in agreement with. However, this contradicts Chapter 2, Section 17 of the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution as well as the regional Protocol on Gender and Development adopted by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which advocate for gender mainstreaming and equal representation in various aspects of society (IMPI, 2014; Ncube, 2020).

Systematic academic literature in the area of gender and power relations in the Zimbabwean media industry is still emerging. Preliminary research on gender power relations in the media industry in Zimbabwe is mainly constituted by commissioned base-line surveys, conducted by gender and media associations – the Culture Fund Trust of Zimbabwe, 2004; Gender Links, 2009; MMPZ, 2014; the IMPI Report, 2014; and Media Monitoring Africa, 2014 – among others. These studies indicate male dominance in newsrooms and management positions across the Zimbabwean media industry. For example, as of 2009, women accounted for 13% of employees in Zimbabwe’s media industry (Gender Links, 2009). Precious Ndlovu’s (2015) Master’s dissertation focusing on the gendered experiences of female journalists in Zimbabwe’s print media industry represents the first systematic “academic” work on the subject. With reference to other Zimbabwe-specific case studies, this research can only be replicated or corroborated against Zhou’s (2015) study. Therefore, the responsibility of venturing into this relatively new and complex area of study constituted a constant test. Attention was given to feasibility issues, specifically ensuring that the study is broad enough to capture all the salient issues, without however becoming too wide to be manageable.

Employing in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected female journalists from the broadcast and print media in Zimbabwe, the article extends the conversation around multi-layered and symbolic forms of violence and discrimination experienced by female journalists in macho newsrooms. Foucault (1980:83) argues that a critical examination of hidden knowledge uncovers a “historical knowledge of struggles”.

The article is theoretically guided by Raewyn Connell’s hegemonic masculinity concept. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the most honoured way of being man, and as such all men in patriarchal societies are expected to try to meet its standard (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In some instances, it refers to men engaging in toxic practices such as physical violence so as to stabilise gender dominance in a particular society (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1987:99) observes that in patriarchal systems, there is sexual division of labour, which entails “allocation of particular types of work to particular categories of people”. Journalism is structured

around the concept that a man is the “ideal worker” and the female body becomes an aberration (Zhou, 2015).

The study is organised in seven sections. This introduction is followed by a brief discussion of the media landscape in Zimbabwe. A literature review then follows. From the literature review, the discussion focuses on the theoretical and methodological aspects. Findings are then presented in two separate themes. The article concludes by illustrating how it contributes to studies on media or journalism and gender issues in Zimbabwe and Africa.

1. OVERVIEW OF ZIMBABWE’S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Zimbabwe has an oligopolistic newspaper industry dominated by state-controlled newspapers published by the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers). Zimpapers publishes two national dailies – The Herald and The Chronicle, based in Harare and Bulawayo respectively. They also publish three national weeklies – The Sunday Mail (based in Harare) and The Sunday News (based in Bulawayo) and Manica Post (based in Mutare). The government-controlled stable also publishes two African language newspapers Kwayedza (Shona) and Umthunywa (Ndebele), the former based in Harare and the latter in Bulawayo. Moreover, Zimpapers are also the publishers of tabloids – H-Metro and B-Metro. Under the Community Newspaper Group (CNG), the government also owns community newspapers in each of the country’s 10 provinces. These newspapers are published by the government’s news agency New Ziana (Chiumbu, Minnie & Bussiek, 2009).

Alpha Media Holdings dominates the private newspaper sector. Owned by Trevor Ncube, this stable publishes Newsday (based in Harare) a national daily as well as Southern Eye, an insert in the Newsday which focuses on the southern part of Zimbabwe. They also publish The Independent, a weekly business paper, and The Standard, a weekly Sunday paper. Both papers are published in Harare. The Associated Newspaper Group (ANZ) is another key player. They publish Daily News, a national daily and The Daily News on Sunday. In 2017, ANZ acquired The Financial Gazette, previously owned by Gideon Gono, former Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. All the ANZ newspapers are published in Harare.

The broadcasting industry is dominated by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) which is state controlled. ZBC owns ZTV, the only television station in the country. They also own four national radio stations, namely Radio Zimbabwe, Power FM; National FM; Central Radio 95.4 FM; and Classic 263 FM. ZBC also owns Central FM, a regional radio station based in Gweru. There are also privately owned stations in the broadcasting industry. These include AB Communications, owned by former ZANU-PF minister Supa Mandiwanzira. AB Communications owns a national radio station – ZIFM stereo. It also owns “regional” radio stations such as 98.4 (Gweru) and Hevoi FM (Masvingo). Zimpapers is also another key player in this sector. They

own Zimpapers Television Network (ZTN). They also own Star FM, a national radio station and regional stations including Diamond FM (Mutare), Nyaminyami FM (Kariba) and Capital FM (Harare). There is also YaFM, based in Zvishavane town, owned by Munyaradzi Hwengwere, a ZANU-PF loyalist.

Zimbabwe now has six licensed community radio stations, albeit they are yet to go on air. In December 2020, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) licensed three players – Mbembesi Development Trust, Ntepe Manama Community Radio Trust and Nyangani Community Radio Trust (Ncube, 2021). In March 2021, BAZ awarded licenses to three more players, namely Shashe Community Broadcasting Association (Beit Bridge and Shashe), Chiredzi Rural Communities Development Initiative Trust (Avuxeni FM) and Lyeja-Nyayi Development Trust which caters for Hwange and Victoria Falls (Ncube, 2021). To date, BAZ has also issued six campus radio broadcasting licenses to journalism and media training institutions including Great Zimbabwe University, the Midlands State University, the University of Zimbabwe, the National University of Science and Technology, Lupane State University and Harare Polytechnic (Ncube, 2021).

2. AVAILABLE STUDIES ON MEDIA IN ZIMBABWE

Existing literature straddles a number of themes such as media reforms and democratisation processes (Zaffiro, 2002; Moyo, 2004; Mano, 2007; Chiumbu, Minnie & Bussiek, 2009; Mhiripiri, 2011; Mare, 2013). This body of literature interrogates broadcast media policies in Zimbabwe and their implications on the expansion of the public sphere.

There is also a body of literature examining the impact of what is now commonly known as the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis on different dimensions of media performance and journalism practice (Ranger, 2005; Chiumbu, 2004; Chuma, 2005, 2013; Mazango, 2005; Chari, 2011; Mabweazara, 2018; Mhiripiri & Ureke, 2019; Munoriyarwa & Chiumbu, 2020). Studies have also employed political economy analysis, interrogating the political influence on media performance and professionalism in Zimbabwe (Mano, 2005; Mabweazara, 2011; Ureke, 2016; Chuma, Msimanga & Tshuma, 2020).

There are also other studies with a bias towards sports media and communication (Chari, 2010; Choto, Chiweshe & Muparamoto, 2017; Ncube, 2014, 2017; Ncube & Moyo, 2017; Ncube & Chawana, 2018; Ncube & Munoriyarwa, 2018; Ncube & Mhiripiri, 2020). These studies focus on different aspects of the media and sport such as the representation of football rivalry, media and intellectual property in sport, and digital football fandom among others. However, the subject of gender and the media is not at the heart of these investigations.

The era of citizen journalism and digital activism has also accelerated the growth of media

studies scholarship. Studies have examined how digital technologies reinforce citizen participation in public affairs and to speak truth to power in competitive authoritarian regimes (Mano, 2010; Moyo, 2011; Mutsvairo, 2013, 2015, 2016; Mare, 2016; Chibwe & Ureke, 2016; Gwindingwe, Alfandika & Chateuka, 2018; Mare, 2018, 2019). In the context of the recurring post-2000 crisis, citizens revert to everyday forms of resistance such as social media jokes and humour (Willems, 2008, 2010). An “information parallel market” is established through social media platforms (Chuma, 2008; Moyo, 2009). The analysis has also extended to intersections of social media and fake news in Zimbabwe (Ncube, 2019; Chibwe, 2020). There is also a growing body of literature on social media and political communication processes in Zimbabwe (Chibwe & Ureke, 2016; Chibwe, 2017, 2020; Ncube, 2019).

There is limited research on the subject of gender and media institutions in Zimbabwe. Existing studies (Hove, 2017; Ncube, 2020) have a bias towards media representations of gender issues in Zimbabwe. Hove (2017) explores how male and female identities are constructed in Zimbabwe’s tabloid newspapers -B Metro and H Metro. The other study by Ncube (2020), focuses on misogynistic constructions of former first lady Grace Mugabe in social media memes and “street talk” during anti-Mugabe demonstrations during Operation Restore Legacy, November 2017. However, due to their focus, these studies exclude experiences of female journalists in male dominated newsrooms. Such production contexts are key to the study of media and representation of gender issues.

As acknowledged earlier, available literature around gender and power issues in the Zimbabwe media industry is mainly made up of commissioned reports by media and gender associations (Culture Fund Trust of Zimbabwe, 2004; MMPZ, 2014; Gender Links, 2010; IMPI report, 2014) which concur that male dominance is prevalent in Zimbabwean newsrooms. Another important academic study is Ndlovu’s (2015) Masters dissertation which is premised on interviews with 12 female journalists from Zimbabwe’s print media industry. The study provides significant insights on how journalism in Zimbabwe privileges men and masculinity, resulting in the exclusion of women. The article is indebted to the pioneering contributions made by Zhou (2015) and media associations such as Gender Links, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ), Media Monitoring Africa, among others. These studies provide a foundation from which to explore gender and power relations in Zimbabwe’s media industry. This research complements the earlier analysis by exploring experiences of selected female journalists in Zimbabwe’s print and broadcast media industries. The paper provides a valuable glimpse on how female journalists experience their work environment in contemporary Zimbabwe.

3. THEORETICAL APPROACH: HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The article uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity as a lens to examine the experiences of

female journalists in Zimbabwean newsrooms. The concept hegemonic masculinity is credited to Raewyn Connell (1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a standard measure against which men conduct themselves to legitimatise the “universal subordination of women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:832). In essence, men are empowered by gender relations that subordinate women (Connell, 1987). The theory is useful to the study in analysing how hegemonic masculinity informs the manner in which female journalists relate to their male counterparts in patriarchal newsrooms.

Connell’s (1987) analysis of gender as a social structure containing other substructures is also important to the study. Connell (1987) avers that, there is sexual division of labour, which manifests through segregation of jobs allocated to men and women. In most cases, males are beneficiaries of prestigious and lucrative jobs (Connell, 1987). In relation to the media and journalism industry, the argument is also buttressed by Deuze (2004) who submits that journalism is an occupational ideology which includes the norms and values shared by a particular group of people. It is pertinent for the study to unpack different ideologies, norms and values which shape and structure the media industry and make it a gendered space.

While hegemonic masculinity is often seen as a “configuration of gender practice”, it is sometimes presented as a cultural ideal or an aspiration that only limited numbers of men can practice (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:849) or even one that can never be fulfilled. Through listening to the accounts of female journalists, the study analyses how women are subordinated in newsrooms as men aspire to this aggressive ideological version of masculinity. The concept is critical when it comes to identifying attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender inequality in newsroom environments.

Hegemonic masculinity is fluid across cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Graham, 2014). It is critical for the study also to explore how female journalists attempt or contest hegemonic masculinity in newsrooms. In addition, the study analyses if there are female journalists who also aspire towards hegemonic masculinity and the implications on their participation and how they are perceived in the newsroom.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative and interpretive in approach (see Bryman, 2012). The unit of analysis is constituted by female journalists due to the nature of the problem under investigation. However, the researcher is aware that sexual harassment is not a problem confined to female journalists in newsrooms. Purposive sampling was used to select participants to the study. Purposive sampling entails selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions and the theoretical position and most importantly the explanation or account which one is developing (Yin, 2011).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A total of 17 journalists were interviewed. Five journalists were interviewed via email. Interviews were conducted so that the researcher could access the views, beliefs and experiences of female journalists working in Zimbabwean newsrooms. Groenewald (2004:7) argues that the principal beliefs in qualitative research are that “data is contained within the perspectives of people or in existing documents hence the researcher should engage with the participants in collecting data”.

Interviewees were drawn from both the privately-owned and state-controlled broadcast and print media. These included interns, junior and senior female journalists. My conversations with female journalists revolved around their experiences, aspirations, attitude towards male-dominated newsrooms and their struggles in these newsrooms. I also asked them about how they are surviving in these patriarchal newsrooms. The interviews were conducted in Harare, Gweru, Bulawayo and Masvingo. To ensure anonymity, all respondents were assigned pseudonyms. The participants’ places of work are also kept anonymous in the findings section.

The study was not without its challenges. The major limitation to the study is the sensitivity of the area. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) argue that male and female researchers have access to different information, as they have access to different people, settings and bodies of knowledge. My male identity potentially posed a hindrance from the onset, given the research population was constituted by females only who often suffer discrimination at the hands of men at their workplaces. The probability was high that some victims of different forms of violence in the media industry could refuse to grant me interviews for various reasons. Moreover, with regard to issues of sexual harassment, participants may have something to hide. In such cases, researchers may end up taking shortcuts in their analysis, typically based on common sense and general public perceptions (Skjerdal, 2010).

However, the interview process was made “smooth” by my already established social networks and rapport with most journalists. I am Senior Lecturer in the Media and Society Studies Department, at the Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. A significant number of male and female journalists in the Zimbabwean media industry have attained their undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in our department. Data was therefore, collected with minimum friction since my former students linked me to their friends in the industry. Data was also collected at minimum ethical risks. To “protect” participants from possible trauma, I avoided “too direct” questions. Interviews were conducted at participants’ places of choice. In other instances, interviewees invited me to their homes for conversations around the subject.

5. FINDINGS

The research findings are presented below.

5.1 “Management positions are masculine”

Most of the interviewees expressed that the media industry in Zimbabwe is masculine as reflected by male dominance in strategic decision-making positions. The participants pointed out that women only occupy management posts that men “allow” them to have. One of the interviewees, Nomsa said:

Male dominance in management positions can be attributed to patriarchy existing in our Zimbabwean culture, starting at family level. From family level, it is reinforced that men are natural heads of families, hence it cascades to institutions (Interviewed 3 October 2019).

In addition, there are concerns that whenever a woman is promoted, she is framed by gossip-mongers including both males and females as having done a “carpet interview” with male “bosses”. In patriarchal societies, women are generally placed in subordinate positions and men tend to dominate the economy, business corporations, politics and the family (Connell, 1995). Patriarchy therefore hinders women’s progression in almost every sphere, including of course the media industry. This scenario corroborates findings on studies on the South African media (Gender Links, 2009; Zuiderveld, 2014; Ojakorotu, 2018), which describe the industry as an “old boys club” where there is a glass ceiling for women.

This study established that there is a huge negative perception towards female journalists in the industry. An interviewee, Chipso, expressed that it is difficult for female journalists to “hang out” or develop close relations with sources as this may be misread by both male and female colleagues in the newsroom.

This is a male world, my friend, and it’s difficult to succeed when odds are against you. My male colleagues can easily hang around with sources [male in most cases], calling each other *mudhara* or *blaz* [Shona colloquial terms of respect], going for drinks or braai. However, if a female journalist appears to be “close” to her sources, gossip-mongers start saying you are sleeping together. I remember only three weeks after joining my current organisation, I cried bitterly as people alleged that I was sleeping with a minister, of which it was not true (Interviewed 12 October 2019).

This was supported by another interviewee, Tanatswa. “Some people say female journalists are people of loose morals who tend to move around sleeping with people in positions of authority”, (Interviewed 19 October 2019).

As observed by Zhou (2015), masculinity is prioritised through the gendered allocation of assignments. Some of the interviewees highlighted that in most cases, female reporters are given assignments that do not involve travelling over long distances or to foreign countries. Ngoni, one of the participants, said:

Whenever there are opportunities to travel outside the country, male journalists in the

newsroom are almost always likely to be given the assignment. Only recently have female journalists been awarded the opportunity to travel to South Africa and Kenya. No female journalist has been given an assignment to travel abroad as yet to places like China, United States or Europe. These assignments have been a preserve of men in the news department (Interviewed 19 October 2019).

One of the respondents, Kuda, claimed that male journalists are deployed on foreign trips because they buy editors [usually male] whisky or bring other freebies upon return. However, despite the general exclusion of women from lucrative foreign trips, at ZBC television, Judith Makwanya (late former diplomatic correspondent) used to accompany the then President Robert Mugabe abroad.

5.2 Marriage pressure

Some of the respondents also highlighted that it is difficult to handle journalism and marriage at the same time. Some husbands do not tolerate having a wife who is always out on duty whilst they are at home with the kids. Pregnancy and breast-feeding also prevent women from working “odd” hours. Tashinga, another respondent, said:

When you attend a function which may spill into midnight or when you go for international trips, you can see that your husband develops insomnia. He starts making WhatsApp video calls during odd hours to verify if you are alone in bed...It's so depressing. There is always a misconception that female journalists sleep around with politicians or other prominent figures they will be covering. My best friend recently divorced because insecurity tendencies of the husband got to unacceptable levels. He demanded that my friend has to quit journalism and revert to a “proper housewife” (Interviewed 12 October 2019).

The above sentiments corroborate observations that the print media in Zimbabwe is shaped by gender and power relations (Zhou, 2015). In essence, journalism is structured around the concept that a man is the “ideal worker” and body in the workplace and therefore women are excluded (Zhou, 2015).

Some of the interviewees also pointed out that most of their male colleagues view them as an aberration in the industry. This was supported by Samantha, who remarked, “There is a general perception that female journalists are magandanga [non-conformist]” (Interviewed 5 October, 2019). Gandanga is a Shona word used to describe someone of a rebellious nature. It gained popularity when used to label nationalist freedom fighters during Zimbabwe's second liberation struggle/ Chimurenga. Female journalists are therefore labelled magandanga due to their guts to “invade” the media industry, which is traditionally framed as a masculine space.

The findings also established that some female journalists succumb to the pressure of patriarchy such that when they marry, they opt out of journalism for “respectable” professions such as public relations

where they have “normal” working hours which allow them to fulfil patriarchally defined mothering roles. “Public relations, advertising or marketing are ‘acceptable’ options which allow female journalists to have a career while at the same time raising their families”, said Tadiwa, one of the interviewees.

5.3 Sexism, misogyny and “doing” hegemonic masculinity in the newsroom

The study also established that newsrooms are infested with male “sex pests”. These sex pests are always looking for opportunities to “perform hegemonic masculinity” by bedding every woman they encounter. Some women are therefore, sexually molested against their will and they suffer in silence. Hegemonic masculinity is enforced through the demonstration of virility (Graham, 2014). Mbembe (2006) argues that power dons the face of virility.

Vimbai, another respondent, said, “The problem is a lot of men still can’t deal with rejection” (Interviewed 17 October 2019). Some of the participants also said that most male “sex vultures” operate in “cabals” and “exchange” their sexual conquests. Though every woman in the newsroom is a target of sex pests, perpetrators mainly target university or college students on internship. This was expressed by Chipso:

You feel pity as these men take turns to “hit” young interns and by the time they will wake up from the deep slumber, the damage would have been inflicted ... Male bosses manipulate interns for high marks and staff for promotion and financially rewarding trips. Young ladies are also targets for politicians and other prominent business people who connive with male journalists to woo them ... These interns are promised employment after graduation. It’s sad that the authorities are doing nothing to save these youngsters (Interviewed 12 October 2019).

Sexual violence against women also manifests verbally. More often, newsrooms are turned into “foul and misogynistic carnivals”. People openly discuss sex and private parts, hence men take advantage of this carnivalesque culture. A respondent, Dadirai, submitted that this “foul language” should be read as an attempt to seduce and naturalise violence against women.

I remember one of the line editors at ZBC who would look at my back and say *Heyi wena mthwa ka Moyo, akhula shone elinje..izibunu so ... hawu yizkwama zomdududdu zonke kezi* [You have nice buttocks, I bet you are from the Ndebele ethnic group, you can’t be Shona] (Interviewed 19 October 2019).

Hegemonic masculinity occasionally occurs even in “seemingly harmless mundane banter” (Ncube & Chawana, 2018:68). Despite some “humour” in the above statement, there are sexist and machismo undercurrents involved. Sexual harassment is prevalent and is a form of violence used to control women’s bodies and limit their career growth (Zhou, 2015). Whilst analysing expressions of hegemonic masculinity in football stadia songs, Ncube and Chawana (2018) observe that in the Zimbabwean society, some men exalt and reify buttocks, suggesting that

“real men” prefer women with huge buttocks. There is also a general belief that most beautiful women with such attributes are found amongst the Ndebele speaking women. Though not the prime focus of this article, the phenomenon is influenced by suggested exploitative relationship between the Ndebele and Shona during colonial times (Ncube, 2014). Beach (1994) argues that powerful Ndebele warriors constantly raided their Shona counterparts for women, land and cattle. However, commenting about buttocks in the newsrooms is a form of sexual harassment.

Another respondent, Tatenda, also acknowledged the prevalence of sexism in the industry:

Some time in 2009, there was drama at our organisation. A husband to one of our colleagues stormed into the newsroom with a pistol, proceeded to the office of one of the line editors whom he accused of wanting to “f**k” his wife... The accused had to plead for mercy because the guy was so angry... The wife was so talented but she has since left the institution (Interviewed 16 October 2019).

Some of the interviewees complained that some unscrupulous males misread their dress code thinking that it is meant to entice them. For example, Nyasha said:

I remember at one point female journalists in the newsroom were called and displayed before male counter-parts and accused of dressing too sexy for the office. This was wrong and a form of abuse (Interviewed 13 October 2019).

The newsrooms should not just be viewed as a space of mere news production. The space is ideologically charged and tangled with hegemonic masculinity and misogyny. Power and gender identities are negotiated and contested in this space. However, in most cases, female bodies are targets of ridicule and manipulation. Foucault (1980) argues that discourse authorises those who can speak or not. Discourse has the power and privilege to determine the “sayable” and “thinkable” and “unsayable” (Hall 1997:445). It appears that patriarchy “authorises” men to exercise and how to exercise various forms of sexual violence against women in newsrooms, and they escape unscathed. This sexual harassment should not be treated as a newsroom phenomenon alone, of course, since male dominance goes beyond newsroom environments.

The study established that female journalists working in sports desks suffer the problem of males who want to “own” or patronise them. Lilly, a respondent, said:

Some men tend to misinterpret our intentions when we talk to them or when we go to cover matches. They think we are “offering” ourselves to them yet we will be on duty as well. Each time you interview a man, you always get the question, where do you like to “chill” and what do you like to drink? (Interviewed 19 October 2019).

This was supported by Nyasha, who remarked:

The biggest mistake is to give male athletes or sources your mobile number. Most of them tend to abuse contacts; they cannot separate business from social life. They start “WhatsApping” or calling you even during odd hours. They don’t care even if you are married. What they want is sex (Interviewed 20 October 2019).

Some female journalists also pointed out that they have also appropriated and naturalised vulgarity in order to feel at home. The newsroom environment mirrors the football stadium environment,, which is punctuated with vulgarity, sexism and misogyny (see Ncube, 2014). The appropriation and deployment of vulgarity by female journalists confirms that hegemonic masculinity is not permanent and is always prone to contestation at any given moment in society. Some women also have aspirations towards hegemonic masculinity (Ncube & Chawana, 2018). Mbembe (2001) argues that vulgarity is an expression of power. Some interviewees said that some female journalists willingly engage in controversial newsroom relationships and “normalise” this trend. This was supported by Tariro, who remarked, “Of course we have predators who go after women, but I have also seen women eager to use their bodies to progress in this male-dominated industry” (Interviewed 16 November 2020).

Despite most media houses having sexual harassment policies, interviewees expressed that the policies were ineffective. The organisations lack clear channels and procedures to report sexual harassment cases. For example, some of the interviewees blamed a former Human Resources Manager (name withheld) at their institution for sweeping most cases under the carpet. “I have observed that if you report a sexual harassment case you can be demoted in a subtle way by being redeployed”, said Chipso. This was supported by Vimbai, from the same organization: “Victims are victimised worse after reporting their plight. The victim maybe relegated to behind-the-scenes role, yet the manager [victimizer] continues to enjoy his role” (Interviewed 16 October 2019).

Sexual harassment allegations raised in the Zimbabwean media industry mimic the Benin media industry scenario. On 7 May 2020, President Patrice Talon ordered investigations into allegations of sexual harassment made by two female journalists, Angela Kpeindja and Pricile Kpogbeme, on their respective Facebook accounts (Lo, 2020). The two female journalists stated that sexual harassment is widespread in that country’s media industry such that women are regarded as “sex objects” by male authorities (Lo, 2020).

6. CONCLUSION

This article complements pioneering contributions made by media associations including Gender Links, the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ), Media Monitoring Africa, as well as Zhou (2015), on gender power relations in the media industry. The article concurs with earlier submissions that the

Zimbabwean media industry is highly patriarchal and masculine. The privileging of masculinity contributes to symbolic violence against the female body (Zhou, 2015).

This article has elaborated on the experiences of female journalists in male-dominated Zimbabwean newsrooms. In essence, the article shows a male gendered domination and perpetuation of gender exclusion. Macho and masculine elements continue to manifest in the contemporary Zimbabwean newsroom environment. Despite the Zimbabwean Constitution upholding principles of gender mainstreaming and equality, critical diversity is still missing at different levels of newsrooms.

There was consensus amongst interviewed journalists that newsrooms resemble phallogocentric and misogynistic “carnivals”. In addition, female interviewees indicated that most male “bosses” have voracious appetite for sex such that female subordinates are “forced” to satisfy their unrelenting thirst. Sleeping with several women is perceived as a sign of dominance and “performing” hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) argues that sex is connected to power. From the study, there is need to improve mechanisms which protect victims of sexual harassment. There is also need to promote women ascendancy to top management positions in the media industry so that they can protect other females who suffer sexual abuse perpetrated by men.

The study is not without its problems and limitations. A case in point is the dominance of female voices. Though female journalists are the main victims of sexism and misogyny, men are not immune to this form of violence. This aspect is reiterated by Miles Tendi in the biography of the late Zimbabwe National Army commander, General Rex Nhongo, aka Solomon Mujuru. Tendi (2020) avers that researchers have tended to erroneously assume that sexual violence in conflict settings only affects women and girls in significant ways. Cultural myths, gendered stereotypes and social taboos prevent male victims or perpetrators to open up on the issue (Tendi, 2020). Future studies could also examine the experiences of male journalists, given that not all men belong to the class of hegemonic masculinity.

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