

‘Opening Up Spaces’: The Politics of Black Economic Empowerment and Indigenization in the Telecommunications Industry in Post-Independence Zimbabwe

by

Douglas Mpondi

dmpondi@msudenver.edu

Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Africana Studies

Metropolitan State University of Denver

Denver, Colorado

Abstract

This paper examines the telecommunications sector reforms in Zimbabwe enacted after independence in 1980 in order to open up space for Black entrepreneurs that were denied opportunities during the colonial era and attempts to answer the following questions: What policies and reforms did the government implement in the telecommunications sector in post-independent Zimbabwe? Is the politics in the telecommunications sector in Zimbabwe about Black empowerment or patronage politics? How has the post-independent indigenization rhetoric by the Zimbabwean government replicated the colonial policies of exclusion of the British imperial rule? How has globalization influenced ICT policies and reforms in post-independent Zimbabwe? Via a Fanonian theoretical framework based on archival and secondary sources analysis, the paper provides a lens in which to understand the politics of Black economic empowerment and the continued “pitfalls of national consciousness” in post-independent Zimbabwe. The 21st November 2017 resignation of Robert Mugabe as the President of Zimbabwe after 37 years in power was a culmination of a patronage system that was fighting itself for survival. The military intervention in Zimbabwean politics and the forced resignation of Mugabe shows that the military also wanted to protect its interests and position from the imminent purging of party members orchestrated by the former first lady, Grace Mugabe. The ‘soft coup’ dramatized the interplay of the bumpy patronage political terrain and questions of constitutionalism in Zimbabwean politics.

Key Words: Zimbabwe, telecommunications sector, mobile industry, Black economic empowerment, patronage politics, Robert Mugabe, Econet, Strive Masiyiwa

Introduction: The Political Economy of Telecommunication Reforms in Post-Independence Zimbabwe

With the coming of independence in 1980, the new government of Zimbabwe set upon an ambitious plan of reconstruction that included telecommunications reforms, land distribution, mass educational reforms and access to health for all citizens. The new government had a socialist orientation and this led to the nationalization and centralization of the economy along with five-year development plans. The telecommunications sector that include telephone and broadcasting was a critical area of social transformation as open access to information was conducive to development and social change. The government monopolized the sector by controlling the issuance of telephone and broadcasting licenses. The government did not issue new licenses for the broadcasting and telephone services to private players during the first decade of independence. This has led to Strive Masiyiwa challenging the state monopoly in the courts and clandestine radio stations started beaming from outside Zimbabwe using the shortwave system. According to Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003):

In the 1980's the signs for Zimbabwe's growth and stability looked encouraging: new government focused on reconstruction, reconciliation and redistribution under an apparently socialist banner carefully tempered by pragmatism. A political priority for the new government, driving years of armed struggle was to reverse seven decades of racially biased inequalities in land and asset distribution, and to bestow fundamental civic and human rights on all its citizens.

Sovereignty formed the centerpiece of the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist rhetoric used by Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) to counter critics of their revived land revolution and new brand of authoritarian nationalism.

The new government focused on the nationalization of the economy including the telecommunications sector. The 'anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric' meant that the flow of information has to be controlled and regulated by the government. This led the government of Robert Mugabe to have a grip and state monopoly on telecommunication policies. The privatization of the telecommunication sector was viewed as a drawback to the aims and objectives of the revolution and against the political engagement of a one party state. The revolution had to have one voice and the ZANU PF party was both the ruling party and the spokesman for the interests of the majority. Makhaya and Roberts (2003) argue that 'the main focus of governments trying to develop an information infrastructure in developing countries will usually be on increasing access to telecommunications, given the low levels of provision in these countries' (p.45).

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had only one fixed line operator, the Posts and Telecommunication Corporation (PTC), inherited from the colonial system. It was not until 1996 that Zimbabwe started operating mobile cellular telephone services through the government-run Net*One. McCormick (2003) states that the telecommunications sector acts as a catalyst and facilitates and integrates the economy:

The telecommunications sector is decisive in enabling countries to achieve socio-economic goals as well as compete in the international economy, since effective use of electronic communication permits improved coordination and configuration of goods and services. The telecommunications network is arguably the most fundamental infrastructure with a pervasive effect on the performance of the economy (p.98).

The development of the new nation of Zimbabwe realized that improved communication services were going to help in developing the erstwhile colonial economy after almost one hundred years of British colonialism. The political direction of the economy expected the telecommunication sector to toe the government's left leaning policies and ideology that was premised on socialism and communism. Mugabe's forced resignation as the President of Zimbabwe in November 2017 was a result of a struggle of the political elites fighting for the control of power and resources that sustain the patronage system in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review: History of communications and telecommunications in Zimbabwe

The Posts and Telecommunication Corporation (PTC) was the regulatory authority for the telecommunications sector in Zimbabwe since colonial times. Howard and Mazaheri (2009) points that 'for many years in many countries, the telecommunications regulator was a political agency under the direct supervision of the executive of government, and its appointments both a political sinecure and a means of shoring up control of public assets' (p.1161). It was not surprising that in post-independent Zimbabwe, the government continued with the colonial structure of monopoly in the telecommunications sector. Djiofack-Zebaze and Keck (2009) assert that:

National monopolies that have dominated the industry in almost all countries until the mid-1990s have been faced with competition and in many countries have been privatized. Traditionally, telecommunications systems in Africa were run by the government. The existing telecommunications infrastructure of the colonial era was inherited by the state after countries became independent (p.919-920).

The Postal and Telecommunication Act of 2000 in Zimbabwe ended the monopoly of PTC and provided for the creation of the Postal and Communications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), which was created to ensure a level playing field in the posts and telecommunications sector. The 'legislation brought about a new institutional framework for telecommunications: Liberalized the sector and introduced distinct roles of government, regulator, operators, and consumers' (Sirewu, 2011, p.2).

POTRAZ's mandate include: ensuring provision of sufficient domestic and international telecommunication services; ensuring provision of services at rates consistent with the provision of an efficient and continuous service; promoting the development of the sector services in accordance with: Practicable recognised international standards and Public demand; to represent Zimbabwe internationally in matters relating to the sector; further the advancement of technology; establish, approve of controls; the National Numbering plan; manage the Radio Frequency Resource, and advise the Government on all matters relating to the telecommunication services (Sirewu, 2011, p.2-4)

The government of Zimbabwe 'currently controls the Information and Communications Technology regulatory agencies which include POTRAZ, Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) and the Media and Information Commission (MIC). (African Development Bank, 2012, p.2). Even with the 'opening up' of the playing field, the government continues to control the ICT sector in Zimbabwe through draconian laws and indigenization policies meant to prevent private players from getting licenses to run their own broadcasting services and other ICT companies:

Until 1993, telecommunications services in Zimbabwe were the exclusive responsibility of the Zimbabwe Post and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC). In the 13 years since independence, the PTC had not succeeded in its mission of making telecommunications accessible to the masses. In 1993, the country had only 145,000 fixed telephone lines, with a penetration of 1.3 telephones per 100 people, a waiting list of 95,000 and very poor quality of voice transmission. In spite of this poor service, there were a series of factors motivating Mugabe and his regime to maintain monopoly control. (Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009, p.497)

It is surprising that a country such as Zimbabwe that started on a promising note took a long time to open up spaces for both broadcasting and telephone services. Braathen (2004), in comparing Zimbabwe and Mozambique claims that 'Zimbabwe's slow digitalization was due to the dominance of neo-patrimonialism, and Mozambique's rapid digitalization was due to advanced professionalism' (p.32).

Developing countries, especially in Africa, have undertaken reforms aimed at ‘corporatisation, privatisation, and liberalisation of telecommunications services’ (Makhaya & Roberts, 2003, p.42). The Zimbabwean government, while eager for the masses to have access to communication tended to ‘choke’ the privatization and liberalization of the telecommunications sector. In developing societies such as Zimbabwe, ‘competition and regulation are associated with lower prices and improved availability of telecommunication services’ (Djiofack-Zebaze & Keck, 2009, p.929).

When most African countries gained their independence from European colonial rule in the 1960s, the euphoria that swept across the continent was infectious. All over the continent the new national leaders, in their inaugural addresses, thanked and praised their people for their support in united common struggles, stressing that:

The victory belonged to every one of them, and pledged their governments to economic self-reliance through indigenous control of resources, to the rehabilitation of African cultural identity, and to programs of detribalization, democratic modernization, and equal opportunity” (Wright:1997:1).

With independence, therefore, there was an effort by the Zimbabwean leadership to rid themselves of colonial structures and establish more participatory political and economic institutions by restoring a sense of self-belonging and community after all those years under the yoke of colonialism. Zimbabwe experienced colonialism for almost one hundred years, far much longer than most African countries. The coming of independence was a time for reconstructing what was destroyed during the period of colonial rule and struggle for nation. Muzondidya (2009) posits that:

The major challenge confronting the post-independence government of ZANU (PF) in 1980 was nation-building in a society deeply divided along the lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender and geography.....The government embarked on a programme of post-war reconstruction which aimed to recapitalize and reintegrate the economy into the world economy. To redress some of the inequalities inherited from the colonial order, it tried to broaden the economy and make it more inclusive by integrating blacks through black economic empowerment, the Africanisation of the public service and the active development of a black middle class (p.167).

The post-independence reforms included opening up broadcasting services and lines of communication and incorporating African people into the corporate sector. However the government of Zimbabwe controlled the issuing of licenses for both broadcasting and telephone services. Zimbabwe was born in 1980 with 'full of promise and that the future would be one of economic prosperity, political freedom and a generally decent livelihood for all and that the nightmarish past of the colonial period was gone forever'(Mlambo, 2014, p.194). With the socialist five year development plans in place, the new leadership under Robert Mugabe sent a loud message that the best way to move forward was through the nationalization of the economy and a one-party-state. The one-party system was a common feature of governance in most countries in Southern countries including Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia, whose first President Kenneth Kaunda was associated with the 'one Zambia, one nation' mantra. Samora Machel of Mozambique was a staunch supporter of socialism and the one-party state and famously claimed that 'for the nation to survive, the tribe must die' (Khapoya, 2012).

Media Communications Policies in Post-Independence Zimbabwe

As part of the post-independence reforms, the Zimbabwean government took over the control of broadcasting services 'through an Africanisation process it restructured broadcasting both in terms of new staff composition and new content so as to reflect the new reality' (Mazango, 2005, p.46). Zimbabwe has retained and even strengthened some of the harsh colonial laws such as the Public Order Maintenance Act (POMA) in order to oppress its citizens in terms of freedom of movement, speech and association. Some of the repressive legislation include, the Access to Information Protection and Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order Security Act (POSA) entrenched intimidation, and tightened the hold of the ruling party over state mechanisms of arrest, incarceration, violence and control of populations and resources (Hammar, Raftopoulos, Jensen, 2003).

In terms of media control in post-independence Zimbabwe, Mazango (2005) states that:

the centralization of an enhanced Information Ministry in the president's office to lead a new and invigorated project of media control, at the same time articulating a coherent defence of state policy. The second and related measure has been the use of monopoly broadcasting as a tool to legitimize ruling party hegemony. The third and final tactic has been the promulgation of harsh media laws in combination with other extra-legal tactics to control journalists and the private press, while at the same time directing the state owned newspaper oligopoly to serve government propaganda objectives more patriotically. The result has been polarization of ideas and a clear shrinkage of alternative voices and of political space in the country (p.35).

The media control by the Zimbabwean state is an indication of how the telecommunications sector is still under siege from the government and the ruling ZANU PF party. Ibbo Mandaza, director of the think-tank Southern African Political and Economic Series Trust (SAPES) told journalists during a World Press Freedom Day commemorations in Harare, in May 2015 that:

Zimbabwe media is under siege, we have been taken back to Rhodesian period, the state is now ruling without being accountable to people. There is too much censorship of the media, especially state-owned media houses. Look at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), it is now like Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (RBC), I mean everything broadcasted there is being censored by the state. We have a state which has come with a very strong law and order department to deal with any democratic voices (Agencies, 2015).

Licenses are also issued on patronage grounds and the Media Commission is made up of personnel with close links to the ruling party. The ruling and governing party in Zimbabwe is cognizant of the power that the media has in empowering people with access to information and influencing their political judgments and participation. According to the Amnesty International report:

"Not only have the government supporters been the only ones to receive licences, but those attempting to set up independent services have been arrested and targeted simply for trying to educate, inform and offer a platform for debate. This is a violation of freedom of expression." Zimbabwe's government had embarked on an "insidious two-pronged attack" to block independent community radio by refusing to issue licences and by harassing and intimidating those wishing to provide services. The Zimbabwean government had not issued a licence to a single community radio station since 2001, despite passing the Broadcasting Services Act that year. At least 28 community radio initiatives were waiting to be licensed. Restrictions to the right to freedom of expression and right to information for this target group are occurring in an environment where human rights defenders, government critics and the political opposition activists are also not freely enjoying their civil and political rights (Agencies, 2015, p.1).

The Zimbabwean government tends to issue licenses to people aligned to the ruling ZANU PF party and also on patronage grounds. Neopatrimonialism takes precedence over professionalism and 'the relatively high professional capacity at the company level could not counter the hidden agendas and private interests pervading policy-making at the central political-administrative level (Braathen, 2004, p.43).

Mazango (2005) argues that 'the media's role in creating public space for modern debate allots to it enormous power, something that attracts the attention of key political and economic interests, governments being paramount, in a desire to either own or to regulate this important instrument that shapes public opinion' (p.36). ZANU PF focused on what Mazango calls 'agenda setting' (p.41), the liberation struggle, the land reforms and economic ownership and freedom. Any information that goes against ZANU PF has been viewed as coming from the 'enemies of the state'. Control of the media by ZANU PF has helped it in staying in power and using the media as its propaganda tool during elections. The opposition parties have not been given room and space to advertise themselves before the elections because they were branded as 'imperialist and Western stooges'. The playing field was skewed towards the ruling party as it controlled the media:

Media institutions are important in political processes because they mobilize bias. It is beyond doubt that media games and control of the media has played a crucial role in maintaining ZANU PF in power in Zimbabwe. The continuing decline in the opposition MDC's image is partly linked to unfavourable rules of access to the media and the party's failure to find an alternative outlet. At the same time it seems ZANU PF's endeavour to legitimize itself by hemming in the media has had mixed outcomes. For one, arguments out forward for the current political order to be recognized as right and just and thus deserving legitimacy and recognition have been difficult to grasp in an environment characterized by coercion (p.51).

ZANU PF made use of the radio to mobilize support in its rural strongholds. People are fed with daily propaganda on how the ruling party is the custodian of the liberation struggle and the only party with people's interests at heart. The reality on the ground points to a different story. The ruling party has reduced the Zimbabwean people to vendors, beggars and foragers trying to survive in a harsh economic environment. The media has been used as an instrument and tool to distract the people from the failures of Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwean political leadership.

Mobile Cellphone Industry, Indigenization and Black Empowerment in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has three mobile cellular service providers, Net*One, Econet and Telecel:

The first mobile operator, Net*One, was established by the Government in 1996, with 100 percent ownership by the state. In 1997 the sector was opened to full competition following a challenge in the courts by Econet Wireless. Telecel became the third mobile operator when it entered the market in 1998. Tel*One, which is the sole supplier of fixed line services in Zimbabwe, is owned entirely by the Government (African Development Bank, 2012, p.4).

All of these companies were products of Black empowerment and indigenization of the economy but with different stories in terms of how they were established. In the aftermath of independence, organizations championing Black empowerment and indigenization such as The Zimbabwe Indigenous Business Development Corporation (IBDC) and the Affirmative Action Group (AAG) were formed. These groups, fronted by business people aligned to the ruling ZANU PF party called for Black economic empowerment and indigenization of the economy. Their premise was that the economy was still in the hands of the white settlers even after independence. The government supported their ideas and projects. However, these groups were elitist and served the interests of the political elite and not the majority of citizens. They also operated mostly in urban areas although with chapters in semi-urban areas.

The mobile cellular services in Zimbabwe is an interesting case study as the government called for Black empowerment and indigenization but also blocked citizens from participating in the industry. Patronage, accumulation, and plunder has led to a politicization of the telecommunication sector in Zimbabwe as government cronies have been awarded licenses at the expense of efficient service delivery:

The ownership structure of Zimbabwe's mobile phone networks necessarily has to be located within the ambit of racial nationalism and the rejection of the principle of non-discrimination based on race. The worldview that informed the indigenisation and affirmative action programs were informed by an idea that the post-colonial economy remained dominated by non-Africans.

Even with respect to the Telecel matter, any attempt to redefine the concept will not change the feelings of continued frustration among African businessmen and women that notwithstanding the fact that Zimbabwe has been independent for 35 years, the commanding heights of the economy are still controlled by so-called foreigners. Proponents of indigenization, therefore, were very active in pushing for the liberalization of the telecommunication space. Accordingly, the principle of indigenisation in Zimbabwe was premised on state actors using state power to alter the shareholding of enterprises and, in so doing, a real danger existed and continues to exist, of concentrating too much wealth and ownership in the hands of a few privileged individuals who are fortunate to be beneficiaries of state benevolence through licensing and other measures (Mawere, 2015).

Indigenization and empowerment in the Zimbabwean government parlance meant issuing licenses and tenders to a select few people who have links with the ruling party. Most popular businessmen in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s made their fortunes through allegiances to the ruling ZANU PF. That is why Strive Masiyiwa's court victory against the Zimbabwean government to be issued an operating licence in the mobile industry is a compelling, unique and interesting case of how governments fight against empowering its citizens. Econet Wireless 'challenged the state's rights to monopoly control over the telecommunications sector during the period 1993-1998 as the states use their power to dominate institutional sectors and maintain institutional control' (Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009, p.489)

The centralized one-party system in Zimbabwe in the first decade of independence from 1980 to 1990 controlled the dissemination of information to support its socialist ideology and authoritarian grip on power. The control of information and state structures are a common feature in authoritarian states:

States have available a number of means to maintain institutionalized patterns of control and secure autonomy or expand capacity including defining rules, establishing laws, securing property rights and, when deemed necessary, employing force and violence to counter threats to state control. Property rights are a particularly important institution in contests between states and challengers to state autonomy.....Autonomy in the post-colonial context may not necessarily be achieved through institutional development and development of an independent bureaucracy but rather through the consolidation of power held by the elites (Goodstein and Velamuri, 2009, p.491-92)

The government of Zimbabwe controlled the broadcasting sector and also operated the mobile telephone industry through its Net*One mobile cellular company. Another private company Telecel, but owned by ruling party elites, operated the second mobile cellular services. In the late 1990s, a private citizen, Strive Masiwa went to court to challenge the government monopoly on the operations of mobile cellular services:

The most outstanding champion of the indigenisation of the economy and ‘**black economic liberation**’ has become *Mr Strive Masiyiwa*....From 1994, he fought a legal and constitutional struggle against the state in order to be allowed to set up a mobile telephone network, first in a proposed joint venture with the PTC, then in competition with PTC. In 1995 he won the case in Supreme Court with reference to the Bill of Rights in the revised Constitution of 1979/80, guaranteeing every Zimbabwean citizen the right to free access to information and means of information. In defining telephony as such a means of information, the Supreme Court concluded that the government violated the Constitution: it could not deny the access of private business into the telecommunication sector as long as its own telecommunications corporation was unable to meet citizens’ legitimate demands of mobile telephones as means of information! (Braathen, 2004, p.41)

It was a protracted court case that he eventually won and established a third cellular company, Econet Wireless in 1997. It was a victory for the whole country and Econet is now the largest mobile cellular company in Zimbabwe. Econet’s court battle with the government dragged on for years but its resilience was also inspired by the support it got from other players in the corridors of power. The late former Vice President, Joshua Nkomo, ‘Father Zimbabwe’, came to Masiyiwa’s side by urging the government to allow him to operate a mobile cellular network but did not listen to him and the case had to be decided by the courts. Goodstein and Velamuri (2009) argue that ‘the power of the state was used in an effort to manipulate the courts and public opinion and to circumvent these traditional institutional channels through direct and coercive intervention by Mugabe into Masiyiwa’s personal affairs and Econet’s business transactions’ (p.491). Thus ‘Masiyiwa became a champion, the leader of one of the most important social movements in post-colonial Zimbabwe’ (Braathen, 2004, p.41). Econet is now the largest mobile telephone subscriber in Zimbabwe and has wider coverage including the rural areas of Zimbabwe. It is also one of the top two profitable companies in Zimbabwe.

Telecel Zimbabwe's Battle with the Government of Zimbabwe

Telecel, the second largest mobile cellular company in Zimbabwe after Econet has been battling with the government over ownership and licensing issues because its owners fell out of favor with the government. It is ironic that the government threatens to close down a company that is owned by a number of Zimbabweans at a time when it is calling for indigenization and empowerment of Zimbabweans:

For months, Government, through the ICT Ministry told us that Telecel's licence was under threat because the company had failed to pay its licence fee and that it had failed to meet the terms of payment that had been agreed with Government. The other reason was that Telecel had failed to comply with the indigenisation rules, which require that companies must cede 51% of their shareholding to indigenous players. Emphasis was placed on the failure to pay licence fees, as if that was the major problem. But it now turns out that the bit about the non-payment of the licence fee was less than honest. It was government that agreed terms of payment with Telecel, for whatever reason and Telecel has been making these payments and, where delayed, this has been with government's knowledge and condonation. They could not turn now to say Telecel has not paid its licence fee. To my mind, failure to pay the licence fee would have been an understandable reason on which to base cancellation of the licence. But now it turns out this is not, in fact, the case. This is probably why the issue of the non-payment of the licence fee has been dropped from the Government's reasoning for cancelling the licence because they know it was not true. It has become apparent that the major reason for the cancellation is based on the so-called non-compliance with indigenisation rules (Magaisa, 2015).

Why is the government bringing in indigenization equations to a company that has been in business for more than fifteen years and has been known to have close links to the ZANU PF ruling party? The untold story could be that some of the Telecel shareholders are in the ZANU PF political faction led by Joyce Mujuru. It is also not a coincidence that the Minister who was more concerned by the Telecel issue is aligned to the First Family and happened to be the ICT Minister. Magaisa (2015) opens states that 'what is happening to Telecel has nothing to do with indigenisation, but that there are other ulterior motives for cancelling Telecel's licence'.

Magure (2012) argues that ‘the proliferation of state-owned enterprises after 1980 reflected the government’s policy of seeking to gain firm control of the economy as opposed to indigenising and promoting African capitalism or maintaining the economic status quo’ (p.69). Thus the government wanted to have a grip on the economy rather than promoting indigenous and ambitious Black business entrepreneurs. The battles fought in the courts by Strive Masiyiwa and Econet Zimbabwe supports the claim of a government fighting against its own citizens:

In the case of the telecommunications story, it is not in dispute that President Mugabe was at the forefront of a struggle to limit democracy in the airwaves. The limited democracy that Zimbabweans now enjoy in the industry was a consequence of struggles that occupied the time of judges. Such experiences would hardly have been necessary if President Mugabe correctly understood the role of the state in building an inclusive and prosperous dispensation. One should critically examine the role of the state in the evolution, development and maturity of the mobile network industry to establish the true drivers of the industry’s growth and viability. In the struggle against colonialism, the principle of self-determination pre-eminent and the very same principle is and was at the core of the dispute in which the state and its actors held the view that allowing private sector actors to provide mobile telecommunications products and solutions was not in the national and public interest. Notwithstanding the views of state actors, the judiciary was forced to intervene to resolve this ideological problem resulting in the initial licensing of three network operators. Indeed, we can all look back and compare what was and what is now. The primary purpose of any business is to serve the consumer and before the painful introduction of telephone democracy, the only provider of telephone connections was the state-controlled, Posts and Telecommunications Corporation of Zimbabwe Limited (“PTC”). It is not in dispute that Zimbabwe now has more than 13 million mobile connections for a population of about 13 million, translating into a penetration rate of 100% (Mawere, 2015).

Zimbabweans have come a long way in getting access to affordable mobile telephone services. However, the mobile rates in Zimbabwe are viewed as high compared to other mobile service providers in the Southern African region, especially against South Africa. The postcolonial Zimbabwean state was suspicious of allowing private citizens to operate mobile cellular services without close government control. Howard and Mazaheri (2009) aptly posit that”

The best policy environment for telecommunications sector is one maintained by an independent regulator that is not above representing the public interest or entering into public private partnerships to develop national information infrastructure. Liberalizing the market for consumer communications services and separating the telecommunications regulator from direct control by the executive branch of government are, for the most part, constructive policies for encouraging technology adoption (p.1159).

An independent regulator will minimize corruption and patronage by having different actors submit their tenders and compete for contracts. There is no need to be connected to the corridors of power to be able to participate in the bidding process.

ZimAsset and the ICT sector in Zimbabwe

After the 2103 Presidential elections in Zimbabwe, the Mugabe administration created an economic blue-print known as the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset). It is a 129-page document meant to resuscitate an ailing and moribund economy. ZimAsset clearly spells out ICTs as one of the pillars for national socio-economic development. ICTs are given a key role as enablers for all other sectors to leapfrog in their development. In organizing these developments the Policy proposes various legislative interventions to protect Zimbabwe's cyberspace, personal and public data, electronic transactions and electronic commerce (Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communication Technology, 2014). The overall objectives of the policy framework are therefore enunciated around these observations. Amongst the major objectives of this policy is the need to:-

- Facilitate the provision and maintenance of infrastructural facilities necessary for ICT development;
- Embark on extensive capacity building and training programmes to provide adequate supply of qualified ICT personnel and knowledge workers in all sectors;
- Establish institutional mechanisms and procedures for determining sectoral application priorities;
- Promote, support and enhance the development and use of ICTs, and ensure equitable access to benefits offered by ICTs across all sectors of society;
- Promote the research and development of local ICTs to compete with international products;
- Establish the necessary governance and regulatory structures that facilitate ICT development and adaptation across all sectors of society;
- Protect consumers during the dispensation of the rapid adoption and diffusion of ICTs; and
- Promote Regional Integration in the development and use of ICTs. (Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communication Technology, 2014).

Setting the tone for a new Zimbabwe, 'ZimAsset was crafted to achieve sustainable development and social equity anchored on indigenization, empowerment, and employment creation which will be largely propelled by the judicious exploitation of the country's abundant human and natural resources' (GoZ, 2013, p.6). What is happening in Zimbabwe is against sustainable development with companies closing down and workers losing jobs. Plunder and accumulation have brought Zimbabwe down to its knees economically.

Government-owned parastatals including NetOne are among the worst performing companies in Zimbabwe with non-payment of workers' salaries and owing local creditors and international financial institutions. Zimbabwe is regarded as an unfriendly economic destination for foreign direct investments (FDIs). It is mostly those in government and connected to the political elites through patronage and clientelism who are benefitting from the economic chaos in Zimbabwe. There is no value addition and beneficiation to the ordinary man in the street. Zimbabwe's economy is now fully informalized and everyone has been turned into a vendor as the economic environment is about buying and selling even for the employed as the wages are not enough to last for a week let alone a month.

Effects of Policy Reforms and Adjustments

There are some positive effects that came with the policy reforms and adjustments in the telecommunications sector in Zimbabwe even though some battles were won through the courts. The emergency of mobile phone services in Zimbabwe has changed the social, economic, political, and cultural landscapes of the country. Econet Zimbabwe was able to bulldoze its way into the rural areas by setting up mobile telephone boosters in some remotest parts of the country. Telecel has a considerable share of the mobile cellular telephone industry market in Zimbabwe. Most Zimbabweans have access to mobile cellphones even in the rural areas and Econet is the dominant player in the market:

By 2009, Econet Wireless had a 73 percent market share of mobile subscribers and 66 percent of all telephone subscribers. Growth in the mobile sector has outperformed that of fixed lines. Mainline accounts have grown less than 3 percent a year in the past decade. In 2000, they accounted for 50 percent of total voice service accounts in Zimbabwe, but 2009 they represented less than 10 percent of total voice service accounts. The fixed line network continues to be dominated by the government-owned monopoly, Tel*One (African Development Bank, 2012, p.4).

Mobile lines are easily accessible and cheap than fixed lines in Zimbabwe. There is no waiting time to register for a mobile telephone account. Minges (1999) predicates that 'mobile cellular networks can be installed more rapidly than fixed lines, are less prone to vandalism and theft, costs less than fixed lines and has greater functionality than fixed lines' (p.586).

Communication has become easier with the liberalization of mobile cellular phone services in Zimbabwe. Although limited in scope, the few players have been able to serve the demand for mobile phone services in both urban and rural areas of the country. McCormick (2003) states that:

Wireless communications can improve access to those people living in rural and underserved areas, which represent the majority of the populace in African states. Mobile communications are also preferred to fixed line terrestrial systems in environments that boasts a sparse population and rugged terrain, which is characteristic of many Southern African states (p.104)

People in both urban and rural areas can communicate easily using call voice services and as well as social media such as short text messages, Email, Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp. Mobile money banking and services through Eco-cash (Econet) Tele-cash(Telecell) and One Wallet (Net One) make it convenient for people to send or receive money anywhere in the country as these companies have agents throughout the country. One does not need a bank account to send or receive money but a mobile cellular phone number registered with the service provider. Zimbabweans in the diaspora are now able to send their families remittances through Ecocash Diaspora in partnership with World Remit.

Zimbabweans who could not afford to have landlines installed in their homes have the convenience of the mobile cellular phone and this has also allowed people to have global access to the internet and close the digital divide between the rich and the poor:

Mobile phones have now become an important way of accessing the internet, especially in poor countries where connectivity through mobile phone providers is relatively cheap and ownership of computers is relatively expensive. Indeed, the number of connected mobile phones has surpassed the number of computers connected to the internet (Howard & Mazaheri, 2009, p.1160).

In rural areas with no electricity, people are using solar energy to charge their phone batteries. Communication is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Econet Wireless' challenge of the government of Zimbabwe's monopoly in the telecommunications sector has opened up other avenues for other entrepreneurs to set up businesses in providing cellular phone services at affordable rates. Consumers have broader choices to make and companies compete for the market and it is healthy for sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Thousands of jobs have been created with the liberalization of the telecommunications sector in Zimbabwe. Thousands of Zimbabweans have informal jobs selling airtime cards, also known as 'juice cards'. The mobile service providers also have their agents throughout the country for the mobile money services that include Ecocash, Telecash, and One Wallet.

Post-Mugabe Era and the Patronage System in Zimbabwe

The November 2017's forced resignation of Mugabe as the President of Zimbabwe helps to explain the heavy-handedness of the state apparatuses against its citizens. While the military intervened in the pretext of 'Operation Restore Legacy', it is also clear that they were fighting for the 'Lacoste' cabal led by the then fired Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The Generation 40 (also known as G40) faction favored Mugabe's wife Grace to replace Mnangagwa as Vice President at a scheduled ZANU PF Congress in December 2017. Factionalism is common in predatory and autocratic political systems. The firing of Mnangagwa by Mugabe was the *casus belli* for the military intervention.

Robert Mugabe was not just an internal ZANU PF problem but a national Zimbabwean problem. He had institutionalized himself into every structure of the Zimbabwean social and political landscapes through corruption and cronyism (Mpondi, 2015). Mugabe's forced resignation was a relief not only for ZANU PF supporters but for Zimbabweans in general who had suffered for so long under his dictatorship and authoritarianism. However, Mugabe's departure does not mean that the patronage system is gone overnight, it is still intact as most of the people who worked with him in party and government in post-independent Zimbabwe are the same people in power. Current President Mnangagwa was Mugabe's right hand man for over fifty years and it will not be surprising to see the influence and remnants of 'Mugabeism' in the post-Mugabe administration.

The ‘soft coup’ or unconstitutional intervention of the Zimbabwean military in politics also underscores the extent to which the patronage system has entrenched itself in the Zimbabwean body politic. Mugabe’s undignified exit through forced resignation has greatly soiled his liberation war legacy and tenure as president of Zimbabwe but his family’s accumulation and plunder of national resources explains why he wanted to cling to power until his death. With Zimbabwe recording an unemployment rate of over 90% and most people surviving as street vendors, the time was ripe for a change of leadership. Mnangagwa’s inaugural speech as President of Zimbabwe focused on job creation, peace, and development. It is a matter of time to see whether the new regime of President Emmerson Mnangagwa will institute economic and political reforms that allow for equal opportunity for all citizens and a road-map to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The government of Zimbabwe half-heartedly reformed and liberalized the telecommunications and media sectors after independence but still wanted to control and regulate the functions of both so as to serve its interests and the socialist ideology, which was the backbone of the nationalization of the economy. The ‘commandist’ attitude of the Zimbabwean government meant that there was not enough space for private operators in broadcasting and telephone services to do business without instructions from the ZANU PF political establishment. Draconian media laws were passed to monitor the flow of information by the government and force the compliance of its censorship laws. This was a replication of colonial laws by the Mugabe regime, the same laws that they fought against during the liberation struggle. The colonial legacy and structures are reproducing themselves in the post-colonial state in Zimbabwe. The private media houses and the private telephone services, especially Econet, found themselves operating in a cul de sac. Telecel is also fighting ownership and licensing issues with the government. Black economic empowerment and indigenization in Zimbabwe is cosmetic and meant to serve the interests of the ruling political elites. This predator class used empowerment and patronage to advance their selfish interests at the expense of the general population. Patronage in Zimbabwe is against the revolutionary spirit espoused in Fanonism in which the ruling class serves the interests of the majority. Fanonism is both a revolutionary decolonization process and a historical ideology that emphasizes social transformation with a new language and a new humanity (Rabaka, 2011, 2017).

Strive Masiyiwa’s court battles with the Zimbabwean government is an instructive case in which the government was trying to block a private citizen with no direct links to ZANU PF from participating in the Black economic and empowerment drive.

That Masiyiwa's Econet Wireless is the largest mobile cellular subscriber in Zimbabwe was a victory for the people of Zimbabwe whose government pretended to protect the interests of the majority whilst in reality championing the interests of the political elite and those aligned to ZANU PF. Magaisa (2015) claims that 'political patronage is a heavy albatross upon business. Econet had thrived, free of political patronage, while Telecel had struggled and been complacent under both the weight and privilege of patronage'. Even though the government has stifled the media and the telecommunication sector, globalization has opened up space in terms of information exchange and inflow into Zimbabwe. Online newspapers based outside Zimbabwe have been published and clandestine radio stations have been sending programs through shortwave into Zimbabwe as alternative sources of information to the government-controlled media and its accompanying propaganda. The ICT sector and telecommunications industry in Zimbabwe will grow by having open and independent regulatory bodies free from government patronage and cronyism. All Zimbabwean citizens should be free to express themselves and participate in a liberalized telecommunications sector as part of a democratic society. Further research needs to be carried out on the impact of state control of the telecommunications industry and the emerging trends brought by the globalization of information technology. Social media and the free flow of information across national boundaries is also an interesting area of research against the backdrop of a Zimbabwean regime with a Censorship Board.

References

African Development Bank, (2012). Information and Communications Technology: Zimbabwe Report. http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-Documents/14.%20Zimbabwe%20Report_Chapter%2012.pdf retrieved Mat 25, 2017.

Agencies (May 4, 2015). 'ZBC now like Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation, Mandaza' <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-22321-ZBC+like+Rhodesia+Broadcasting+Corp/news.aspx> retrieved June 10, 2017.

Agencies (May 20, 2015). 'Amnesty International says govt is stifling media freedom' <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-22644-Govt+stifling+media+freedom,+Amnesty/news.aspx> retrieved June, 23, 2017.

Braathen, E. (2004). Institutions matter: Engineers and telecommunication development in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. *Telematics and informatics* 21 (2004) pp.25-47.

Djiofack-Zebaze, C. & , Keck A. (2009). Telecommunications services in Africa: The impact of WTO commitments and unilateral reform on sector performance and economic growth. *World Development*, Elsevier, 2009, 37 (5), pp.919-940.<hal-00387976>

Fanon, F. (2005). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

GoZ (2013). Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-economic Transformation (ZimAsset) <http://www.dpcorp.co.zw/assets/zim-asset.pdf> Retrieved June 20, 2017.

Goodstein, J.D & Velamuri, S.R. (2009). Power, legitimacy and maintaining institutional control: The battle for private sector telecommunication services in Zimbabwe. *Organizational Studies*, 30(05): pp489-508.

Hammar, A., Raftopoulos, B. & Jensen, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis*. Harare: Weaver Press.

Howard, P.N. & Mazaheri, N. (2009). Telecommunications reform, internet use and mobile adoption in the developing world. . *World Development*, Elsevier, 2009, 37 (7), pp.1159-1169.

Khapoya, V. B. (2012). *The African Experience*. (4th edition). New York: Routledge.

Magaisa, A. T. (May 5, 2015). 'Telecel saga: The problem of primitive accumulation in Zimbabwe' <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/columns-22342-Telecel+Primitive+accumulation+in+Zim/columns.aspx> retrieved May 11, 2017.

Magure, B. (2012). Foreign investment, black economic empowerment and militarised patronage politics in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30(1), 67-82. DOI:10.1080/02589001.2011.638154

Makhaya, G. & Roberts, S. (2003). Telecommunications in developing countries: Reflections from the South African experience. *Telecommunications Policy*, 27, 2003, 41-59.

Mawere, M (June 3, 2015). 'The good story of Telecel Zimbabwe and the lessons' <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-22926-Telecel+Zimbabwe+the+story+and+the+lessons/opinion.aspx> retrieved April, 20, 2017.

Mawere, M. (May 11, 2015). 'Lessons from the Telecel Zimbabwe saga: Corporate identity and citizenship' <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/opinion-22460-Lessons+from+the+Telecel+Zim+saga/opinion.aspx> retrieved May 24, 2017.

Mazango, E. (2005). Media games and shifting of spaces for political communication in Zimbabwe. *Westminster Papers for Communication and Culture*, Special Issue, November 2005, pp33-55. https://www.westminster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/20174/004zim_art3.pdf retrieved July 18, 2017.

McCormick, P.K. (2003). Telecommunications reform in Southern African Development Community. *Telecommunications Policy*, 27, 95-108.

Minges, M. (1999). Mobile cellular communications in the Southern African region. *Telecommunications Policy*, 23, 585-593.

Mpondi, D. (2015). The institutionalization of one man rule and the politics of succession and patronage in Zimbabwe. *International Relations and Diplomacy*, 3(8), 511-519. DOI: 10.17265/2328-2134/2015.08.002

Muzondidya, J. (2009). From buoyancy to crisis, 1980-1997. In B. Raftopoulos & Mlambo, A (eds). *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from the precolonial period to 2008*. Harare: Weaver Press.

Rabaka, R. (2017). Frantz Fanon, Fanonism and the Discourse on Decolonization. Lecture Series, Metropolitan State University of Denver, April 27th, 2017.

Rabaka, R. (2011). Revolutionary Fanonism: On Frantz Fanon's Modification of Marxism and Decolonization of Democratic Socialism. *Socialism & Democracy*, 25(1), 126-145.

Sirewu, B. (2011). Telecommunications Status in Zimbabwe. http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Emergency-Telecommunications/Documents/Zimbabwe_2011/Status%20of%20Telecommunications%20Sector%20in%20Zimbabwe%20-%20Current%20-%20POTRAZ.pdf retrieved July 27, 2017.

Wright, D. (1997). *New Directions in African Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers.

Zimbabwe National Policy for Information and Communication Technology, (2014). <https://cmchimakure.wordpress.com/2015/03/12/zims-new-ict-policy-in-full/> retrieved June 30, 2017.