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## Structural working conditions of journalism in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa:

Empirical findings from interviews with journalists reporting on  
democratisation conflicts

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## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of core comparative findings from MeCoDEM interviews with journalists in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. It investigates the structural working conditions of journalistic actors in transitional societies across a set of comparable democratisation conflicts. Empirically, the study builds on qualitative semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interviews with 100 professional journalists working for local news organisations in the four countries. Interviews employed the reconstruction method.

- The analysis confirms that journalism faces highly complex, ambivalent, contradictory and changing structural conditions in all MeCoDEM countries.
- The structural conditions of journalism are shaped by legacies of the past (marked by non-democratic regimes and sometimes colonial rule) and persisting power structures. The state and powerful political actors are perceived to play an important role in the media sector, mirrored in different forms of political interference directed at newsrooms and individual journalists in the way of repressive legal frameworks, political ownership and advertising, economic censorship and blackmail, as well as threats directed at the physical and psychological safety of journalists. Journalists perceive the relationship between different communities in society to be reflected in the constitution of and atmosphere among newsroom staff.
- Even though journalists operate in a more liberal environment than under autocratic rule in Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, media privatisation has created new dependencies and pressures: Against the background of profit-making pressures in capitalist and highly commercialised media markets, journalists claim to work under precarious working conditions, marked by time constraints due to short-staffed newsroom and juniorisation, high professional insecurity and poor salaries arguably making journalists vulnerable to bribery and corruption. Challenges relating to journalistic professionalism also translate into insufficient training on conflict-sensitive reporting and safety measures for journalists reporting on conflicts, low professional organisation and self-regulation, as well as a lack of professional solidarity and prestige.
- The salience of different elements of structural constraints varies depending on the stages of transition and consolidation which imply different degrees of democratisation relating to media structures. These become evident, for example, in differing levels of legal and practical media freedom, state interference in the newsrooms and the nature of threats against journalists.
- Also, the nature and salience of structural constraints depends on the conflict context: Violent protests (such as the service delivery protests in South Africa or the Pride Parade in Serbia) become a challenge especially for the physical and psychological safety of reporters working on the ground. Predominantly political conflicts (such as election campaigns) enhance various forms of overt and subtle political interference in the newsrooms and pressures against individual (mainly senior) journalists.

## Introduction

In specific situations such as democratisation conflicts and in certain countries, as well as in general terms, journalistic performance and journalism culture are informed by various interrelated elements: journalistic work practices, role perceptions, ethical orientations, and, last but not least, the *structural working conditions of journalism* (Neverla et al. 2015). Our report on journalistic work practices, role perceptions, ethical orientations of journalists reporting on democratisation conflicts in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa (see Lohner et al. 2016a) indicated that a strong intervening factor emerges within the *structural conditions of journalism* outside and inside the media organisation – possibly challenging journalistic ideals in practice.

Against this background, in this working paper we aim to systematically investigate which *structural working conditions* journalists face when reporting on democratisation conflicts in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, building on interviews with 100 local journalists conducted for the MeCoDEM project. We will outline how structural conditions impact on journalistic roles and performance, the potential of conflict-sensitive reporting (Howard, 2004, 2009, 2015) and the overall role of journalism within democratisation.

Based on Kleinstauber (2005, p.275), by *structural conditions*, we understand the totality of (formal and informal) orders and structures that characterise media and journalism in a certain space, most commonly, a country. These structural conditions are established on four levels: (1) the respective society in general, (2) the media system, (3) the professional field of journalism and (4) the particular media organisation. Several dimensions can be extracted and adapted from existing research on structural conditions of media and journalism, which is largely based in comparative studies on media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 2012; Blum 2014). These dimensions are listed and described in the table below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a more in-depth description of dimensions please refer to Lohner et al. (2016b).

**Table 1: Structural conditions of journalism: dimensions**

Dimension	Description
Historical development: Political stability of country	Changes of political systems / regimes over time and impact on the media system
Political system / form of Government	Formal and informal rules regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of people to vote</li> <li>• Degrees of division of power (system of checks and balances among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government)</li> <li>• Institutionalisation of the rule of law and civil liberties</li> </ul>
Political culture	Concepts, ideas and structures ruling both the functioning of institutions (media) and agency of political and societal actors as well as citizens <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrality of the state in aspects of society (low state intervention of liberal system vs. high involvement in welfare system)</li> <li>• Distribution of political power (majoritarian vs. consensus politics)</li> <li>• Relationship between political institutions and the public (individualised vs. organised pluralism)</li> <li>• Level of cleavage of political parties and ideologies (polarised vs. moderate vs. fragmented vs. hegemonic pluralism)</li> <li>• Adherence to formal rules, procedures and political institutions (rational-legal authority vs. clientelism)</li> <li>• Political culture of citizens: How people see the role of the state, treat different ethnicities, religions, linguistic groups, participate in community / political life (voter turnout); What kind of political debates/historical traditions they support</li> </ul>
Media freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of media freedom in legal framework (constitution, media laws and regulation on censorship, information access and control, legal protection of journalistic actors, legal autonomy of regulation bodies)</li> <li>• Policies and actions by state actors or legal bodies</li> </ul>
State control / regulation of media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intention of state control (Political control through organisational, personnel and content-oriented intervention vs. apolitical regulation via distributing frequencies, limiting advertising)</li> <li>• Media types that are being controlled/regulated, addressees of media control</li> <li>• Procedures regarding licensing of media outlets, accreditation of journalists</li> <li>• Character of regulation bodies (state or independent public institutions)</li> <li>• Nature of prosecution of journalists by state actors</li> </ul>
Media ownership and financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whether media are owned by private companies and/or the public or state</li> <li>• Market driven media, mixed-source financing, and state financing</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audience and market share of different media types</li> </ul>

Structure of media markets and patterns of information distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of media market / Level of internationalisation</li> <li>• (De-)centralisation of media market / system</li> <li>• Pluralism / concentration of ownership</li> <li>• Patterns of media distribution and circulation of information</li> </ul>
Orientation of media	Primary social focus that guides news production: commerce/market oriented, divergent, society oriented
Political / societal activity and parallelism of media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tendency of media to intervene in political debate / engage in advocacy / influence political events</li> <li>• Alignment between media outlets/individual journalists and political parties and societal actors (religious institutions, trade unions, business)</li> <li>• Polarisation of the public/audiences according to the political orientation of media which they consume</li> </ul>
Journalism Culture	Overall status of journalism and role perception of journalists in relation to other social systems: investigative/critical, ambivalent, or rather concordant to those in power
Journalistic Professionalism	Internal rules and norms of the professional field and media institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of professional education/training</li> <li>• Level of professional organisation</li> <li>• System of self-regulation</li> <li>• Awareness of professional norms and practices</li> <li>• Prestige/competitiveness of journalistic profession</li> </ul>

It is important to keep in mind that while structures are often referred to as something static or 'given', they are established by different *actors* and always subject to *change* (Hallin and Mancini 2012b). This particularly applies to countries in transition. Thus, agency and the procedural dimension are also an important focus of analysis when the structural dimensions of journalism are being investigated. Based on these considerations and the scheme of analysis we will provide a systematic and critical analysis of the structural conditions of journalists reporting on democratisation conflicts in the four countries.

Given the substantive focus of interviews, this paper will focus on the structural conditions on the level of the media system, the professional field of journalism and the particular media organisation, with information on the various dimensions differing in detail. Complementary information can be found in previous working papers mapping structural conditions of media and journalism in the four MeCoDEM countries based on a review of country-specific literature (Lohner et al. 2016b, c, d; Banjac et al. 2016 a, b).

## Methods

This study builds on **qualitative semi-structured face-to face in-depth interviews with 100 local journalists** in Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, and Serbia, which investigated the role of journalistic actors in transitional democracies across a set of comparable democratisation conflicts and themes of inquiry: journalistic work practices, ethical principles and dilemmas, role perceptions, and structural working conditions.

**Overall methodological principles** were drawn from the study's research interest and shortcomings in previous research (see: Neverla et al. 2015): (1) an *innovative* and sensitive *qualitative* empirical design was required, (2) an *inductive, exploratory approach* for certain research goals. In line with overall 'comparative case-study design' of the MeCoDEM project (see: Voltmer and Kraetzschmar, 2015) we compared journalistic practices, roles, ethics and working conditions *across countries and democratisation conflicts*, enabling case-specific in-depth analysis *within one country* as well as *across similar types of conflicts* in different world regions. (3) As democratisation is a dynamic, non-linear process, we applied methods that captured historical developments of journalistic cultures and working conditions *across time*. Finally, sampling accounted for *different media outlets, media types, and levels of professional hierarchy*.

The relevant **types of democratisation conflicts** selected were: (1) conflicts over the distribution and control of power in the shaping of a new political order; (2) conflicts over different conceptions of citizenship rights by previously marginalised groups; (3) election campaigns in democratising regimes as they often revive and reshape existing social divisions and conflicts, boosting polarisation and possibly facilitating violence; and (4) conflicts involving struggles over the accountability of old elites and how to deal with the authoritarian past through transitional justice (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar 2015, p.17-24).

#### *Selected conflict cases*

	<b>Citizenship (rights, minorities, identity)</b>	<b>Distribution of power</b>	<b>Elections</b>	<b>Transitional justice</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	Christian-Muslim violence (2013)	Maspero incident (2011) Constituent Assembly (2012) Mohammed Mahmoud events (2011)	Presidential election (2012 and 2014)	
<b>Kenya</b>	Somali community/ Kenya's 'war on terror' (2013-2014)		Presidential election (2007) Presidential election (2013)	(also includes ICC prosecution of Kenyatta)
<b>Serbia</b>	Pride Parade (2010)		Parliamentary election (2008) (issues: EU	Arrest and extradition of



		integration/Kosovo's secession)	Milosevic to the ICTY (2001)
<b>South Africa</b>	Xenophobic violence	Community protests <sup>2</sup> (2009, 2010; 2012, 2013) State of the Nation Address (2015)	

Interviews were conducted by researchers of the MeCoDEM country teams between November 2014 and May 2015: 24 interviews in Egypt, 26 in Kenya, 25 in Serbia and 25 in South Africa, totalling 102 hours and 39 minutes of interview conversation.<sup>3</sup> The researchers interviewed **professional journalists**, defined here as a person who works (as an employee or freelancer) for journalistic media, and is involved in producing and editing journalistic content or is otherwise in editorial supervision and coordination. The **sample** includes journalists working for different media and who covered the studied conflict cases: junior, middle-ranking and senior-level journalists, male and female journalists, from print, TV, radio and online media, public and private organisations. Journalists vary in age, experience, education and training, newsroom roles (reporter, subeditor, editor, editor-in-chief etc.) and the beats they cover.<sup>4</sup>

Interviewers relied on an interview guide ensuring that all core aspects and subject areas were covered across all journalists, countries and conflicts under study, while providing interviewers with flexibility to explore issues that might be specific to one interviewee, one country or one conflict case. Interviews employed the **reconstruction method** (Reich 2009, Flick et al. 2007). During the interviews journalists were shown a copy of a conflict story they had produced in the past to encourage them to recall and reconstruct processes involved in its coverage while reflecting on professional practice, roles, ethics and constraints inside and outside the newsroom. This method aimed at going beyond broad self-descriptions and 'socially desirable' answers – a common criticism of quantitative journalism surveys.<sup>5</sup>

Data analysis and interpretation were based on **qualitative content analysis**. Interview content was categorised and interpreted alongside theoretical concepts, and open coding techniques were applied to identify further patterns. To ensure high data quality and procedural

<sup>2</sup> Community protests are also interchangeably referred to as 'service delivery protests' by interviewees.

<sup>3</sup> The interviews have been organised, conducted, translated, transcribed and structured by our colleagues from the four country teams, namely Gamal Soltan, Yosra el Gendi, Rachel Naguib, Lama Tawakol, Aseel Yehia Osman (for Egypt); Nicole Stremlau, Toussaint Nothias, Seth Ouma, Charles Katua (for Kenya); Filip Ejduk, Aleksandra Krstic, Ana Stojiljkovic (for Serbia); Herman Wasserman, Tanja Bosch, Wallace Chuma, Kendi Osano, Sue Nyamnjoh, Travis Noakes (for South Africa). We thank them for their valuable work.

<sup>4</sup> A description of the sample of interviewed journalists can be found in Lohner et al. (2016a).

<sup>5</sup> Given the conditions in the field, reconstructions were done in 19 out of 25 interviews in Serbia and in 14 of the 26 Kenyan interviews. In Egypt, 14 reconstructions were done. Since many South African journalists who agreed to be interviewed faced time constraints, a reconstruction could only be done in 2 South African interviews.

consistency across countries and researchers, quality measures were applied during data collection and analysis.<sup>6</sup>

### **Perceived structural working conditions of journalists reporting on democratisation conflicts**

Since journalism is a social institution, the structural conditions of journalism are crucially shaped by the ***journalists' relationship with and level of (in)dependence from sources of power*** outside the media organisation, i.e. other social actors such as state power and politics, economics, cultural institutions, civil society and interest groups. Highlighting *mutual professional dependence*, journalists describe the external sources of power as crucial *sources of information* they regularly contact in times of conflict. This relationship depends on *accessibility and applied modes and quality of communication*: Journalists in all four countries express difficulties in receiving information from official sources such as government, political and religious actors and public authorities who have *little or no interest in disclosing information* to journalists – possibly limiting the comprehensiveness of conflict reporting.

Beyond professional (inter)dependence and partnership, journalists also disclose having close networks and *friendships* with sources of power, namely politicians and former colleagues now working in political PR. Some Serbian journalists claim limited ability to conduct investigative journalism before and during early stages of transition due to close relations with new political leaders whom they wanted to protect along with their political goals, by not reporting too critically. Whereas some journalists do not seem to problematize close relationships with external actors (especially political authorities), others point to the *need for professional distance and journalistic independence* in order to be able to do critical reporting. Many journalists describe being confronted with massive pressure and interference from political and other societal actors as *adversaries*, obviously limiting journalistic independence. Here, journalists in all four countries underline the *strong impact of state authorities and political actors*.

Among the ***instruments of external interference***, journalists mention both subtle measures and overt pressures or direct influence, measures targeted at individual journalists as well as

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<sup>6</sup> These included a clear and transparent design of research instruments, an interview manual with detailed instructions and explanations on what to do before, during and after the interview, three pilot interviews conducted in each country, ongoing communication among involved scholars, a transcription and translation manual to ensure consistency across countries, and a coding template for first data structuring. During analysis, the involved researchers (authors of this paper) regularly exchanged experiences and discussed each other's decisions on categorisation and coding as well as challenging interpretations of the data. Moreover, a quality check was conducted, where two main themes of inquiry were coded by both researchers.

on the institutional level of the media houses and the whole media sector. The following are claimed as most influential means of interference:

***Character and application of legal framework - media freedom and (political) control of media:*** While direct censorship by governmental actors is not mentioned openly by interviewees, Egyptian journalists refer to the possibilities of legal censorship, as “the laws prevent you to publish any news related to the military institution” (Egypt, 9) – adding that suggested stories might not be pursued or published because they criticise authority (“it is a nice story but it cannot be published because (...) it can lead to military trial”, Egypt, 9). A Kenyan journalist mentions that government would “censor some information when security is tensed or sensitive” (Kenya, 11), such as blocking the flow of news during the Westgate attacks.<sup>7</sup>

When it comes to the *character of media laws*, the Kenya Information and Communications Amendment Act implemented under the Kenyatta administration was seen as an example of the “government trying to change the law to gag the media” (Kenya, 22) by introducing high fines for journalists and organisations. A Kenyan journalist highlights the intimidating impact of this law, stressing that “if I write a story against a minister, he can refer me to tribunal and if they find me guilty they can charge me up to Ksh. 500, 000, while my media house pays Ksh. 20, 000, 000. In the event I can’t raise the Ksh. 500, 000 the tribunal has powers to come take my property, whatever that is registered in my name, be it my house, land” (Kenya, 3).

In Serbia, *legal provisions*, such as the rule obliging (broadcast) media to “broadcast all parties participating in the electoral process” potentially challenges the way a story is being framed (Serbia, 17).<sup>8</sup> Another challenge arises with regard to the *implementation of laws securing media freedom*: In Serbia, civil judges’ lack of familiarity with existing laws, especially the law on public information, is reported to have led to their incorrect use and application (Serbia, 22).

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<sup>7</sup> While this elicits the question of whether national security is a legitimate purpose or (mis)used by the regime to censor, in Egypt and Kenya, journalists considered *national security* over professional obligation to report new information and consequently feel obliged to self-censor: “(...) if there is something that effects national security matter, you will not allow it, even if it is professionally correct. Because here the principle is assuring the benefits of the collective is not harmed” (Egypt, 5). A Kenyan journalist adds: “(...) we want to give the correct, full information but at times in a few occasions we are sensitive to national security and no one tells us not to do anything” (Kenya, 22).

<sup>8</sup> The two Serbian public services (Radio Television of Serbia and Radio Television of Vojvodina) are obliged to ensure consistent and equal, free of charge, broadcast of all political parties participating in the elections. Commercial radio and TV stations have the right to decide on their own whether they will broadcast the news about the elections, but if they decide to do that for free, they are obliged to equally and without discrimination broadcast all parties and candidates. If commercial stations decide to broadcast paid political advertisements and other promotional material, they must respect the rule of equal representation of all parties and their candidates (see: Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 2012).

Interference furthermore includes *legal proceedings* at the organisational level against media houses (by political parties, businessmen or competing newspapers) (Egypt, 11) or against individual journalists. Several journalists mention *the risk of being taken to court* with a Kenyan journalist having had a “hit and run case pending in court” (Kenya, 13). Journalists in both Egypt and Kenya have experienced *arrests and temporary detention*.

Among the most influential means of exerting influence, journalists particularly in Egypt and Kenya mention ***political ownership and advertising***, referring to the massive influence of politically active businessmen as owners or advertisers of private media and the direct influence of the state, and thus the current government, in public service or state media. As a Serbian journalist states: “it all boils down to the impact of ownership” (Serbia, 13).

While *political ownership* in Kenya has been described as “factually true, legally untrue” (Nyanjom 2012) and media ownership structures lack transparency and politicians’ names rarely appear in the legal documents of the companies, journalists claim that “most media houses in Kenya are politically owned” (Kenya, 24) and “owners are in bed or in cahoots with different political power bases” (Kenya, 25). Consequently, journalists report that ownership conditions affected the coverage of the ICC trial of President Uhuru Kenyatta because politicians influenced newsrooms by instilling a “siege mentality” in the newsrooms (Kenya, 24). The outcome of the interference was censorship from “both in-house and from outside” (Kenya, 5) and a vetoing of publications critical of Kenyatta (Kenya, 5). Pointing to the enormous counterproductive impact of political ownership on independent journalism, a Kenyan journalist hopes that “there could be a way of disentangling media ownership from political players because unless that is done, I don’t see things changing (...)” (Kenya, 9).

In this context, journalists report that politically active owners, and the state’s influence over public service media, have direct interference in the newsroom and *human resource policies* resulting in an atmosphere of existential fear and insecurity through loss of employment if coverage of media owners or associated elites is too critical. Journalists in all countries claim having been reproached for certain articles, a particular headline, or a published interview with a certain figure and that promotions within media organisations depend on political alignment.

A “punishment and reward system” (Kenya, 1) is also applied via ***economic censorship and blackmail*** with advertisers using this financial leverage to influence media houses and journalists by threatening to withdraw advertising if met with negative reporting, resulting in *self-censorship*. This constraint is predominantly mentioned in Kenya, where the government

is the biggest advertiser (Kenya, 17). Findings thus confirm previous research that government-backed advertising exists in the vacuum of business advertising and has led to a largely unspoken threat of “government censorship” (Relly and Gonzalez de Bustamante, 2013).

Another structural constraint mentioned prominently by interviewed journalists refers to *threats directed at the **physical and psychological safety of journalists*** (for more details see Lohner and Banjac 2017, forthcoming). Safety threats in all four countries occur at the individual (i.e. personal, including family) and organisational level, they are directed at the respective media organisation and the whole journalistic profession.

*Individual threats* are manifested psychologically and physically. Experiences of *intimidation* include being “followed”, “escorted” (by the intelligence), having one’s conversations, actions and movement monitored (Kenya, 1) or receiving “anonymous calls” to establish the journalist’s involvement in a case (Kenya, 26). Journalists asking controversial questions are blacklisted by political fronts, banned from press conferences and excluded from accessing information (Kenya, 1, 3, 13).

*Death threats* were experienced in all four countries, and delivered by organised crime groups in Kenya (Kenya, 5, 25), Pride Parade hooligans and the leader of the Serbian Radical Party (Serbia, 17, 25) and the Muslim Brotherhood’ in Egypt (Egypt, 20). Critical stories invite *personal insults* from right-wing organisations against the Pride Parade (Serbia, 3), “public condemnation” by politicians accusing journalists of mounting a “conspiracy” (Kenya, 24), or attacks via social media by “turning the spotlight” on the journalists “instead of the story” (SA, 13). Psychological threats also include *breaches of data safety*, with journalists suspecting their phones were tapped and conversations monitored (Kenya, 1, 10, 24, 25, 26), challenging protection and retention of sources as well as *interrogations* and temporary *detention* (already mentioned above).

Where journalists report *physical attacks*, these include being “slapped” by citizens for “reporting for the establishment” (Kenya, 19+20) and by a protester for taking photos of killed protesters (SA, 15); getting “stuck in the middle of clashes, the beatings, the killings”, being beaten up (Egypt, 15), being “kidnapped” by political factions and “harassed” during the June 30 Revolution (Egypt, 20); reporting on community protests while police fire live ammunition (SA, 7); and being in a police van intercepted by anti-Pride Parade rioters who want to set the van on fire (Serbia, 19). Although none of the interviewed journalists reported being injured, some mentioned colleagues nearly getting killed in post-election violence in Kenya (Kenya, 4)

and Egyptian journalists “assassinated” during coverage of the January 25 Revolution (Egypt, 20). Journalists covering the 2007 and 2013 Kenyan elections were reported to have been “injured or ejected from rallies” and some “had their equipment destroyed” (Kenya, 9).<sup>9</sup>

*Psychological safety* eroded through repeated exposure to *trauma from witnessing death and violence*. “Reporting the Westgate Mall attacks left one journalist “shocked” and “traumatised” (Kenya, 2); another caught inside a police van that was set on fire said “you don’t need such trauma in your life” (Serbia, 19). A journalist covering community protests describes a colleague experiencing a panic attack after witnessing a person being shot (SA, 7). Beyond individual trauma, Kenyan journalists spoke of a *collective trauma* in the wake of 2007 post-election ethnic clashes (Kenya, 19+20). Further sources of trauma emerged around the challenge of *balancing emotions* against the journalists’ professional obligation to remain detached. Journalists spoke of attempting “to save lives” (Kenya, 19+20), confronting perpetrators of crimes (Egypt, 10) and questioning whether to interfere in xenophobic attacks and stop the violence or witness and report (SA, 24), while contemplating the psychological effects: “What does that do to you? When you get home, do you even sleep?” (Kenya, 19+20); “I go into conflict situations and often go home at night and cry because I didn't do anything to help” (SA, 20).

Safety challenges at the *organisational level* include *legal proceedings* (see above) and closing of media houses when they are “about to publish something sensitive” (Kenya, 11). A Kenyan journalist reports that “at times the government uses for example the spy agencies to *spy on the media houses*” (Kenya, 11). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood slandered particular media calling for their boycott and thus reducing viewership and advertising revenue (Egypt, 11), while damage to media house property occurred during Kenya’s post-election violence in 2007 (Kenya, 19/20).

Most commonly mentioned *actors behind the safety threats* were, broadly speaking, “powerful leaders” (Kenya, 10) such as government, state authorities and police (Kenya, 1), organised crime groups (Kenya, 10), hooligans and rioters (Serbia, 2), as well as citizens (Kenya, 19/20). Threats intensify during election periods and heightened political competition (Kenya, 3) as power structures become vulnerable to an upsurge in conflict between opposing parties (Kenya, 3, 9). Additionally, criminal behaviour and corruption (Kenya, 11, 17) appear to be the *riskiest topics for journalists to report*, as these usually involve “high-profile journalists and the ruling class” (Kenya, 19/20).

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<sup>9</sup> As cameras carried by journalists are often personal property and seldom insured by the media organisation, damage or confiscation can “effectively cripple their work and livelihood” (Aslam 2015).

These safety threats have a considerable and presumably counterproductive impact on journalistic standards and performance as journalists explain juggling their safety against the risks of getting a good story (SA, 15). The security of journalists assigned to cover conflicts has to be taken into consideration during high-risk events, presenting limitations to the selection and pursuit of a topic. Serbian journalists report that for the Pride Parade it was decided “that high-profile journalists do not go to the scene as they will be recognizable and will be the target as soon as they appear. We agreed that women would not go to the Pride but men could, who would be able to defend themselves in case of attack” (Serbia, 1). The danger of covering the Somali conflicts and Al-Shabaab meant Kenyan journalists engaged in armchair reporting, depending on second-hand information from the Kenya Defence Force (Kenya, 23).

While some journalists deny the impact or at least stress that they do not want to be influenced, other journalists in Kenya were clear that safety threats and political interference had a “chilling effect” (Kenya, 25) limiting investigative and watchdog journalism as “the media plays safe” (Kenya, Interview 19/20). Others describe the ethical sacrifices in their efforts to cover electoral corruption in exchange for preserving the safety of their families and themselves, saying: “So at times you let your ethics be rubbished by the lies that you publish. (...) There is no story that is bigger than your life” (Kenya, 5).

Based on interviews, ***the (commercial, profit-oriented) media logics*** can be identified as another intervening factor on the structural level, speaking to the dimension “orientation of media”. Journalists report that conflicts which exhibit *contentious topics* are more likely to be reported because they correspond with universal media logics of topic selection and framing. However, this seems to considerably reduce chances for conflict-sensitive reporting as well as reporting on peaceful protests. It might therefore have a negative impact on the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Furthermore, while investigative reporting of events is claimed to be crucial for in-depth conflict reporting, the media’s presence at events might also produce *manufactured news and pseudo-events*: Interviewees reveal that common media logics of topic selection and framing which promote violence and conflict as important news values are likely to turn peaceful protests violent once the media come to the scene (SA, 1, 10, 16) because protesters understand that “if it bleeds, it leads” (SA, 1); an approach that was also evident in the coverage of the Pride Parade where hooligans fashioned their communication by “creating a scandal” in order to “obtain the space in media” (Serbia, 3). Journalists also have to ensure they are not dealing

with a “rent a crowd” phenomenon (South Africa, 13) – people hired by conflict actors (such as politicians) to participate in a protest with a promise of receiving food or some other incentive.

In terms of limits to the *so-called balance-norm*, journalists often feel able to bring out only the most important and contentious sides of a case because of the editor’s requests to both simplify and sensationalise conflicts. A Kenyan journalist points out that in the context of reporting on ICC trials the “bits of the victims and their lawyer” were removed from the scripts based on editors’ instruction – sensationalizing news (Kenya, 24).

Linked to commercial media logics and the structural aspect of media ownership and financing, interviewees reveal that **profit-making pressures** dominating highly commercialised media markets lead to limited resources, e.g. time constraints due to short-staffed newsroom and juniorisation also in the four MeCoDEM countries. Journalists mention that due to time and space limitations they “only get to do a percentage of the stories” they want “to report and reflect on” (South Africa, 23) and that they have to concentrate on key events of a certain issue, e.g. final conventions during election processes (Serbia, 17). Time constraints limited journalists from following up on stories or pursuing them in greater depth, leading to a lack of understanding of complex issues. Especially South African journalists criticised the consequences of ‘parachute journalism’, explaining that too often when it comes to covering community-based conflicts, journalists parachute in only when there is a visible conflict, failing to understand the deeper issues and reasons behind the conflicts. Profit-making pressures and the unstable economic situation of media houses in the four countries also reflect in *poor salaries and job insecurities* which affect especially journalists working for small media houses, and freelance journalists who are only paid if their story is published.

The precarious financial situation arguably makes journalists vulnerable to **bribery and corruption**: While sampled journalists claim never to have accepted bribes, they report having been approached in the past, with interviewees from Serbia and South Africa saying they have been offered money in exchange for favourable reporting (Serbia, 22; South Africa, 1). Across the four countries under study, bribery and brown envelope journalism appears to be most pressing in Kenya, where poorly paid journalists are reported to protect sources such as politicians, business people, police or military in exchange for “handouts” (Kenya, 2, 6) – a mechanism which obviously counteracts investigative, critical and conflict-sensitive journalism: “this takes away the issue of objectivity, the issue of exposing” (Kenya, 6), “if you are given a lift by the governor or by an officer you can’t be critical” (Kenya, 8). Here, journalists claim that freelancers and those working for smaller or rural media outlets are especially vulnerable since their salaries were lower and corruption was said to be greater and more likely to go



undetected: “If I earn so little money and someone brings me money, school fees for my children, I’ll run a story” (Kenya, 19+20). On the other hand, Kenyan journalists also mention anti-corruption measures in some media houses, claiming that while it is not possible to “pay everyone on the grassroots so well so that they are immune to corruption” they would make sure that “gate keepers, people who decide what goes into their paper” would “have a lot to lose.” (Kenya, 14).

In summary, our study confirms previous research which found that “the processes of commercialisation and tabloidization” which quickly follow the growth of media markets in newly democratising countries can be viewed as obscuring and – at least partly – “inhibiting the democratic roles the free media were entrusted by normative media theory” (Jebri et al. 2013: 14).

Relating to the ***societal parallelism of media*** another structural constraint is the degree to which the *relationship between different (ethnic, religious) communities in society* is reflected in the constitution of and atmosphere among newsroom staff. This potentially affects journalistic performance, especially when covering conflicts over ethnic or religious tensions and citizenship.

Not speaking *the language of a community* they were reporting on or sharing their *ethnic background* posed challenges for journalists especially in Kenya and South Africa. In Kenya, mistrust between different ethnic communities limits access to sources and information and safety of journalists reporting on the ground, preventing them from covering areas populated by other ethnic groups and hindering communication between politicians and journalists from different communities, e.g. during the 2007 elections. Consequently, newsrooms are likely to assign journalists to cover their own communities in order to facilitate access to sources and information and guarantee safety of reporters (Kenya, 8, 19+20). In South Africa “it’s absolutely essential we have reporters who speak Xhosa, who live in areas which are often affected by the service delivery protests” (South Africa, 23).

Moreover, journalists admit that their *ethnic background* and by extension their affiliation or favouritism for political parties or actors has challenged journalists’ ability to remove political bias from their reporting. Furthermore, journalists (in Kenya) admit a *division of newsroom staff along ethnic lines* and competing attitudes in the newsrooms based on ethnic affiliations. A reflection of these societal ethnic cleavages among journalists would not necessarily be counterproductive if the internal diversity in the newsrooms was reflected in diverse media reporting. It is however problematic if newsrooms are characterised by a *lacking ethnic*

*diversity* which was noted in Kenyan media where only very few journalists have Somali background, thus hindering reporting on the Somali case: “This company has more than 600 to 700 workers, but the Somalis aren’t even more than five. And there is not even one editor” (Kenya, 4).

Furthermore, *gender inequalities within society* are also reflected within the newsrooms and affect journalistic performance. Especially in Egypt and Kenya, female journalists encounter burdens when entering the profession and accessing senior level positions, and face specific threats, including sexual harassment also by male colleagues which often goes unreported given their inequitable professional dependency. Female journalists reporting from a protest might receive “inappropriate comments” (SA, 23), be held back by their families or editors and encouraged to take a male colleague with them (Egypt, 15) or compile stories from material fed back by male journalists attending the Pride Parade “who would be able to defend themselves in case of attack” (Serbia, 1).

***Journalistic professionalism***, i.e. the internal rules and norms of the professional field and media institutions can be identified as another intervening factor. Among important aspects constituting professionalism, the aforementioned *insecure and precarious job situation* of reporters in all four countries is deemed to limit individual motivation and integrity and consequently quality of journalistic output.

When it comes to *self-regulation mechanisms* as important aspect of professionalism, i.e. evaluation of and adherence to bodies such as Press Councils and journalism associations, these are deemed by interviewed journalists as weak, mistrusted and therefore ignored – especially in Serbia.

Regarding *professional norms and practices*, both the existence of codes of ethics or codes of conduct as well as awareness and adherence by journalists seems to vary: Since reference to ethical codes was not extensive by interviewees one may assume that they do not play a significant guiding role in journalists’ daily work. While a Kenyan journalist expresses doubt that journalists know about the Code of conduct issued by the Kenya Media Council (Kenya, 8), another confirmed that “each media house has its own code of ethics” and that the “Kenya Media Council at the moment is working on a joint code of ethics for journalists” (Kenya, 11) – pointing to a potential professionalisation in this regard. A South African journalist relies on a code of ethics implemented by their own newspaper: “I think it’s a good thing that one has a guideline, like a map” (South Africa, 1).

Pointing to an uncertain professional situation and a politicised profession in Egypt, one

journalist said the “profession was harmed” with respect to adherence to ethical principles and codes of conduct (Egypt, 6), while another explained that their newspaper’s ethical codes are built on “personal criteria” likely to change with every new leadership of the newspaper (Egypt, 5).

While on the one hand journalists report that story assignments within the newsrooms are based on expertise, on the other hand the professionalisation of the working environment seems to be limited with journalists noting *insufficient institutionalised training, particularly on conflict-sensitive reporting and safety measures* for conflict journalists (e.g. interviewing in conflict situations, protecting sources, safety equipment). A Kenyan journalist traces the “unfortunate and irresponsible” reporting on the Westgate Attacks back to insufficient training of colleagues with “(...) no experience in covering security, meaning they haven’t attended any course besides what they left with from college and they aren’t trained as journalists” (Kenya, 13).

Additionally, journalists stress that there are *no agreed safety policies* within and across journalistic organisations. Kenyan media houses lack safety policies guaranteeing journalists’ emergency evacuation, rescue and insurance for injuries sustained in the line of duty (Kenya, 19+20). Journalists claim that there are *no mechanisms to address trauma from witnessing death and violence while reporting on conflict*: “the issue of trauma for journalists hasn’t been really handled” (Kenya, 19+20).

The sense of belonging to a *professional community* is another aspect indicating the level of professionalism. Here, journalists in Kenya bemoan a *lack of professional solidarity* to address threats against some journalists through joint action by the entire profession (Kenya, 24). Some of this might be owed to fierce competition between media brands, and technological convergence that forces journalists to meet round-the-clock deadlines, putting war and conflict journalists under increased risk (Saleh, 2015).

Lastly, *the public prestige of the journalistic profession* and trust in journalism as a public institution is perceived to be limited in all four countries. Consequently, journalists lament low public support and awareness of the value of independent journalism – e.g. deeming the Serbian public “not ready to support any kind of independent media project” (Serbia, 13). A South African journalist illustrates the gap between the experienced security risks and the lack of public awareness of safety challenges: “They see a completed product on the TV or read it in the newspaper but that’s a fraction of what we see, smell, hear, feel on the ground every day” (SA, 20). Consequently, journalists cannot expect support and protection by the public

and civil society actors when facing interference and impunity of violence against their profession which possibly limits their commitment to engage in conflict-sensitive reporting.

Finally, another structural aspect impacting on journalistic performance refers to the described **decision-making processes and editorial policies within the newsrooms**: On the one hand, journalists describe regular and intensive discussions through regular meetings of all members of the newsroom and institutionalised mechanisms of moderating and gatekeeping (through editors) in order to guarantee “checks and balances” and to avoid personal biases in reporting (e.g. Kenya, 8). However, on the other hand, journalists highlight the strong position of individual decision-makers (especially editors) in the decision-making process. Under these circumstances, the selection and framing of topics very much depends on *political attitudes or affiliations* and *individual preferences of senior journalists*. Certain topics might be requested by the editorial policy of the media outlet, as one Serbian journalist explains with regard to the reporting on the Kosovo question (Serbia, 5). Other stories might be ignored based on the editor’s personal motives; one Serbian editor states that their negative view on homosexuality informed their decision about whether and how to report on the Pride Parade: “(...) my editorial policy is that we ignore the parade and the sick story surrounding it” (Serbia, 10).

## Conclusions and outlook

Our analysis confirmed that journalism as a social institution faces **highly complex, ambivalent, contradictory and changing structural conditions** in all four countries. These structural conditions are marked, first and foremost, by repressive legal frameworks limiting media freedom, pressure and interference by political and other societal actors in the way of political ownership or economic censorship, corruption and threats aimed at individual journalists and media organisations. Besides, there are limitations to the professionalisation of the working environment perceived to be providing insufficient training on conflict-sensitive reporting and safety measures for journalists reporting on conflicts, weakened by limited resources, time constraints, financial insecurity, short-staffed newsrooms, juniorisation, deficient know-how as well as low professional solidarity and prestige. These structural constraints limit the implementation of normative ideals and influence conflict-sensitive reporting in a potentially counterproductive way.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to comparative findings, we can find **various common features** across all four countries. As media systems and organisations are not created from scratch after the breakdown of old regimes but are reshaped in the process of transition, obviously, in all four

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<sup>10</sup> These tensions will be further discussed in a future book chapter on ‘conflict-sensitive journalism’.

countries, the structural conditions of journalism are shaped by *legacies of the past* (marked by non-democratic regimes and sometimes colonial rule) and *persisting power structures*, which have been identified as key ingredients in the structural conditions of journalism in transitional societies (Lohner et al. 2016b). The hybrid forms of political governance and political cultures featuring a divergence of ideologies and a high level of clientelism are to varying degrees reflected in the media systems of all countries, i.e. in the form of political ownership and a high level of societal parallelism of media which fosters clientelist reporting. The constitutional guarantee of media freedom is challenged by ambivalent or openly repressive media laws or the reluctance of governments to implement fundamental reform. Accordingly, the state and powerful political actors play an important role in the media sector, mirrored in different forms of political interference directed at newsrooms and individual journalists. Though safety concerns vary, journalists in all four countries are likely to face pressure and harassment, and risk prosecution.

At the same time, even though journalists operate in a more liberal environment than under autocratic rule in Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, media privatisation has created *new dependencies and pressures*: Against the background of *profit-making pressures* in capitalist and highly commercialised media markets, journalists work under precarious conditions, marked by high professional insecurity, low salaries, as well as a low professional status and fragile social reputation. All case study countries face challenges relating to journalistic education and (conflict-sensitive) training, professional organisation and self-regulation, which impact on journalistic professionalism.

At the same time, the comparative analysis reveals ***structural conditions specific to each country***, despite the fact that some procedures and institutions have been borrowed from the same (western) 'sources'. The salience of different elements of structural constraints varies dependant on varying stages of transition and consolidation which imply different degrees of democratisation relating to media structures. These become evident, for example, in differing levels of legal and practical media freedom, state interference in the newsrooms and the nature of threats against journalists. Moreover, there are significant differences in the structures of media landscapes, professional field and media organisations, which reflect the size, economic situation, infrastructure, and cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the four countries.

Also, the nature and salience of structural constraints depends on the ***conflict context***: The level of physical violence and political interference, in particular, vary among the conflict types. Violent protests (such as the service delivery protests in South Africa or the Pride Parade in Serbia) become a challenge especially for the physical and psychological safety of reporters

working on the ground. Predominantly political conflicts (such as election campaigns) enhance various forms of overt and subtle political interference in the newsrooms and pressures against individual (mainly senior) journalists.

In this context, on a general level, our analysis demonstrates the ***importance of conflict communication as a case study*** with regard to structural conditions: in fact, conflicts (and journalistic communication about them) can be considered as test cases for the function of journalism-related structures, and hence feature as possible catalysts for changes to these structures.

Furthermore, the need to consider *agency* and the *procedural dimension* while investigating structural conditions of media and journalism (as highlighted in the introduction), has been confirmed by the analysis: in all MeCoDEM countries, structural conditions have been (re-) designed by both central political incumbents, economic actors and media practitioners to serve their personal interests. Moreover, the structural conditions changed repeatedly during the different phases of transition and consolidation: not in a linear but rather in a circular mode, as democratisation as an ongoing learning process has experienced various backlashes and reboots across time in all countries.

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