Ethical Dilemmas in Reporting Corruption: 
A Comparative Analysis of Government 
and Private Newspapers in Tanzania

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Abstract
Almost all corruption scandals are exposed by privately-owned newspapers in Tanzania but these newspapers are also accused of being more unethical than government-owned newspapers. The main purpose of this article is therefore to compare ethical dilemmas in coverage of grand corruption facing government and private newspapers. The findings suggest that the biggest ethical dilemma facing journalists in private newspapers was whether or not to respect individual privacy. On the other hand, journalists working with government newspapers are more concerned about whether or not to safeguard public interests. The article found that many ethical problems facing private newspapers are structural, and give the business and ruling elite room to turn the press into a battlefield for special interests. Several strategies are discussed regarding how to address conflict of interest issues facing both private and government-owned newspapers in the country.

Key Terms: Corruption, Newspapers, Media Services Bill, Ethical Dilemma, Journalists

Résumé
En Tanzanie, presque tous les scandales de corruption ont été exposés pour des journaux privés. Seulement, ces mêmes journaux sont accusés d’être encore plus corrompus que ceux dits officiels. L’objectif principal de cet article est donc de comparer les dilemmes éthiques dans les couvertures médiatiques des cas de grande corruption concernant le gouvernement et les journaux privés. Les résultats de recherche suggèrent que le plus grand de ces dilemmes pour les journalistes de la presse privée est de savoir si oui ou non ils doivent respecter la vie privée. De l’autre

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côté, ceux qui travaillent dans les journaux officiels sont plus préoccupés par le sauvegarde ou non des intérêts publics. Selon cet article, la majorité de problèmes des journaux privés sont d’ordre structurel. Ce qui donne aux riches et aux gouvernants l’opportunité de transformer la presse en un champ de bataille pour leurs intérêts spéciaux. Cet article discute de plusieurs stratégies visant à appréhender les questions de conflit d’intérêt qui existent entre les journaux privés et ceux dits officiels.

**Introduction**

It is often claimed that the proliferation of newspapers in Tanzania had caused them to throw journalistic ethics to the wind (Bgoya 2005; Mpangala 2006). One explanation for this is that while the number of media houses has proliferated since the introduction of the multi-party system of government in 1992, this has not been met with a corresponding rise in the quality of training available to journalists (Muthee Jones and Mhando 2007:13). As such, the profession has been ‘invaded’ by people who have no training in journalism and this has contributed to the falling standards of the profession (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:7).

Other reasons include lack of specialisation, a hostile environment and corruption (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2007:13). For example, Jones and Mhando 2007:11 quotes Kilimwiko (2006) as saying that most journalists do not have contracts and are forced to survive as freelance reporters. Also, journalists work for over 80 hours per week most of the time, without overtime compensation. Inevitably, this reality led to a situation where standards plunged, professionalism suffered, and people were unnecessarily hurt by some media products (Media Council of Tanzania 2008a:5).

Compounding this situation is the claim that journalists in privately-owned newspapers tend to be more unethical than their colleagues with government newspapers (see Bgoya 2005; Mpangala 2006). Yet, almost all corruption scandals, known in Kiswahili as *Ufisadi*, are exposed by the private newspapers in Tanzania (Hussmann and Mmuya 2007; Chêne 2009). Issues that have been reported extensively and consistently by the private newspapers include high level corruption in government, suspicious mining contracts with foreign firms, unimplemented power generation contracts and alleged Bank of Tanzania shady deals (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:30).

News reports indicate that *Ufisadi* are committed by ruling and bureaucratic elites, who happen to control the government newspapers (Tegambwage 2008:3). Journalists who work with these government news-
papers face ethical dilemma, about whether to suppress a story of public interest such as corruption scandal or not (Rioba and Karashani 2002:13). This article, therefore, is intended to compare ethical dilemmas confronted by private and government newspapers in their reportage of corruption stories in Tanzania, focusing specifically on the types of ethical dilemmas. The article also suggests ways in which ethical practices in reportage of corruption could be improved in Tanzania.

Using a quantitative survey method approach for this study, our results support the existing theoretical and empirical views that government newspapers are less effective than privately-owned ones in safeguarding public interests. The article draws from a previous study conducted by the author in 2009 and funded by the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT).

The Role of Newspapers in Combating Corruption

As corruption continues to take centre-stage in policy discussions in developing countries, the role of the media becomes all the more important (Coyne 2005:9). The media can act as a force against corruption in ways that are both tangible and intangible (Stapenhurst 2000:2). Whereas the former usually relates to the breaking of a particular news story, or set of stories, bringing corruption to public attention, the latter is linked to the broader social impact of the existence of an independent media (U4 2009:2).

The tangible (direct) ways in which the news media perform this function include those in which some sort of visible outcome can be attributed to a particular news story or series of stories. For instance, the launching of investigation by authorities forced the resignation of a crooked politician, the firing of an official, and so on (Stapenhurst 2000:3). Frequently, news reports prompt official investigations or proceedings into allegations of public or private sector corruption, thus providing an important impulse to official bodies charged with investigating or prosecuting corrupt acts (U4 2009:3).

Intangible (indirect) effects, by contrast, can be characterised as those checks on corruption which arise from the broader social climate of enhanced political pluralism, enlivened public debate and a heightened sense of accountability among politicians, public bodies and institutions that are inevitably the by-product of a hard-hitting, independent news media (Stapenhurst 2000:18). As such, the press has constituted itself into a positive force, which has etched anti-corruption crusade in the consciousness of the people (Alawode 2008:6).
Citizens have imperfect information about government actions, and that mass media can therefore enhance citizens’ abilities to scrutinise government actions (Besley et al. 2002:45). In fact, when the media fosters debate in a way that encourages members of the public to become politically active, it serves as an indirect counterweight to the lack of mass participation in politics often associated with high levels of corruption (U4 2009:3). In Tanzania, for example, the void left by the absence of strong opposition parties is often filled by the watchdog newspapers, which make the government more accountable.

Altogether, the most obvious examples of journalism’s potential to curb corruption can be seen when politicians or senior public officials lose their jobs as a consequence of the public outcry or legal proceedings that follow the fearless reporting on corruption (Stapenhurst 2000:4). In Tanzania, for instance, the series of investigative stories by MwanaHalisi, Kulikoni and ThisDay newspapers helped in unearthing the External Payments Account (EPA) scandal, which led to the firing of the Governor of the Bank of Tanzania (BoT) in 2008.

Another way the press has been sustaining the war is unearthing anti graft cases that would have been buried (Alawode 2008:6). The case in point was the continuous reportage of suspected foul play in Richmond Emergency Power project in Tanzania, which led to the formation of Parliamentary Select Committee, whose findings led to the resignation of the Prime Minister along with other two ministers and dissolution of the entire cabinet in 2008. As such, qualitative, independent media reporting on corruption can play an important role in pressuring the government to act in the public interest (Nogara 2009:2).

Private Versus State-owned Newspapers

A crucial question is how to organise newspapers ownership in order to counter corruption and other social ills effectively. Djankov et al. (2002) and Coyne (2005) present two schools of thought with regard to private and government ownership of the media. On government ownership of the media, this school of thought holds that privately-owned media produce selective information and disseminate biased news reflecting the interests of the private owners, therefore neglecting the interests of the public at large. It argues further that the logic behind government ownership of the media is that the state serves the public interest, publicly-owned media will likewise do the same by disseminating accurate and unbiased news to the general public (Pigouvian theory).
Private ownership of the media is considered the exact opposite of the government-ownership approach. This school of thought contends that state-owned media will distort information to benefit incumbent political agents. It also argues that state functionaries, given their penchant for preventing changes in the status quo that threaten their entrenched positions and authority, will abuse the media. Private media ownership, therefore, assumes that private owners will act in their own self-interest. Using this logic, one can also assume that public owners will act in the same manner. However, private ownership brings discipline through competition (public choice theory).

The two theories of newspapers ownership explained above have distinct implications for both the determinants and the consequences of who owns the media. For example, the public interest theory predicts that more ‘benign’ or ‘public-spirited’ governments would promote higher levels of media ownership, and that the consequence of such ownership is greater freedom of the press, more economic and political freedom, and better social outcomes (Djankov et al. 2002:2). Yet, public choice theory predicts exactly the opposite.6

Ownership, of course, is not the only determinant of media content (Djankov et al. 2002:4). In many countries, even with private ownership, government has many ways of regulating the media industry by providing direct subsidies and advertising revenues to them, restricting access to newsprint and information collection, and harassing journalists when all other measures fail (ibid).7 As Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2007:11) observed, media owners (government or private) do interfere in breaking stories on certain scandals, especially those involving the elite or their relatives.

It is, therefore, fair to assume that owners in both categories self-interested and will provide biased news to the general public. The main difference between the two is that the ‘state-owned’ media theory requires a monopoly over the industry, while the ‘privately-owned’ theory fosters competition (Coyne 2005:4). Many African countries, including Tanzania, have a mixture of the two and fall between these two extremes.

Given these two types of newspapers ownership in Tanzania, understanding their implications for reporting corruption is therefore imperative. The key issue becomes the level of ethical dilemmas that private and government newspapers face in reporting such occurrences. Indeed, individual journalists are often confronted by the dilemma of having to act ethically according to the dictates of their profession or act according to the wish of their employers (Rioba and Karashani 2002:23).
Newspaper Reports on Corruption in Tanzania: The Context

The re-introduction of pluralism into Tanzanian politics in 1992 resulted in the breakup of government monopoly over the media, producing an unprecedented proliferation of media houses and the emergence of a lively free press. This was after three decades of one-party rule. By 1997, there were more than a dozen daily newspapers and scores of weekly newspapers.

Statistics from the Registrar of Newspapers (see the State of the Media Report 2008) indicate that up to June 2008, there were 210 newspapers and 404 other publications (see also Media Council of Tanzania 2009:12). While the number of private national newspapers is currently estimated at 39, government has only three (see Muthee-Jones and Mhando 2007:21). Indeed, the media landscape in Tanzania is characterised by diversity, independence and sustainability (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2007:5).

Nevertheless, it took the government more than ten years to formulate the new Information and Broadcasting Policy in 2003. The document envisions the existence of a strong, diverse and plural media, with ownership in public, private and community hands, and guided by professional ethics (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:4). Further, the 14th amendments of 2005 to the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 adopted the international approach on recognising freedom of information by repealing Article 18 and replacing it with a new Article which states:

Every person (a) has the freedom of opinion and expression; (b) has the right to seek, receive and impart information regardless of national frontiers; (c) has the freedom to communicate and has the right of not being interfered with in the course of his/her communications; and (d) has the right to be informed at all times of various events which are of importance to the lives and activities of the people and also of issues of importance to society.

With these amendments, the right to access information is now a constitutional right (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:5). However, the laws, which are conflicting with this right have remained in force (Kilimwiko 1996:76). The laws include Public Security Act 1970, Preventive Detention Act 1962, Government Secrets Act and many other 40 oppressive laws declared by the Nyalali Commission as unconstitutional.

In fact, the history of the media in Tanzania shows that after independence in 1961, particularly during the one-party era, the country adopted the theoretical framework used in dictatorial and authoritarian societies (Mpangala 2006:11). For example, the colonial Newspaper Ordinance was
amended in 1968 to shift the control of newspapers from market criteria to the hands of the Executive President who, at his pleasure, could proscribe a newspaper if, in his opinion, it was in the public interest or in the interest of peace and good order to do so (Kilimwiko 1996:77).

The noose tightened further round the neck of freedom of the press in 1976 when the Newspapers Act of 1976 (No. 3) was passed (Kilimwiko 1996:76). Under this Act, the Minister for Information has powers to cancel the registration of a newspaper if he is satisfied that the paper ‘is being used or is likely to be used for unlawful purpose or for any purpose prejudicial to or incompatible with the maintenance of peace, order and good government’. Still, the media sector has been changing, both in terms of the number and the nature of ownership, as a result of liberalisation (UNDP 2003:7).

Over the past two decades, there have been bold and courageous newspapers springing up as a result of the media liberalisation. Immediately after the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, for instance, newspapers like *Family Mirror, Motomoto, Heko* and *Wakati ni Huu* began to champion the reform agenda as well as playing the watchdog role. It was the first time since independence that authorities could be taken to task on official policies and the conduct of public officials, unlike what happens in the secretive party caucuses and cabinet meetings (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:30).

The democratisation process that started in 1992 presented opportunities for minimising corruption by introducing greater accountability and transparency in governance, including development of a substantial private press to spearhead the fight against corruption. As such, Tanzania enjoys a vibrant newspaper reporting. Yet, newspapers need to become more proactive to be able to set the agenda on matters of public interests, such as coverage of corruption scandals.

**Theoretical Framework**

Although the great moral philosophers throughout history have not agreed on many aspects of ethics or on its main theories and sub-theories (Rioba and Karashani 2002:12), they however agree on the ‘consequentiality’, the ‘deontological’ and the ‘virtue’ approaches to ethics (Burton 2005:13). According to Burton:

The consequentiality approach looks at a decision in terms of the harms and benefits to multiple stakeholders and attempts to arrive at a decision that produces the greatest good for the greatest number; the deontological approach raises issues related to duties, rights and justice considerations;
while virtue ethics focuses on the character or integrity of the moral actor and looks to moral communities, such as professions, to help identify ethical issues and to guide actions accordingly.

Journalism ethics is concerned with making rational judgements as well as sound moral decisions in daily journalistic performance (Rioba and Karashani 2002:13). This article, therefore, adopted virtue ethics approach. Indeed, the virtues dear to journalism are many and wide-ranging in application, for example, truthfulness, accuracy, fairness, honesty, integrity, autonomy, independence, impartiality and objectivity (Quinn 2007:180).

The question as to which norms should guide journalism is answered by trying to provide documents on basic principles, such as cannons of journalism, popularly known as codes of conduct (Kunczik 2000:18). A well-written code of ethics with explicit sanctions for extreme transgressions might serve as a foundation for journalistic practice, rather than a single answer to a complex question (Hulnick 2001:26).

Generally, the journalists adhere to voluntary codes of conduct, which are developed and enforced by self-regulatory bodies. For example, the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) was established in 1995 by journalists themselves to provide them with the voluntary ethical guidelines and oversight. Indeed, the MCT’s codes of ethics for Editors provides newspaper journalists with a framework for self-monitoring and self-correction in carrying out their investigative tasks. The public can bring complaints on alleged violations of the code of conduct against the media to the council for arbitration and mediation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:29).

Even when journalists rely on voluntary media industry codes of practice, disagreements about whose standards should be enforced and criticisms of the adjudication process have ensued (Mayes 2002:9). In addition, the less extreme cases fall into the grey areas, where codes of ethics often cannot reach, due to their lack of precision and the journalist’s desire for a freer rein (Hulnick 2001:26). In fact, no clear-cut answer can be given to the question as to how codes like these influence the behaviour of journalists (Kunczik 2000:22).

At the same time, media content is determined by individuals and guided by their perception of what is right or wrong, given the circumstances (Media Council of Tanzania 2008a:143). Moreover, the social, political and economic forces operating at any particular time heavily influence the decision of journalists. Many of them believe that, in the end, their decision comes down to making a professional judgment based on the
individual’s experience and values, rather than consultation with a code of ethics (Hulnick 2001:26).

Yet, if confronted with a complex situation, i.e., ‘should I suppress this information despite it being of public interest?’ then journalists should refer to the codes of ethics.9 If the codes state that it is unethical to suppress information of public interest, then journalists know that it is ethical to publish such material. Thus, uncertainty on whether or not to adhere to MCT’s codes of conduct can be termed as journalistic ethical dilemma in Tanzania.

Table 1: Codes of Ethics for the Newspaper Reporting on Corruption in Tanzania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevant Code of Ethics</th>
<th>Possible ethical dilemma</th>
<th>Possible influence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that media output is distinguishable between factual and commentary; that only proven and accurate stories are published and that rumours are discouraged.</td>
<td>To crosscheck for accuracy or not?</td>
<td>Gift from the source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that libel is avoided, and that the dignity of every citizen is respected.</td>
<td>To respect one’s privacy or not?</td>
<td>Gift from the source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that all points of views are exposed by seeking out the main parties in a story. When a party refuses cooperate, the organ should say so.</td>
<td>To observe impartiality or not?</td>
<td>Gift from the source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that the public is provided with un-biased, accurate, balanced and comprehensive news.</td>
<td>To be fair or not?</td>
<td>Gift from the source.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid violation of individual privacy and human dignity, unless necessitated by public interests.</td>
<td>To safeguard public interests or not?</td>
<td>Gift from the source.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Media Council of Tanzania’s Code of Ethics for Editors.

While various existing codes have some differences, the relevant codes of ethics for reporting corruption in Tanzania share common elements, especially respect for privacy, social responsibility, impartiality, accuracy and fairness. Nevertheless, these codes cannot assist journalist in resolving some of the most difficult problems.10 Only a person’s commitment to a journalistic morality can do so (Mencher 1997:623). Thus, any pressure on a journalist to influence his or her ethical decisions may result in ethical dilemmas.

Methodology

A survey was conducted among journalists in Dar es Salaam. Interviews were also conducted with a select group of journalists. Dar es Salaam was selected as study site because the city is home to almost all mainstream
media houses in Tanzania. The most widely-read newspapers are printed and distributed from Dar es Salaam (Muthee Jones and Mhando 2007:21). This also means that majority of investigative journalists live and work in the city.

One structured survey questionnaire was administered to the reporters and editors. The questionnaire had 37 closed-ended questions, which captured data about the forms of ethical practices and the effects of unethical practices on newspaper report of corruption, particularly ethical dilemmas facing journalists. This was supplemented by semi-structured interviews, which gathered data on policy and institutional factors regarding ethical practices in newspaper coverage of corruption. Eighty-two journalists participated in the study, of the approximately 100 journalists in Dar es Salaam. Eight journalists who had not worked on an investigative beat were removed from the sample. The final sample of 74 journalists came from 20 newspapers based in Dar es Salaam.

### Sampling and Sample Size

A journalist was defined as an individual within a news organisation who makes decisions that affect news content directly (Patterson and Donsbach 1996:456). Thus, the unit of analysis was newspaper journalists who had worked on an investigative beat within the past two years as a reporter or an editor. It was estimated that Dar es Salaam had a total of 100 investigative journalists; hence all of them were treated as the sample population. Thus, the sample frame was a list of 100 investigative journalists working in Dar es Salaam.

Initially, 82 journalists (about 82% of the population) filled in the questionnaires. The respondents were first asked to answer whether they had worked on an investigative project within the past two years. Eight journalists marked ‘no’ to this question so their questionnaires were not included during the data coding. The remaining 74 respondents (about 74% of the population) were treated as the sample size. Table 2 shows the number of respondents by the category of newspaper ownership:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on the Field Data
The 58 respondents from privately-owned newspapers were from *The African* and *Mtanzania* (New Habari Corporation), *The Guardian* and *Nipashe* (IPP Media), *ThisDay* and *Kulikoni* (Media Solutions), *The Citizen* and *Mwananchi* (Mwananchi Communications Ltd), *Business Times* and *Majira* (Business Times Ltd.), *Raia Mwema, MwanaHalisi, Changamoto*, and *Sauti Huru*. Thirteen respondents were from government newspapers: *Sunday News, Daily News* and *Habari Leo* (Tanzania Standard Newspapers Ltd). The remaining three respondents were from *Uhuru* and *Mzalendo*’ (Uhuru Publications) owned by ruling Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM) and the opposition leaning, *Tanzania Daima*.

**Findings and Analysis**

The study first cross-tabulated the responses on factors that had more impact on ethical decisions of journalists and whether the newspaper is privately or government-owned. Fear of losing the job was higher in government newspapers (44%) than in private newspapers (13%); fear of losing advertisements was higher in private newspapers (49%) than in government newspapers (22%); gift from the source was higher in private newspapers (30%) than in government newspapers (22%); while ideological affiliation was higher in government newspapers (11%) than in private newspapers (9%).

**Table 3: A Cross-tabulation of Ethical Dilemmas Between Private and State Newspapers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors that had more impact on your ethical decisions</th>
<th>Whether the newspaper is privately or government owned</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privately-owned %</td>
<td>State-owned %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of losing job</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of losing adverts</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift from the source</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological affiliation</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on the Field Data
The findings suggest that reporters in government-owned newspapers may be pressured by their bosses to reconsider their ethical decisions in reporting corruption (for fear of losing the job). This was consistent with the follow-up question, which sought to know whether journalists are pressured by owners to drop corruption stories. More respondents from state-owned newspapers (67%) replied in the affirmative compared with 36 per cent for privately-owned newspapers. Thus, the fear of losing one’s job is more serious in state-owned newspapers than in privately-owned ones.

The analysis indicates that some journalists in state-owned newspaper may have been compelled to shirk their professional ethics in order to keep their jobs. The evidence shows that they do risk losing their jobs if the ruling elite does not like the news they report or the way they report it. This is not surprising because state-owned newspapers in Tanzania have recently been accused of bias in their coverage of high profile scandals in order to protect special interests. Indeed, the problems of loyalty to an employer are toughest for the employees of state media (Hatchard 2007:8-17).

On the other hand, the major ethical concerns for privately-owned newspapers come from the fear of losing advertisements (49%). This result was expected, given that free and independent media are commercial enterprises and face clear economic imperatives (Department for International Development 2008:9). At the same time, the government, which is a major advertiser chooses the ‘friendly’ media to advertise in (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:14). Thus, the fear of losing advertisements by private newspapers is in fact the major contributor to potential ethical lapses in the private media.

The analysis shows that government sometimes issues circulars to ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), instructing them to stop advertising in certain private newspapers. For example, it has been reported that a former prime minister ordered one media house to be starved of advertisements for carrying negative stories about him (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2007:7). Indeed, the fear of losing advertising revenue and other financial resources all impose a burden on journalists and media houses, encouraging a culture of self-censorship (Nogara 2009:4).

In addition, reporters in private newspapers are more prone to inducements from the corrupt sources they are investigating than their counterparts in the state-owned newspapers. It is well-known that many of these private newspapers face budgetary constraints and, therefore, are not able to meet all the requirements of their personnel. Thus, gifts from some
of these corrupt sources are sometimes accepted by journalists to offset their income shortfalls. Such practice, needless to say, often compromises the impartiality of the reporters.

The analysis shows that taking cash for news coverage is rampant in Tanzania. Sources shower journalists with gifts, including cash, and reporters repay them with protection and promotion of their interests in their news coverage. As Peters (2002:52) observed, journalists’ codes of conduct condemn such corrupt activities, but the truth is that the practice of the profession does not mirror its aspirations, especially when underpaid – or unpaid – journalists resort to accepting payment in order to make ends meet.

**Ethical Dilemmas Between Private and State Newspapers**

Respondents from privately-owned newspapers were asked to name the ethical practice they find difficult to adhere to in their coverage of corruption cases. Figure 1 shows that respect for individual privacy was the most difficult code for private newspapers to abide by in their coverage of corruption (26%), followed by social responsibility (12%), impartiality (17%), fairness (10%) and, lastly, accuracy (9%). Some respondents (26%) did not respond to this question.

![Figure 1: Ethical practices difficult to adhere to in private owned newspapers](image)

Similarly, respondents from state-owned newspapers were asked to name the ethical practice they find difficult to adhere to in their coverage of corruption cases. Figure 2 shows that social responsibility/public interest was the code they found most difficult to adhere to (32%), followed by respect for privacy, fairness and accuracy (15%) and, lastly, impartiality (8%). Some respondents (15%) did not respond to this question.
The findings suggest that the biggest ethical dilemma for journalists with privately-owned newspapers is whether or not to respect individual privacy. But for journalists of state-owned newspapers, it is whether or not to be socially responsible (safeguarding public interests). As such, some newspaper reporters have been putting their professional ethics aside in order to serve their selfish ends and those of their masters.

Privacy intrusion can be justified under the public interest principle (Hulnick 2001; Rioba and Karashani 2002; Mayes 2002), but the analysis suggests that some private newspapers abuse this code in their report of corruption stories. For example, a newspaper associated with an influential man in society who was implicated in a corruption case alleged that one vocal Member of Parliament had impregnated school girls. Other similar newspapers published series of stories accusing one top legislator, who had declared war against graft, of abuse of parliamentary properties in order to support his many mistresses.

The analysis indicates that some editors and reporters were recruited deliberately by some special interest groups to attack people who seem to be a threat to their political survival and business interests. In a democracy, people should know everything they want to. But in reality, it is not what people might want to know that counts, but what is important to say (Mayes 2002:20).

Not surprisingly, the analysis shows that some editors and senior reporters collude with suspects in corruption cases to tarnish the image of those engaged in corruption fighting, including the outspoken Members of Parliament. As State of the Media 2007 reported, there have been proven cases where reporters or even editors have used the media to wage personal wars, or where reporters have been used unwittingly, or bribed, to
do the same (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:42). In such cases, the newspaper codes of ethics were flagrantly abused to safeguard some personal interests.

One interpretation for this development is that some sections of the private newspapers have been captured by some powerful interest groups in politics and business who do not want their affairs to be scrutinised by the press (M pangala 2006:14). Critical media organs have been bought by business tycoons belonging to the ruling party, and government advertising continues to be used as a tool to exert economic pressure or sanction on the media (Hussmann and Mmuya 2007:184). Indeed, when media houses are owned or run by groups with vested interests (e.g. politicians, businessmen), political patronage and editorial interference are likely to undermine the professional judgement of reporters and their editors (Department for International Development 2008:9).

Private media owners themselves can have a strong influence on whether corruption goes unreported, especially if they pursue greater profits rather than principles of free reporting or access to information (Peters 2002:49) As Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2007:13) revealed, some private media owners issue standing orders on what news should be published by their organs. Not surprisingly, when responsible private newspapers unearth malfeasance in the high offices, other private newspapers tend to counter such investigative pieces by expressing a different view altogether. This implies that some newspapers are there to protect some special interests.

On the other hand, the analysis indicates that journalists from government-owned newspapers may be under pressure not to take into consideration public interests in their coverage of corruption cases, especially where they affect public figures. This finding is not unexpected because the Chairperson of the Board of Directors and the Managing Editor of the state-owned Tanzania Standard Newspapers (TSN) are appointed by the President of the United Republic of Tanzania on the recommendation of the Minister of Information.11

After all, the President and many of his ministers are part of the ruling elite whose members are often the ones involved in corruption scandals that have rocked the country in the recent past. The analysis suggests that government-owned newspapers are often pressured to drop or doctor stories implicating political figures or their accomplices in the business sector. This is an unfortunate finding because the primary mission of newspaper reporters is to publish accurate information about everything that is in the public interest.
The disregard of social responsibility ideals means that powerful but corrupt politicians and bureaucrats often have a say on how government-owned newspapers cover corruption scandals. And this is where editors face the real test of their profession. But good editors should always decide on what is good for the people rather than appease the powers that be.

As Coyne (2005:5) argued, unchecked public ownership will, in all likelihood, be biased in favour of those in power. This affirms the analysis of media ownership structures by Djankov and his associates (2002), which found state-owned media to be less effective than private media in safeguarding public interests. As such, the evidence provided by this article is inconsistent with the Pigouvian view of state ownership of the media.12

As such, qualitative evidence suggests that some privately-owned newspapers are doing their best to adhere to their social responsibility ideals in their coverage of corruption stories and their reporters are dedicated to stamping out the vice. In such newspapers, stories are discussed in a very transparent manner during editorial conferences which approve stories for publication. Only stories which meet required standards are published. One Managing Editor of a privately owned newspaper said:

We have set up a special desk for investigative stories which is headed by the Chief Investigative Reporter. He reports directly to the Managing Editor to avoid leakage of ‘sensitive’ information before the stories are published. Tips come from different sources. All journalists are also supposed to have their own personal diaries for the same purpose (Interview by the author).

Indeed, there are media houses which are respected for their commitment (not always successfully) to presenting the different sides of every story and there are even heroic journalists who have risked their lives and livelihoods to tell the truth against lies and distortions of the political/business establishment (Bgoya 2005:5). In general, a free media serves a critical watchdog function, making it more likely that political agents will act in a transparent and accountable way (Coyne 2005:9).

There is evidence, too, that some private newspaper establishments engage in deliberate character assassination in their crime and corruption reporting; and sometimes, they act in connivance with politicians. The Registrar of Newspapers said he could not ban their organisations because of their ties to the business and power elite. The registrar admitted the following during an interview:

When owners want to register their newspapers they just inform me that their objective is to inform, educate and entertain. However, they often violate their registration conditions after starting publication. When I ask
them to explain why I should not punish them, they respond that they educate citizens about ufisadi. In such circumstance, it is very hard for government to take action against such newspapers. As a result, newspapers have become prosecutors and judges. It is chaos' (Interview by the author).

Yet, the registrar has been banning the publication of critical newspapers by using the draconian Newspapers Act of 1976 and sparing the government-owned newspapers or those supporting ufisadi, even if they violate the same code of conduct. The recent example was the suspension of the vibrant MwanaHalisi for three months for what the Minister of Information said was professional misconduct, following a story about contending sides in President Jakaya Kikwete’s cabinet that the minister said had cultivated misunderstanding in the president’s household.13

Ironically, the government-owned Habari Leo and one well-connected weekly newspaper reported almost the same story, but the registrar did nothing to punish them despite the call by the Members of Parliament for similar action to be taken against Habari Leo. The Minister of Information promised action against ethical transgressions by the government-owned paper but nothing has been done to-date apart from the controversial departure of the Managing Editor. In a way, this also implies bias on the part of the registrar in favour of government-owned newspapers.

It means, therefore, that critical newspapers in Tanzania are just taking a risk. In fact, investigative journalists who expose corruption and economic sabotage, despite the draconian law, appear to be working more out of naivety and foolhardy courage and the forced tolerance of the status quo which wants to appease donors and be seen to be supporting the democratic values of free media (Media Council of Tanzania 2008b:2). Thus, without deliberate reforms to empower the private newspapers, the media may fail to play a meaningful role in fighting corruption in Tanzania.

Conclusion

The study found that journalists in both government and private newspapers face ethical dilemmas in their coverage of corruption stories and, therefore, both private and government newspapers may be equally unethical in unearthing and reporting high profile scandals. Specifically, the analysis shows that intrusion on privacy is a chief concern of private newspapers when reporting corruption in Tanzania while journalists in government-owned newspapers seem to condone corruption because their employment is under the control of the same ruling clique that perpetrates corruption in the land.
The analysis suggests that many ethical problems facing privately-owned newspapers in Tanzania are structural. This gives the business and power elite room for interference, which enables them to turn the press into a special interest battlefield. Government needs to address the conflict of interests in newspaper ownership and placement of government advertisements by instituting special provisions in the Media Services Bill.

Similarly, the analysis shows that state-owned newspapers have continued to be the government’s mouthpiece but failed to promote public interest when it comes to cases of corruption. Some of the suspects in the biggest corruption scandals in the recent past have been ruling and bureaucratic elites, who command big influence in the state-owned newspapers. This is very unfortunate because the public newspapers usually take sides by distorting their reports to mislead the public.

With this tendency of the government media to align with the power elite against the people, there should be a rethink on whether the model of state-owned newspapers is still valid in today’s Tanzania. After all, the newspaper industry is matured enough to take care of government business. What is needed is for government to put in place an enabling framework and environment for the privately-owned newspapers to play not only ‘gate keeping’ and ‘agenda setting’, but also the watchdog role.

Notes
1. Private media tend to ‘poach’ trained journalists from the public media houses which usually invest more in training (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:17).
2. This actually means that they are working as labourers (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:34).
3. Ufisadi is an all-embracing Kiswahili term for all manner of skulduggery involving public resources: malfeasance, misfeasance, corruption, embezzlement, outright theft, etc. (see The East African ‘My Money on Lowassa as the Man to Crack Ufisadi’ by Karl Lyimo, issue of 17 March 2008).
4. Notable privately-owned newspapers participating in the war on corruption with a renewed vigour include ThisDay, Kulikoni, MwanaHalisi and Raia Mwema.
5. As such, the discussion of ethics in corruption coverage has in the recent past provoked divided opinions among the media stakeholders, particularly between the private and state newspapers.
6. Simeon Djankov and his colleagues at Harvard University – Caralee McLiesh, Tatiana Nenova, and Andrei Shleifer – examined the patterns of media ownership in 97 countries around the world.
7. All these factors influence journalistic decision on what should be reported (Djankov et al. 2002:4).

8. The Nyalali Commission, which recommended the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in 1992, presented opportunities for minimising corruption by introducing greater accountability and transparency into governance.

9. This was articulated in the Journalism Ethics Manual for Trainers and Students of Journalism, developed by Rioba and Karashani (2002).

10. In fact, no code can make a journalist a person of good conscience (Mencher 1997:623).

11. It is difficult under such circumstances to be critical of government (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2009:14).

12. Djankov and his colleagues also cast doubt on the proposition that state ownership of the media serves benevolent ends.

13. The MwanaHalisi suspension was announced in a Government Gazette notice No. 208A dated 10 October 2008 which the minister read before the journalists and sounded a warning, saying the MwanaHalisi suspension should serve as a warning to other newspapers.

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