

6-2021

Media Analysis of Conflict in Chinese-Zambian Engagement: From ZAFFICO to the COVID-19 Discrimination Controversy

Nicole Mazurova
Southern African Institute for Policy and Research

Pokai Tsao
US-China Business Council

Taurence Chisholm Jr.
University of Delaware

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/sajpd>

 Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mazurova, Nicole; Tsao, Pokai; and Chisholm Jr., Taurence (2021) "Media Analysis of Conflict in Chinese-Zambian Engagement: From ZAFFICO to the COVID-19 Discrimination Controversy," *Southern African Journal of Policy and Development*: Vol. 5 : No. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/sajpd/vol5/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarship@Cornell Law: A Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Southern African Journal of Policy and Development by an authorized editor of Scholarship@Cornell Law: A Digital Repository. For more information, please contact jmp8@cornell.edu.

Media Analysis of Conflict in Chinese-Zambian Engagement: From ZAFFICO to the COVID-19 Discrimination Controversy

Nicole Mazurova, Pokai Tsao, Taurence Chisholm Jr.

This paper examines the role media plays in polarising views and escalating tension. The cases studied reflect the competing perspectives on Chinese engagement in Zambia, from the courtship of Chinese investment to rising anti-Chinese sentiment. Based on a comparative media analysis of English and Mandarin news articles about the ZAFFICO and COVID-19 discrimination controversies, we argue that the multi-layered polarisation in Zambia's media landscape amplifies existing identity-conflicts. Framing—the tone, word choice, and selection of detail—in articles changes with the positionality of the media outlet and shapes the discourse around the cases. Sensationalisation, misinformation, and divergent frames contribute to conflict between different identity groups, which is capitalised on in a divisive political environment. The media facilitates blackboxing and us vs. them thinking which often precede conflict. The 'other' that appears in the Zambian media landscape includes 'China/the Chinese', 'the opposition', and 'the ruling Patriotic Front'.

Introduction

A globalised mass media is transforming communication, as well as its most intense form, conflict. Each conflict unfolding today has a media dimension because those directly involved, as well as outside audiences, form perspectives based on varied information that is more accessible and spreads quicker than ever before. New media further pluralises the media space and provides opportunities for audience engagement. While these developments have a democratising effect, the rise of voices competing for space has its disadvantages. There is mounting evidence that changes to how the public consumes and shares news intensify political attitudes and identities, which leads to more polarised societies (Cottle, 2006, p. 17). Self-interested actors are learning how to manipulate content and information flow which accelerates the process, and these actors include media conglomerates themselves (Orlowski, 2020). Sub-Saharan Africa is an interesting case study to analyse the relationship between media and conflict because of the dramatic changes to the continent's media landscape, as well as competition between international and local networks for a share in the information space. We selected a topic that is much-debated in academic and policy circles—the dilemma between the open reception of China's presence and vast investment, and rising anti-Chinese sentiment.

We specifically look at Zambian-Chinese engagement in the trading sector, as Zambia has a vibrant democracy and a relatively liberal media environment (CIVICUS, 2017). Zambia is also the main recipient of Chinese investment and home to a growing Chinese population.¹ There is a rich literature on Zambian-Chinese relations and increasing interest in how the media shapes perceptions, tensions, and conflict in the country (Jiang, Li et al., 2016; Li and Rønning, 2013; Li and Shi, 2019; Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2018). The following

questions guided our research: How do frame dynamics compare between Zambian and Chinese media sources? What are the consequences when frames clash? Are frame differences a mechanism of conflict? We seek to add to the literature by conducting a frame analysis of Zambian and Chinese media sources' coverage of two conflicts: 1) the ZAFFICO controversy; and 2) anti-Chinese sentiment in response to COVID-19, using media conflict paradigms and the spiral of escalation theory (Cottle, 2006; Hamelink, 2015).

Based on our research, we found that, first, the Zambian media landscape is highly polarised and provides the 'other' as an object of projection whereby fears, frustrations, and other negativity can be associated with any actions of the 'other' group. 'China/Chinese', 'the opposition', and 'ruling Patriotic Front' frequently appear as the 'other' in the media discourse, which abstracts the stakeholders involved. Second, polarisation amplifies and consolidates existing perceptions of the 'other', which facilitates identity-based conflicts. When othering leads to scapegoating, the root causes of grievances receive less coverage. Lastly, the Chinese media is less integrated into the Zambian media landscape than, for example, Western media, which leads to further perception gaps on China's influence in Zambia. In fact, the Chinese media often functions as its own landscape because sources are written in Mandarin and exclusively target Chinese audiences. While the media continues to intensify these gaps, the distrust of the Zambian government and its affiliation with China, as well as Chinese migrants' incentive to segregate themselves from local society for self-protection, may grow. As a result, a vicious circle is created, which facilitates the spiral of escalation.

2. Background

2.1 Media and Conflict

Conflict, its dangers, cleavages, and opportunities for resolution are ever changing. One dynamic that has become increasingly important is the relationship between conflict and the media. The media is an extremely fast-growing medium of communication that holds fact, fiction, innermost fears, and other projections on one device. To study this relationship between the media and conflict, it is important to analyse contexts where conflict exists and media plays a role in how information is shared.

Conflict resolution academics and practitioners have long debated the relationship between the media and conflict. In his book, *Mediatized Conflict*, Simon Cottle (2006) identifies three paradigms that could guide research on the media's divisive and unifying roles. The paradigms are dated and do not fully reflect social media advances, but they still offer a strong framework for media conflict analysis.

The first, the manufacturing consent theory, holds that the media mass produces culture in capitalist societies. The elite has the most control over the dissemination and production of

the media narrative. This normally manifests itself in how different groups or opinions are censored, uplifted, or even unintentionally left out, as well as how the victims and perpetrators are depicted.

The second, the media contest paradigm, is based on the idea of the media as a battleground. Different groups compete for media space across two dimensions, structural and cultural. Reports are shaped by the players' positionality, resources, as well as the relationship with the press. This, in one form, may be demonstrated in how certain identity groups compete for space on a certain media outlet. For example, viewership determines a lot of the content. As a result, the ideas shared in those videos, papers, journals, etc., will be the ones codified.

The third paradigm, the media culture paradigm, examines how media consumption shapes identity. The expressions of class, gender, race, sexuality, as well as moral attributions, are in part socialised through media consumption. Consumers are drawn to various corners of media (be it television, social media, etc.) **where they feel community**. This process facilitates 'us' versus 'them' world views, affecting how people position themselves to others. One way this can manifest is in the understanding of language that one group uses to define itself and its experiences versus the language another group uses to define the former group and that group's experiences. Differences in terminology can lead to constructive discourse or interactions shrouded in vilification.

Cottle's paradigms are most useful if put in dialogue with each other and other theories such as Cees Jan Hamelink's (2015) 'spiral of escalation.' In his book, *Media and Conflict: Escalating Evil*, Hamelink argues that the mass media triggers mechanisms in the 'spiral of escalation' by offering a daily discourse of social anxiety, elevating the rhetoric of provocative leaders, facilitating alienation by adopting divisive frames, and making possible the self-defense argument. The spiral works both ways, and thus media can both serve to resolve and amplify conflict. If the theory is applied to modern technological advancements, in which social media provides for a cheaper, faster, back-and-forth type of communication that has a global reach, it could be argued that the spiral takes on those qualities and is activated quicker and with greater intensity.

2.2 Zambia, China, and Media Relations

In Africa, perceptions towards China are complicated and heavily dependent on the proximity to the 'benefits' of individual engagement with Chinese state and non-state actors. In Zambia, the ruling party traditionally welcomed macro-level Chinese investment and the added value in multiple sectors (Matambo, 2019). However, local reports of unequal benefit sharing, corruption, and poor working conditions in Chinese organisations have led to tensions at the individual-organisational level. Frequent reference is made to the Chambishi Copper Mine (2008) and Collum Coal Mine riots (2010) which were a result of labour

disputes between Chinese management and Zambian miners. Western-led criticism of Chinese territorial ambitions and human rights abuses confirms biases, for example, the association between the Chinese and profit-driven pragmatism.

Zambia is one of the epicenters of sensationalised and ‘fake news’ about China, according to Eric Olander, co-founder of the China Africa Project. Misinformation is shared and forwarded through messaging platforms, and its content is frequently incendiary and xenophobic. One is only to look at the viral Facebook post picked up by a local tabloid that alleged China was selling canned human meat to Zambia (Olander, 2016). The story was declared a hoax after Zambian and Chinese leaders issued public statements to fact check the misinformation.

Zambian disinformation is closely intertwined with stories coming out of other countries. The knowledge, opinions, and conversations flowing through Anglophone countries—Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa—mix together and, along with the fake news from one country, feed into other countries (E. Olander, personal communication, October 14, 2020). Then, this news and the discourse with it get a second life on Facebook and Twitter. International media and expat media bring their own biases. Increasing the amount of sensationalised news, now termed ‘fake news’ by many (Mfula, personal communication, November 11, 2020). This demonstrates how pervasive, inconsistent coverage of issues and mis-contextualisation by the media coupled with the emotionally driven transport of social media can further exacerbate conflict, effectively losing the heart of where people’s frustrations come from in the leaguering outrage. The Chinese media is often intentionally slow to respond and prefers false allegations to dissipate on their own or for government authorities to act first.

The reasons for these stories’ prevalence are complicated. They reflect grievances and fears of displacement but also seem to be exploited for political aims. First, Zambian politicians are using charged rhetoric against China, and as the 2021 Presidential election approaches, several seem ready to evoke Michael Sata’s campaign tactics before his win in 2011. A portion of the Zambian public associates China with the health and economic crisis triggered by COVID-19, which compounds the ongoing accusations levied against the current administration’s corruption and handling of Chinese debt. Second, as Zambians use Western platforms, they are privier to Western views than to Chinese views. Third, as internet penetration increases across Africa, these dynamics will be further tested as more people engage in creating and sharing news.²

The PRC government is aware that to control its image, it needs to increase its share in Africa’s information space. In a 2010 trip to Africa, Chinese journalists vocalised the need to balance Western coverage and present different narratives on Chinese engagement in Africa (Li and Ronning, 2013). In recent years, there has been an increase in English and French language Chinese-state owned multimedia broadcasting initiatives across Africa (Hollihan

and Zhang, 2016). At present, African audiences are less likely to rely on Chinese media than Western and indigenous media. Focus group data from Kenya and South Africa suggests that Africans do not actively engage with the Chinese media, including CCTV/CGTN and WeChat, and some are strongly biased against it and cited negative stereotypes of China as reasons to avoid these platforms. (Wasserman and Morales, 2018). These sentiments alone show how important audience perceptions are; if there is negative sentiment or no trust, then people will not engage enough with imported media platforms to shape or reshape local views.

To avoid the monolith trap, it is important to deconstruct 'China' and identify the many stakeholders involved on the continent. In a study of Chinese community associations in Zambia, the authors distinguished between state actors – “state-owned enterprises, diplomatic corps, and technical aid missions” and non-state actors – “long-term migrants, traveling business people, and students” (Li and Shi, 2019). Other scholars argue the Chinese in Africa are not a homogeneous group (Hodzi, 2019; Yan et al., 2019). While some Chinese migrants are reluctant or unable to interact with locals due to language barriers, others, especially highly-educated expatriates, have shown their proficiency in local languages and willingness to integrate into local communities. Based on a survey conducted by Yan et al. (2019, p. 53), the Chinese are the second most adaptive group, only after 'whites', among those represented in Zambia.

There is a growing awareness that misinformation and damaging narratives around Chinese engagement in Africa could be a result of prejudiced media coverage. Chinese communities in Africa have argued that negative press harms their interests and even jeopardises their safety. Countering misinformation on a case-by-case basis is an increasing priority for local associations. For example, Chinese embassy officials, association leaders, and journalists based in Zambia formed a WeChat group, 'Fighting Media Crisis', to exchange ideas on fighting negative press, as they recognised how negative press exacerbates tensions leading to the sensationalisation of events (Li and Shi, 2019, p. 162).

3. Methodology and Sources

3.1 Methodology

To study the relationship between 'media and conflict' with Chinese-Zambian engagement as a case study, we used qualitatively-driven mixed methods. We conducted a frame analysis of English and Mandarin news articles on two cases of conflict in Chinese-Zambian relations: the 2018 ZAFFICO Scandal and Riots and the 2020 Lusaka discrimination controversy. We selected articles from diverse Western, Zambian, and Chinese media outlets to compare their reporting on the cases. We supplemented the findings of the paper with key informant interviews using snowball sampling (Annex).

We found these cases frequently cited, both in interviews with informants and the recent literature. They feature diverse stakeholders and perspectives towards China, and they offer a departure from the 2005 BGRIMM and 2013 Collum Coal Mine incidents, which are the most widely studied examples of conflict in Chinese-Zambian engagement. As these cases are current, they also reflect the evolution in China's response to criticism and strategy – at the state, private and migrant worker level. There is a growing awareness that the media is an important space for interaction and reputation management and that 'anti-China' stories could incite real-life violence. We were also interested in analysing cases at the intersection of globalisation and identity politics, and these cases show frictions between different in and out-groups and how they form representations of 'the other.' To identify articles, we searched Google for key terms, including variations on China, Zambia, conflict, tension; terms related to the selected case studies; and the titles of major Chinese, Western and Zambian news outlets. We selected English and Mandarin articles that best complemented each other based on the context and timing of publication.

We analysed the framing, or "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation" in each article (University of Vermont, 2009). We also looked for the master-narratives based on identity, which could lead to us versus them categorisation and polarisation. The three media and conflict paradigms discussed in the previous section (manufacturing consent, media contest, and media culture) were useful in identifying framing techniques and the positionality of the media outlets and readership.

3.2 Sources

3.2.1 Zambian Sources

Zambian access to the media is affected by many factors from poverty, illiteracy, and uneven electrification. However, those who have access to print and online media can choose from a variety of sources with diverse stances and focal points. Many are influenced by their ties, from state to external, for example, to the Zambian diaspora in the West, and almost all have explicit political affiliations. For instance, state-owned Zambia Daily Mail and Times of Zambia tend to bolster the position of the ruling party, the Patriotic Front. The Lusaka Times provides a more moderate perspective, but its content is sourced largely from government-owned news sources. Independent media that are based on online platforms, such as Zambian Watchdog and News Diggers, are considered to be more critical of President Edgar Lungu and in line with the opposition party, United Party for National Development (UPND) (Mfula, 2020).

3.2.2 Chinese Sources

Most Chinese nationals in Zambia prioritise online Chinese-language news and use a range of sources from official media to other independent platforms that cover African affairs.

Xinhua and Global Times (Huanqiu) are top state-owned international media outlets that report major events worldwide, but often without direct connection to what is happening on the ground. Their journalists extensively quote Chinese embassy announcements or Zambian media that is perceived as more objective, such as the Lusaka Times. Online platforms that are popular among the Chinese are the Guancha Syndicate (guancha.cn) and Toutiao (www.toutiao.com). There is only one Chinese-language newspaper published in Zambia: The Oriental Post (Feizhouhuaqiaozhoubao), which covers various countries in Southern Africa.³ This newspaper cooperates with the overseas version of People's Daily (Remin Ribao, a Chinese official newspaper) and largely reports on issues affecting business, such as Chinese investment, external relationships, and the latest Africa Policy.

4. Case Studies and Analysis

4.1 Case Studies

4.1.1 The ZAFFICO Controversy

On 5 November 2018, the alleged sale of the Zambia Forestry and Forest Industries Corporation (ZAFFICO) to Chinese investors triggered several riots in Kitwe and its neighbouring towns. It was reported that several Chinese shops were damaged and looted, and more than 100 protesters were arrested (Zambia: Over 100 Picked Up by Police in Anti-China Protests in Kitwe, 2018). The Lungu administration blamed UPND leader Hakainde Hichilema for inciting the riots, citing his interview with the Sun FM radio programme. Hichilema had accused the Zambian government of listing ZAFFICO on the stock market as part of a scheme to sell shares to the Chinese. The issue remains controversial to this date, with the media becoming a battlefield for competing narratives.

News outlets like Zambia Daily Mail and the Lusaka Times took a hard line against Hichilema's announcement and relied on Patriotic Front party officials' statements to challenge it (ZAFFICO Has Not Been Sold; It's Fake News Created by Overzealous Opposition-Dora Siliya, 2018; Musonda et al., 2018). Comments on a Zambia Report article accused Hichilema of spreading rumours and acting as an irresponsible politician (Phiri, 2018). At the end of November, the Lusaka Times published an article highlighting the Chinese Foreign Ministry's praise for President Edgar Lungu's handling of the "false China-related reports" (China Happy with President Lungu's Defense of Its Interests in Zambia, 2018).

Zambian Watchdog reported the story from a different angle, expressing support for Hichilema and questioning why the government would list a natural resource company - as it is not profitable and should not be privatised - on the stock market (Zambian Watchdog, 2018a, 2018b). Commenters on Zambian Watchdog's Facebook page showed their support for Hichilema and posted sarcastic comments about the PF government's tendency to blame everything on the opposition party. Hichilema defended himself on BBC Radio and offered a

timeline of government actions that shaped his thinking on the issue (VoiceUp News Zambia, 2018). After official government sources labelled the ZAFFICO sale as fake news, pro-opposition continued to question the legitimacy of the assertion (It's the Land Not Zaffico per se That Has Been Sold, 2018).

As for Chinese media outlets, the Oriental Post and Guancha Syndicate both accused Hichilema of causing the conflict. An Oriental Post headline even called Hichilema's denial of the accusation "pale and powerless" (Kitwe Riot Is Directed to Opposition Party's Incitation, HH's Denial Seems Pale and Powerless, 2018; Tang, 2018). Xinhua reported a small demonstration led by Zambian miners and businessmen one week after the riot. They denounced Hichilema's statement and accused him of breeding xenophobia. They feared Chinese investors would decide to leave Zambia (Mym, 2018). This event, however, did not attract as much attention as the earlier protests in Zambian media outlets.

ZAFFICO made headlines again in 2019 after the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), an international NGO with headquarters in London and Washington DC, published a report about ZAFFICO's role in corrupt practices (Environmental Investigative Agency, 2019). According to the report, ZAFFICO was a cover for well-connected Zambian and Chinese business operators to illegally traffic an endangered species of rosewood. Yet again, oppositionist-linked and pro-government media interpreted the events from different angles (Diggers Editor, 2019; Mwamba, 2019a, 2019b; Ruwe, 2019). While Zambian News Diggers and Zambian Watchdog cited the report as proof of PF government corruption, sources such as Zambia Daily Mail denounced the report as propaganda and even hinted it was strategically released in advance of the 2021 elections to "sully, soil, and damage the local and international image of President Lungu" (Mwamba, 2019b). While Chinese outlets, such as the Guancha Syndicate, mostly quoted official Chinese embassy statements and refrained from taking sides, comments on the article revealed competing views. The comments with most likes blamed Western NGOs for escalating tensions and obstructing other countries' development. However, there were also comments positing that China's role in deforestation merited the negative backlash.

4.1.2. Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Response to COVID-19

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, several Chinese businesses in Lusaka were accused of displaying anti-Blackness, such as turning away Zambian customers and preventing workers from going home after work. Zambian Watchdog used loaded rhetoric while reporting the cases - "Zambians wake up! Your country is being taken away. The Chinese have regrouped and you are still sleeping" (Muchima, 2020). The Mayor of Lusaka, Miles Sampa, soon launched an investigation into the incident in May 2020 and shut down Chinese businesses that allegedly discriminated against Zambians (Sampa, 2020; Racist Chinese Barbershop Closed, 2020). Surprisingly, just one week later, Sampa apologised for

revoking trading licences and using discriminative language against the Chinese (Nkomesha, 2020). One day before his apology, Local Government Minister Charles Banda warned Sampa that unilaterally revoking trading licences is against standard procedure (Local Government Minister Opposes Lusaka Mayor for Closing Down Abusive Chinese-Owned Businesses, 2020). Segments of the public believed that the apology had been coerced. Lily Mutamz, a UK-based Zambian livestream commentator on YouTube, suggested the Mayor was pressured into apologising to delegitimise him. In the comments, many of her followers agreed with her and found it hypocritical that the Chinese did not have to apologise for mistreating Zambians (Lily Mutamz TV, 2020). An op-ed on Diggers News also argued that the government was allowing the Chinese to break laws freely (Sakala, 2020). Zambian Watchdog responded to Banda's statement by saying, "With this intervention, the Chinese are now free to discriminate [against] Black people in their businesses." This post attracted over two-thousand comments from those who supported Sampa's actions (Zambian Watchdog, 2020a).

Mayor Sampa's political affiliation should not be ignored—he is the nephew of former President Michael Sata. It is speculated that Sampa is copying his uncle's strategy—stirring up Sinophobia as part of a campaign strategy—and cultivating an image that would help him eventually run for President (Matambo, 2019; Marsh and Sinyangwe, 2020). Although the correlation is unclear, several criminal activities against Chinese nationals were reported after Sampa's charged rhetoric, which suggests an increase in Sinophobia. On May 24, 2020, three Chinese nationals were brutally murdered over a pay dispute at a warehouse in Makeni, a suburb of Lusaka (Three Chinese Murdered Over Pay Dispute, 2020). Crimes against the Chinese continued to happen. On September 16, 2020, armed thieves robbed a Chinese mining company's dormitory, in which three Chinese nationals and two Zambians were assaulted (Armed Thieves Rob Chinese Firm in Luano, 2020).

The Zambian media showed much more uniformity and discouraged sensational reports on these tragedies. Even Zambian Watchdog, which often takes an anti-Chinese stance, limited itself to an official Zambia Police statement; most comments under the post also condemned the attacks (Zambian Watchdog, 2020b). Some media outlets even expressed alarm over the potential racial motivation behind the murders and sent a clear message to readers, "You can't kill a Chinese national by taking advantage of the current anti-Chinese sentiment" (Mwewa Lane, 2020). Chinese media outlets argued that the perceived discrimination was a misunderstanding, but that social media and Mayor Sampa's 'radical' policies intensified the situation. For instance, a report on Caixin (a popular financial newspaper in China) clarified that the restaurant worker accused of racism was innocent and his actions misinterpreted. The restaurant's security camera showed that the dispute was over anti-epidemic measures, and no other Zambians in the restaurant were mistreated (Qing, 2020); the government's

investigation group supported these findings. Zambia Reports corroborated this point of view (Phiri, 2020).

Global Times reported that the increase in robberies and murder was due to the influence of anti-Chinese rhetoric used by local media and politicians. Those unfamiliar with the truth started to channel anti-Chinese sentiments (Zhao et al., 2020). According to a report on Toutiao (Look at The World, 2020), the misunderstanding stemmed from Chinese stores' implementation of strict anti-epidemic measures after cases of the virus were reported in Zambia in March 2020, including closed-off management and control of visitors, similar to precautions taken in China. These measures were seldom properly introduced by the Zambian media. An anonymous source in this report said the Chinese were worried about the rising anti-Chinese sentiment as robberies continued to happen after the murder. Some even hired guards or bought guns to defend themselves. "Many colleagues are being called 'virus' on the street," the source added. This report went viral on the internet and received more than five thousand comments. Chinese netizens flocked to the post to express their anger or question if the accusations of racism were exaggerated for political optics.⁴

4.2 Analysis

Based on a review of media sources from 2018 to 2020, we found significant differences in how Zambian and Chinese media outlets framed and reported events. Strong cleavages exist in the Zambian media environment, shaped by English and Mandarin language outlets' partisan affiliation. Zambia's state-owned media, Zambia Daily Mail and Times of Zambia tend to highlight the benefits and historical significance of Chinese-Zambian economic relations. As for independent media like Zambian Watchdog and News Diggers, they report more openly on acts of anti-Chinese prejudice. Such differences consolidate viewers' existing values or stereotypes, which also give politicians or activists the opportunity to mobilise anti-Chinese sentiment, disregarding what is true and what is not, to bolster their political platforms.

Chinese state-owned media, such as The Oriental Post and Xinhua, strive to report positive developments to boost China's image and quote extensively from governmental statements. However, they publish harsh criticism of anti-Chinese behaviour, mostly casting blame on Zambian opposition parties or politicians, when China's reputation or Zambia-China relations are attacked. Chinese online platforms, such as Guancha Syndicate and Toutiao, demonstrate similar patterns but publish more first-hand information and opinions and thus attract more critical or sensationalised comments from the readers.

It is important to note that loaded language was used across outlets, but different outlets flip-flopped villains and heroes based on their positionality. The tension is largely internal, with the PF government, on one side, and opposition parties (UPND, RRP, etc.) on the other, with

different stances reflecting different sides of the partisan divide. Chinese sources tend to support the PF government narrative because it strengthens China's positive image and maximises the stability of the relations between the two countries.

The polarised nature of the Zambian media landscape influences perspectives on Chinese activity in Zambia, reinforces in-group out-group identities, and distorts responses to information. In tense situations, variation in contextualising information leads to perceived clashes between group interests. Furthermore, a media environment in which false, incomplete, or inaccurate information is pervasive, attempts to discredit stories are interpreted as a devaluation of opposing perspectives, and there arises even more imperative to defend in-group interests.

Especially in the 2018 case, the 'media contest' paradigm described by Cottle best reflects competition in a polarised Zambian media environment. Their reporting on opposition leader Hichilema diverged. While one side blamed Hichilema for spreading rumours and inciting the riots, it focused less on people's distrust of the government and concerns about job loss. The other side represented Zambian people's grievances and questioned the government's affiliation with China, but provided little evidence to support its claims and relied on blackbox language. The competitive nature of the media only consolidates the Zambian people's existing stance for/against China. The EIA report in 2019 shows that, even though ZAFFICO was not sold to the Chinese, people's suspicions were likely rooted in a history of government corruption. Yet again, the media diverged on their views. The 'truth' remains unclear, but different media positionalities often only consolidate existing perceptions.

It is important to note that the target of mediated violence is frequently the Chinese migrant community in Zambia, unconnected to larger business dealings between the Zambian government and Chinese investors. This scapegoating could be a result of the media's creation and elevation of leaders' loaded rhetoric against a monolithic 'Chinese/China' threat which projects fears, frustrations, and other negativity onto anyone of visible Asian descent.

As for the year 2020, we found that the manufacturing consent theory and media culture paradigm are useful for analysing the case. As anti-Chinese sentiment was rising due to the spread of COVID-19, Sampa took advantage of the shift in public attitudes and 'manufactured' the image of a prejudiced Chinese migrant population. This image is possible because of the stereotypes about the Chinese formed over the years. Especially during a time of rampant misinformation about COVID-19's origins, the additional association between 'the Chinese' and the virus is easily exploited. However, as the events unfolded, it became clear that cultural differences, language barriers, and perceptions of the 'other' most likely contributed to misunderstanding.

Once mainstream views take shape, it is difficult to change the narrative. For example, *Zambian Report* unpacked the discriminative restaurant incident, but commenters did not believe the report though clear evidence was provided (Phiri, 2020). As for the media culture paradigm, when some Zambian media outlets showed support for Sampa's actions, the view of 'us' (Zambian) versus 'them' (Chinese) became more pronounced. Such a view gained support rapidly because the Chinese were not just accused of racism, but also of their intention to exclude local people or 'segregate' themselves from local communities. Thus, according to some, the Chinese were not just discriminating against Zambians but also taking away job opportunities and monopolising the benefits of economic development.

Disregarding if the Chinese intend to segregate or not, if anti-Chinese sentiment and crimes against Chinese people continue to grow, this might force the Chinese to further segregate themselves from locals. As Yan et al. (2019) argued, the main causes of Chinese self-segregation are due to structural factors, including anti-Chinese discrimination, as opposed to 'subjective consciousness.' In fact, most Chinese migrants are willing to embrace and adapt to the host society. However, when the media creates an environment of 'us' versus 'them', the Chinese will have to protect themselves by adopting segregation from the locals, but that will only increase anti-Chinese sentiment. A spiral of escalation is, therefore, created.

There is a second layer to the mechanism. The Chinese media mostly engages Chinese audiences. Segments of the media are delivering the message that Zambians mistreat Chinese migrants and that opposition political leaders are purposely and untruthfully demonising the Chinese. Thus, all critiques and attacks against the Chinese government or Chinese people could be perceived as political manipulation while structural factors that make the Chinese presence unwelcome are neglected. Such a point of view may discourage Chinese immigrants from integrating with the local society or embracing the opinions of the opposition. In short, the different style and focus of Chinese media may also worsen the image of 'us' versus 'them.' As a result, Chinese engagement with Zambians would only decline, as well as the chance for Zambian people to get to know the Chinese. Moreover, as both the Zambian and Chinese media continue to polarise views, the lack of engagement and the problem of asymmetric information between Zambians and the Chinese will deteriorate as well.

5. Conclusion

The media plays a role in polarising views and amplifying societal tensions around Chinese-Zambian engagement. We found visible differences in tone, word choice, and selection of detail between articles depending on the positionality of the outlet and its readership. These differences in frames could be a contributing factor to polarisation and conflict escalation in inter-group conflict. The majority of Chinese stakeholders are not malign actors, as some media sources suggest, but differences between them and the Zambian people are

capitalised on in a divisive political environment. The media certainly reflects real grievances, but also sensationalises and exaggerates information for political ends.

Analysing the media presents an interesting but also daunting task as there are so many points of distortion. People are inundated with information, and it is difficult to discover the root of the problem and not get emotionally invested in the discourse taking place. Similarly, for researchers, it is difficult to limit where, when, and what to assess in the media. From this, the question of positionality arises as how someone adds to the conversation is affected by the identity they hold in relation to the identity of the group, society, or country being researched. The other difficulty with media analysis is reflecting intersectionality in the analysis. There are socioeconomic differences that affect who can participate in the media discourse and whose identities are validated. All of these ideas feed into information reliability, and there is no guarantee that the media is an accurate reflection of what is happening in society.

Without effective spaces for addressing legitimate grievances and mediating between different views, the media will continue to escalate tensions and be used as a tool to incite violence. Those who study the media in any context should acknowledge positionality and intersectionality, and those working with activists, journalists, or stakeholders could create workshops and facilitate discussion on navigating media in different contexts.

¹ Governmental ties between China and Zambia date back to the 1960s when China committed itself to the TAZARA railway project in 1967. The railroad has been an important symbol of Chinese-Zambian friendship to this day. However, it is not the only reason to keep their relationship. By 2015, China became the largest investor in Zambia, with 9% of China's total FDI going to the country (UNCTAD, 2019). China now accounts for around 80% of infrastructure in Zambia. The number of Chinese nationals residing in Zambia is reportedly growing rapidly as well, which was around 20 thousand in 2014 and reached 30 thousand in 2020, and the Chinese are even referred to as the '74th nation of Zambia' by the Zambian government (Che, 2020; Postel, 2017).

² As of 2020, the number of Internet users increased to 4.45 million (+16%), while 16 million people gained mobile connection (+5.6%) in Zambia, and as a result, social media users increased to 2.3 million (+19%). To put these numbers in perspective, Zambia's population is 18.12 million and, it is important to note that the median age is 17.6. While community radio continues to serve as the greatest source of information across many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa and internet penetration is low, there is already indication of how the continent will transform. The youth bulge and continued digitisation will likely lead to growth in citizen journalism and political organisation around collective identity and shared goals inspired by outside influences. However, state pushback and use of these tools by malign actors will check their activity.

³ The Oriental Post also has other online versions, such as Qiaowang (<http://www.qiaowang.org/>) and WeChat public account (huaqiaozhoubao).

⁴ There were many angry comments in the post, such as "do not trust Africans" or the "Chinese must retaliate," while some argued that Zambians just envy the rich Chinese and that there are always risks to doing business in Africa. Also, one of the comments clarified that "I know the restaurant (Lan Tian), it is famous in the local, and many of its chefs and clerks are black people. How can this restaurant be discriminative?"

References

English Reference

Armed Thieves Rob Chinese Firm in Luano. (2020, September 20). *Lusakatimes.com*. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/09/20/armed-thieves-rob-chinese-firm-in-luano/>

China Happy with President Lungu's Defense of Its Interests in Zambia. (2018, November 24). *Lusakatimes.com*. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/11/24/china-happy-with-president-lungu-defence-of-its-interests-in-zambia/>

CIVICUS. (2017, January 1). Zambia – Overview. <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2017/01/01/zambia-overview/>

Cotterill, J. (2020, September 22). Zambia Headed for Africa's First Covid-Related Debt Default. *Financial Times*. www.ft.com/content/0b744d46-46b1-48c3-81cd-be0d78d99262

Cottle, S. (2006). *Mediatized Conflict: Developments in Media and Conflict Studies*. Open University Press.

Diggers Editor. (2019). How Did 95% of Mukula Reach China Undetected by Zambian Authorities? *Diggers News*. <https://diggers.news/opinion/2019/12/15/how-did-95-of-mukula-reach-china-undetected-by-zambian-authorities/>

Environmental Investigation Agency. (2019). *Mukula Cartels: How Timber Trafficking Networks Plunder Zambian Forests*. EIA. https://content.eia-global.org/posts/documents/000/000/987/original/Mukula_Cartel-HighRes.pdf?1575566086

Hamelink, C. J. (2015). *Media and Conflict: Escalating Evil* (digital ed.). Taylor and Francis.

Hodzi, O. (2019). Chinese in Africa: 'Chineseness' and the Complexities of Identities. *Asian Ethnicity*, (20)1, 1-7.

Hollihan, T. A., and Zhang, Z. (2016). Media Narratives of China's Future. *Global Media and China*, 1(1-2), 7-11.

It's the Land Not Zaffico per se That Has Been Sold. (2018, November 24). *Zambian Watchdog*. <https://www.zambianwatchdog.com/its-the-land-not-zaffico-per-se-that-has-been-sold/>

Li, H. and Shi, X. (2019). Home Away From Home: The Social and Political Roles of Contemporary Chinese Associations in Zambia. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 48(2), 148-170.

Li, S. and Rønning, H. (2013). Half-Orchestrated, Half Freestyle: Soft Power and Reporting Africa in China, *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, (34)3, 102-124.

Lily Mutamz TV. (2020, May 27). *Lusaka Mayor Miles Sampa Does the Unthinkable Apology to the Chinese in Zambia* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKmfKsKmOOY>

Local Government Minister Opposes Lusaka Mayor for Closing Down Abusive Chinese Owned Businesses. (2020, May 27). *Lusakatimes.com*. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/05/27/283923/>

Marsh, J. and Sinyangwe, C. (2020, June 5). Three Chinese Nationals Were Murdered and Burned in Zambia, in a Week When Racial Tensions Were Running High. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/05/china/china-zambia-murder-intl-hnk/index.html/>

Matambo, E. (2019). Constructing China's Identity in Zambian Politics: A Tale of Expediency and Resignation. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs*, (6)3, 43–64.

Mfula, C. (2020). Re-enacting Zambia's Democracy through the Practice of Journalism on Facebook. In Banda T. et al. (Eds.), *Democracy and Electoral Politics in Zambia* (pp. 242-282). Koninklijke Brill NV.

Muchima, K. (2020, May 18). Zambian Turned Away At Chinese Restaurant. *Zambian Watchdog*. <https://www.zambianwatchdog.com/zambian-turned-away-at-chinese-restaurant/>

Musonda, C., Ndola, and Ntambi, M. (2018). ZAFFICO Will Forever Be for Zambians. *Zambia Daily Mail*. <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/zaffico-will-forever-be-for-zambians/>

Mwamba, E. (2019a, December 14). What Would \$193 Million Worth of Mukula Timber Look Like?- Let's Expose the Heightened Propaganda from EIA. *Lusakatimes.com*. <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2019/12/14/what-would-193million-worth-of-mukula-timber-look-like-lets-expose-the-heightened-propaganda-from-eia/>

Mwamba, E. (2019b, December 12). Peddling in Mukula Trade or Defamation – The EIA Report. *Zambia Daily Mail*. <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/peddling-in-mukula-trade-or-defamation-the-eia-report/>

Mwewa Lane, S. (2020, May 25). 3 Chinese Nationals Tied-up, Murdered and Their Bodies Burnt. *Zambian Observer*. <https://www.zambianobserver.com/3-chinese-nationals-tied-up-murdered-and-their-bodies-burnt/>

Mym. (2018, November 15). *Zambian Miners Stage Protest against Inciteful Opposition Politicians.* *Xinhua.* http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2018-11/15/c_137607705.htm

Nkomesha, U. (2020, May 28). *Sampa Apologises to Chinese Community.* *Diggers News.* <https://diggers.news/local/2020/05/28/sampa-apologises-to-chinese-community/>

Okeowo, A. (2013). *China, Zambia, and a Clash in a Coal Mine.* *The New Yorker.* <https://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/china-zambia-and-a-clash-in-a-coal-mine>

Olander, Eric. (2016, September 17). *So What Do Zambians REALLY Think of Chinese Immigrants?* *The China Africa Project.* <https://chinaafricaproject.com/podcasts/podcast-zambia-africa-chinese-china-migrants-lu-yao/>

Orlowski, J. (Director). (2020). *Social Dilemma* [Film]. Netflix.

Over 100 Picked Up by Police in Anti-China Protests in Kitwe. *Lusakatimes.com.* (2018, November 5). <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/11/05/over-100-picked-up-by-police-in-anti-china-protests-in-kitwe/>

Phiri, C. (2018, November 7). *Hichilema Roasted Hot FM ZAFFICO Spark.* *Zambia Reports.* <https://zambiareports.com/2018/11/07/hichilema-roasted-hot-fm-zaffco-spark/>

Phiri, C. (2020, June 5). *Reflection: With Regards to the Lan Tian Incident.* *Zambia Reports.* <https://zambiareports.com/2020/06/05/reflection-regards-lan-tian-incident/>

Postel, H. (2017). *Moving Beyond “China in Africa”: Insights from Zambian Immigration Data,* *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs,* 46(2), 155-174.

Racist Chinese Barbershop Closed. (2020, May 21). *Zambian Watchdog.* <https://www.zambiawatchdog.com/racist-chinese-barbershop-closed/>

Ruwe, F. (2019, December 18). *Lungu Urged to Come Clean on Mukula Cartel.* *Zambian Watchdog.* <https://www.zambiawatchdog.com/lungu-urged-to-come-clean-on-mukula-cartel/>

Sakala, N. (2020). *Chinese Will now Freely Break Laws after how Banda Rebuked Sampa, Laments Machungwa.* *Diggers News.* <https://diggers.news/local/2020/06/02/chinese-will-now-freely-break-laws-after-how-banda-rebuked-sampa-laments-machungwa/>

Sampa, M. (2020, May 24). Miles Sampa Confronts Another Chinese Operation Locking Locals on Fear of COVID-19 Transmission. *Lusakatimes.com.*

<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/05/24/miles-sampa-bursts-another-chinese-operation/>

UNCTAD. (2019). World Investment Report 2019. United Nations. <https://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=2460>

University of Vermont. (2009, Spring). Frame Analysis. http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/Courses/sociology_of_news/page25/page25.html

VoiceUp News Zambia. (2018, November 11). *UPND Leader Hakainde Hichilema on BBC Radio Talks Sake of ZAFFICO*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/VoiceUpNews/videos/576037092818354/>

Wasserman, H., and Madrid-Morales, D. (2018). How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 2212-2231.

Yan, H., Barry, S. and Lu, Y. (2019). Chinese and 'Self-Segregation' in Africa. *Asian Ethnicity*, (20)1, 40-66.

ZAFFICO Has Not Been Sold; It's Fake News Created by Overzealous Opposition-Dora Siliya. (2018, November 6). *Lusakatimes.com*. <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2018/11/06/zaffico-has-not-been-sold-its-fake-news-created-by-overzealous-opposition-dora-siliya/>

Zambian Watchdog. (2018a, November 7). *Zaffico Should Remain as Zaffico, I Smell a Rat*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/Zambianprotector/posts/2156868227697249>

Zambian Watchdog. (2018b, November 8). *HH Says It's the Chinese who Will Buy Zaffico Shares, Say PF Is Blaming Him even for the Current Heat*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/Zambianprotector/posts/2158042407579831>

Zambian Watchdog. (2020a, May 26). *Money Talks: Minster Stops Sampa from Revoking Licenses of Racist Chinese*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/Zambianprotector/posts/3266614246722636>

Zambian Watchdog. (2020b, May 24). *Three Chinese Murdered, Warehouse Burnt Over Pay Dispute*. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/Zambianprotector/posts/3260463607337700>

Chinese Reference

Che, J. J. (2020, September 4). 2020 Zambia Chinese Society Screening [2020 赞比亚华人社会扫描]. *Qiaowang*. <http://www.qiaowang.org/m/view.php?aid=13693>

Kitwe Riot Is Directed to Opposition Party's Incitation, HH's Denial Seems Pale and Powerless [基特韦骚乱矛头直指反对党煽风点火HH竭力否认却似乎苍白无力]. (2018, November 16). *The Oriental Post*, Z3.

Look At The World. (2020, May 27). After Three Chinese Nationals Were Killed in Zambia, More Robberies against Chinese Happens; Anti-Chinese Sentiment Rises Significantly, Chinese Are Afraid of Going Out, and They Hire Armed Guards and Build Electricity Fence [3 中国人在赞比亚遇害后, 又有华人被抢; 当地歧视华人情绪明显, 华人不敢出门, 雇佣持枪保安、拉电网]. *Toutiao.com*. <https://www.toutiao.com/a6831483900334703117/>

Qing, Y. (2020, May, 27). Three Chinese Nationals Murdered in a Zambian Warehouse, Two Suspects Were Arrested, Chinese Embassy Demanded Punishment [.

Tang, Y. F. (2018, November 7). Riots Against Chinese Happened in Zambia: 三名中国人在赞比亚仓库遇害 两嫌已被捕使馆要求严惩]. *Caixin*. <https://international.caixin.com/2020-05-27/101559790.html>

Multiple Shops Were Looted, Embassy Announced Safety Alerts [赞比亚发生针对华人骚乱: 数家商店遭打劫, 使馆发布安全提醒]. *Guancha Syndicate*. https://www.guancha.cn/internation/2018_11_07_478597.shtml

Zhao, J. C., Li, Q., Liu, C. Y. (2020, May 25). Chinese Embassy Condemns the Murder of Three Chinese Nationals in Zambia, Malicious Attacks against Chinese Occur in Consecutive years [我大使馆强烈谴责3名中国公民赞比亚遇害案件 赞已连年发生针对华人恶性事件]. *Huanqiu.com*. <https://3w.huanqiu.com/a/5e93e2/3yNkCacZT1I?agt=11>

Annex: List of Experts Interviewed

Chanda Mfula, PhD Candidate in Media Studies, Journalism and Democracy at the University of Sussex.

Charles Mulila, Director of Development Education Community Project in Zambia (DeCoP).

Eric Olander, Managing Editor of The China Africa Project.

Kibrom Teweldebirhan, LLM from Harvard Law School Candidate.

Marriot Nyangu, Executive Director of The Policy & Governance Center.

Nsama Musonda Kearns, Executive Director of Care for Nature Zambia.

Solange Chaterlard, Journalist and Researcher.

Tamika Halwiindi, Accountable Mining Project Officer at Transparency International Zambia.

Trevor Simumba, Senior Partner and Director of Sub-Saharan Consulting Group.

Wang Xin, Vice President of Zambia Chinese Association.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone we interviewed for their time and expertise, as well as Dr. Marja Hinfelaar (Director of Research and Programs at the Southern African Institute for Policy and Research) and Dr. Katherine Collin (Conflict Resolution Professor at Georgetown University) for their guidance throughout the writing process.