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RESEARCH ARTICLES

The Fourth Estate? The Experiences of Cape Verdean Journalists

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This article explores how being a small island jurisdiction affects actors in the journalism sector. The media is often referred to as the fourth estate, an institution inherently important for democracy. By scrutinizing politicians, journalists have the possibility to reveal transgressions and provide the public insight into how powerholders are performing as state officials. With this knowledge, the public can make informed decisions as to who will earn their vote in coming elections. This article studies the space for manoeuvre of investigative journalism in a small island state where the interconnectedness of people – journalists, sources, and powerholders – is a fact. It does so by studying the case of Cape Verde, a small island nation with 560 000 residents. Interviews with 12 Cape Verdian journalists from a range of the most important media outlets in the country, reveal that although freedom of expression and freedom of the press are constitutionally guaranteed, there are substantial practical limitations of free journalism. Respondents tell of widespread self-censorship, underfunding, and political interference as aspects that limit the possibility of conducting their work in a manner that would make them the watchdog institution that most of them aspire to and wish they could be.

Introduction

Being a small island jurisdiction has political consequences. This has been brought to evidence by recent scholarship (Corbett, 2015; Saati, 2022, 2023; Veenendaal, 2013, 2018; Veenendaal & Corbett, 2020). The interconnectedness of people who reside in such states with each other and with their political representatives bring a certain dynamic to these small islands that are beneficial for purposes of strengthening democratic processes in some respects. These attributes also present certain challenges that are to the detriment of democratic procedures (Anckar, 2010; Anckar & Anckar, 1995; Baldacchino, 2012; Ott, 2000; Saati, 2022, 2023; Srebrnik, 2004). On the positive side of the spectrum, political representatives – due to the small population size – are more able to gauge the temperature of the constituents, and by extension, are more aware of their voter's needs so they can represent them better (Saati, 2022). On the negative side of the spectrum, the interconnectedness of voters and political representatives creates a breeding ground for patronage and corruption to thrive (Saati, 2023; Veenendaal, 2013). It has also been shown that social norms are particularly strong in small island states, and that individuals experience an almost overwhelming sense of pressure to conform to prevailing norms due to fear of being ostracized from the community if they fail to do so (Baldacchino, 2012; Saati, 2023). Thus,

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there are important scholarly contributions that have added to our understanding of how islandness and smallness impacts the political system of such states both in beneficial and harmful ways. This field of work has, however, not engaged specifically with what islandness and smallness can, potentially, imply for actors in the journalism sector. The present article sets out to remedy this research gap. It takes an interest in exploring what small island state dynamics, in terms of the interconnectedness of people, imply for the media. How does being a small island jurisdiction affect journalists and their ability to conduct their work independently from political interference? It explores this issue by studying the small island state of Cape Verde.

This study shows that although Cape Verde is a democratic country in which freedom of the press and freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, the practical experiences of journalists who reside and work in this small island nation suggest that these freedoms are paper constructs to some extent. Their experiences further suggest that this has consequences for Cape Verdean media to conduct its function as the fourth estate: a watchdog institution that monitors power holders. This article draws its findings and conclusions based on in-depth interviews with twelve Cape Verdean journalists. These were conducted in Praia, the capital of the country, in 2023. Among other aspects, the interviews show that private media struggle with funding and, therefore, its journalists face difficulties of conducting investigations into state affairs. State-owned media has the funding that would make investigations into state affairs possible, but is still reluctant to move ahead with such investigations. This is so because journalists who are employed in state-owned media feel reluctant, impeded at times, to investigate power holders due to implicit and explicit political interference into what should and should not be investigated.

This article is organized in five parts. In the next section, the theoretical points of departure for this study are explicated. These rest on two different legs. The first concerns the role of the media in a democracy. The second concerns democracy and small population size. The article then presents and discusses methods and materials, paying particular attention to the challenges of conducting interviews in a small island state where answers could potentially be traced back to respondents if confidentiality is not assured. This section is followed by the empirical investigation in which the results from the interviews are presented and discussed, relating these findings back to the theoretical notions raised earlier in the article. The final section discusses conclusions based on the preceding empirical investigation.

The fourth estate

The media's role as the fourth estate complementing the three pillars of democracy (executive, legislature, and judiciary) as a watchdog institution, and a defender and upholder of democracy has been emphasised in many scholarly contributions (e.g., Stier, 2015; Strömbäck, 2005; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021; Zaller, 2003). The relationship between a democratic system of government and that of a free press in which investigative journalism can thrive, is perhaps

more akin to a symbiotic relationship where both are dependent on each other. The ability of journalists to conduct their profession without impediments from the political sphere are more likely to prosper in a democratic system of government since such a system guarantees the freedom of speech and freedom of the press. At the same time, a democratic system of government relies on free and independent media, and zealous journalists who keep the citizenry informed about matters of public interest (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 332). As explicated by McQuail (2009) and echoed by Trappel & Tomaz (2021), journalism can take on different roles in a democratic society. They range from being the provider of all kinds of relevant information that citizens need about current and recent events not only in the political sphere, but in all areas that concern the general population, to taking on a more active role as a "facilitator" (McQuail, 2009, pp. 125–126). This implies a type of journalism that sets out to encourage citizens not to be mere passive recipients of information, but to be active, willing, and enthusiastic about engaging in debates about current events (McQuail, 2009, pp. 125–126). In addition to these functions, when thinking about the media as a watchdog institution, journalists by investigating, scrutinizing, and reporting how powerholders are governing the country also enable the citizenry to keep the governing elite accountable. Potential transgressions and misdemeanours are brought into daylight, which, in turn, can influence how individual citizens choose to place their vote in the next elections, i.e., on the opposition (Strömbäck, 2005). The reverse is equally valid. By reporting fulfilled election promises, current powerholders may maintain or increase trust from the citizenry and hence be allowed to continue running the country. In their role as the fourth estate, media also shoulder the responsibility of providing citizens with accurate information about the political platforms of various political parties so that when election day does come, the population can make an informed decision as to which political party to vote for (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 339).

Smallness and democracy

Even though the study of the political systems of small states – states with a population size of around or below 500,000 – is an under researched field of empirical inquiry in comparison to that of larger states, there is no shortage of theoretical notions as to how smallness affects democratic processes and procedures. Theories cover positive as well as negative propositions. These propositions will be outlined shortly. Before engaging with this matter, however, it should be specified that when referring to democracy and democratic institutions at large, it is a liberal type of democracy that is envisioned. Indeed, as expressed by Teorell (2010, p. 30), the liberal form of democracy has become the mainstream approach to defining democracy in the comparative democratization literature. We are here dealing with the conventional aspects of democracy: the holding of free and fair elections, universal suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and, in addition to these procedural aspects, a number of political and civil rights.

When it comes to how smallness affects democracy, there are notions that address both potentially beneficial as well as potentially harmful aspects. Starting with the former, there is a scholarly vein within this specific field that suggests that the very circumstance of being small and, even more so, of being a small island state, increases the likelihood of a democratic system of government taking root (Anckar, 2002, 2010; Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004). These are contributions that have observed a correlation between smallness and democracy i.e., by quantitative methods detecting that small states are more likely to be democracies, not, however, delving deeper into *how* democratic these states actually are. The observed correlation is hypothesised to be attributed to smallness giving rise to a sense of togetherness that is not as prevalent in larger states. This sense of belonging is further expounded when smallness is combined with islandness (Baldacchino, 2012). The surrounding sea, the sense of being left to their own devices and having to fend for themselves, gives rise to a "spirit of community and fellowship" (Anckar & Anckar, 1995, p. 220) that is conducive for establishing and maintaining democratic systems of government. How the causal chain is envisioned to play out is, however, shrouded in the unknown. One can, nevertheless, assume that the underlying proposition is that people in small island jurisdictions realise that a democratic system of government is the most apt system of conflict management, appropriate for a small state in which there is nowhere to run nor hide in case of conflict. On the negative side of things, the same sense of togetherness and interconnectedness, between ordinary citizens in small island jurisdictions and between citizens and political representatives is also hypothesised to create fertile soil for patronage and corruption. When everybody knows everybody (Corbett, 2015), the stage has been set for quid pro quo situations to occur. Meritocracy takes a backseat to relationship networks. Individuals are appointed to positions that they would not have been if qualifications had been the sole determinator. Possibilities to hold individuals in public office to account are circumvented. These aspects are detrimental for democratic processes and procedures (Saati, 2022, 2023). Further, small island jurisdictions develop social norms that are strong to the extent that they risk stifling individuals – be they political representatives, journalists, legal professionals, or just ordinary citizens – so they feel that they *must* conform to not risk being ex-isled, to use Baldacchino's very to the point expression (2012, p. 109).

In the empirical section of this article, the theoretical notions accounted for above will be used as points of reference when exploring how Cape Verdean journalists understand their manoeuvre space to practice their profession in this small island nation. Before turning our attention to this matter, the next section presents and discusses methods and materials.

Collecting and presenting material from a small island nation

The island state of Cape Verde with a population size of approximately 560 000 (UN, 2021) fits squarely within the parameters of what constitutes 'small' in the specific vein of research concerned with the study of the political

system of small states. Scholars in this field commonly draw the cut-off point for 'smallness' somewhere below or around a population size of 500,000, sometimes referring to states with populations below 250,000 as 'microstates' (Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004; Veenendaal, 2015). Undeniably, gathering material based on the personal experiences of individuals in a small state bring certain challenges, in particular, if such individuals are public figures, hold public office, and/or work in a public profession such as the media sector. Such individuals are easily identifiable, seeing that the total amount of individuals in the investigated population is not likely to be overwhelmingly large. Thus, it is of utmost importance to assure potential respondents that their answers will be handled with discretion, and that no identity marker of any sort will be disclosed when articles that are based on their statements are published in scientific journals, policy papers, or anywhere else for that matter. Thus, care will be taken in the presentation of the empirical material in this article. In the next section, numerous quotes will illustrate the experiences of Cape Verdean journalists, but no identity marker will be disclosed. It will not be revealed whether the person who is quoted is a woman or a man, whether he or she is young or middle aged, whether he or she has worked as a journalist for many years or is newer to the profession, or whether he or she works in state-owned media or in privately owned media.

Preparation for conducting interviews with Cape Verdean members of the media included: identifying the main media outlets in the country, seeking to include a combination of state-owned and privately-owned media. The investigation also sought to include both women and men, and both experienced journalists with many years on the road as well as a younger generation of journalists. The main media outlets in the country, and from which journalists also agreed to participate, are: Radiotelevisão Caboverdiana (RTC) (state-owned radio and television station), O País (privately owned), Expresso das Ilhas (privately owned), A Nação (privately owned), Record TV Cabo Verde (privately owned), Santiago Magazine (privately owned), RTP Africa (state-owned), Inforpress (state-owned), and Radio Morabeza (privately owned). It is worth noting that several of these journalists have experience of working within both state-owned media as well as within private media companies. Journalists who work at these different newspapers/radio stations were approached with an email in which an information letter about the overarching purpose of the research project was presented. The letter also included information about the respondent's potential participation, assuring them of confidentiality, and stated that no identity marker would be revealed in any written (or other) documentation based on their answers. Interviews would be recorded with their permission and recordings would be deleted following the finalization of the research project. Finally, it clarified that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time during the interview. Consent forms with the details just accounted for were also emailed to potential respondents alongside the information letter. Twelve journalists participated in this research and each of the interviews took approximately

40-60 minutes. They were recorded with the participants permission. All interviews were finalized as planned, i.e., none of the respondents chose to terminate their participation during the interview.

This study does not make any claims to capture the experiences of all Cape Verdean journalists. It would be presumptuous to assume that this would be possible based on a limited number of interviews. It was, however, striking that except for one single interview, the answers from the respondents aligned with each other to an overwhelming degree. These findings held true across employer, experience, and gender. Thus, the material gathered from the interviews was rather saturated. Though it is impossible to know whether entirely new perspectives would have been voiced had more interviews been carried out, the consistency in the experiences shared during the interviews conducted puts this into doubt.

It is important to mention that the material from the interviews has also been complemented by official reports from Reporters without Borders, Freedom House's annual report on the state of democracy for Cape Verde, information from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). A recent report from the Centre of Development and Democracy by Mendes-Borges (2022), for which the author interviewed 16 key informants, including journalists, also helped capture the media landscape of the country in its present state. These materials, to large extent, corroborated the findings of this article, strengthening its validity.

Free journalism?

The Cape Verdean constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press (*Constitution of Cape Verde*, 1980 (Rev. 1992), Article 45 & 46). Thus, the formal requirements for the media to function freely without impediments are assured. This was acknowledged by all the interviewed journalists. Answers such as "from a legal point of view, all the necessary conditions are met," "all legal conditions are there," and "theoretically, yes – the legal conditions that allow us to work freely and independently exist" were voiced. It is worth lingering a bit to the last statement, that *theoretically,* all conditions are present. This raises the question of practical limitations. To be sure, in the same manner that all respondents brought attention to the fact that the constitution guarantees the necessary freedoms for the media to conduct its role as the fourth estate, all but one of the journalists followed up their initial statement with how freedom of expression and freedom of the press, in their experience, is circumvented in practice. The obstacles that the Cape Verdean journalists gave expression to cover different aspects that have to do with i) underfunding, ii) smallness and self-censorship, and, iii) political interference. These aspects reinforce and connect to each other. For purposes of structuring this section of the article, however, they will be presented separately.

The matter of underfunding

The issue of Cape Verde being a lower middle-income nation was brought to attention throughout the interviews. Almost regardless of which particular matter was being discussed, income was seen as a root cause to the democratic challenges that the country faces. Regarding the specific issue of practicing free journalism, the underfunding of the media sector was raised by all respondents as a structural problem. One of the journalists stated that:

> First, it is very difficult to do proper journalism if you do not have the financial capability. Secondly, independent journalism must be journalism without external financial dependencies of any kind. Journalism with small economic resources will always be susceptible to different types of constraints and pressures.

In a similar manner, one of the other respondents stated:

> The possibilities of practicing free journalism could exist here if there was economic independence of the media. Journalists and media companies are vulnerable to possible offers, to favours, that may arise. To have independence, it is necessary to think about the financing mechanisms of the media and ensure that the state actually fulfils its role, which is to guarantee the plurality of media, plurality of opinions.

Although state-owned media is in a better position to conduct serious investigations since its resources are subsidized by the state (Freedom House, 2022; RSF, 2023), journalists who are, or have been, employed in such media outlets expressed that it is not entirely without difficulties to exercise press freedom and investigate all types of matters despite the available resources. Some of the journalists expressed that though they might want to (and have attempted to) look into matters that involve state officials, how power is exercised, and public expenditures, such investigations are seldom published:

> Investigations in this country are complicated. For example, if I want to do something about corruption in government, I would have to get the approval of my editors, and I would have to get the time and the resources to be able to do it thoroughly. But I do not get it because [they] believe that it is problematic and that it can bother the wrong people.

This sentiment captures a notion of state funding coming with strings attached. Resources are there in the sense that journalists who are employed in state-owned media can rest assured that at the end of the month, they will receive a pay check (RSF, 2023). However, resources are not necessarily there in terms of time and, perhaps even more so, willingness. It appears that certain topics are simply off limits due to being 'uncomfortable,' the term used one of the respondents.

Another journalist was even more straightforward saying that:

> There are serious limitations and there are sanctions, especially from the political side. When we work on matters related to politics, it seems that we are stepping on a minefield that could explode at any moment. This is especially so when we are working on an investigation involving politicians.

The financial situation was stressed by another one of the journalists who emphasised that it conditions the entire idea, and more importantly, practice of an independent media in Cape Verde. A combination of two factors were underscored: the small market and low levels of advertising. Adding to that, whatever advertising that does exist:

> goes to the public sector, to the state media that has more range. So, for example *RTC* absorbs a lot of the available advertising, including institutional advertising. So even though we have this law that obliges public institutions to advertise in all types of newspapers, this does not happen. The state should distribute advertising to all the press, whether public or private.

Underfunding, leading to a lack of time and resources to be able to conduct thorough investigations has given rise to a sense of running errands for the political elite. Several times during the interviews the phrases "press release journalism" or "journalism by press releases" were voiced. When asking what this implied, the respondents conveyed that conducting their work often entailed attending press conferences arranged by politicians – in the government or in the opposition – to note down their statements before relaying the information onwards to the public. Thus, investigative journalism appears to be the exception rather than the rule, which has also been noted by Freedom House (2022) in their assessment of Cape Verde. Relating this back to the earlier theoretical discussion about different roles that the media can have in a democracy, conveying of information is of course an important and relevant role. However, if this is the only, or prime, role that the media shoulders, it is difficult to argue that that media is exercising its role as the fourth estate. One of the respondents clarified:

> This is not, from my point of view, sharp journalism that is capable of confronting – as a kind of watchdog service – the corridors of power.

Another respondent said:

> It's a very passive form of journalism. We react a lot, instead of acting.

Another journalist continued along the same lines of argument and acknowledged that, doubtlessly, financial limitations and the lack of resources constrain the ability of Cape Verdean journalists to investigate how powerholders perform their duties in office. This aspect set aside, however, the respondent implied that even if resources were ample, such investigative journalism may not be carried out due to the interconnectedness of people in Cape Verde:

> We are a very small place, you know. Everybody knows everybody. I walk on the street and everybody knows who I am, and I know most of the ministers personally, I know many of the judges, and so on. It is very complicated to write about someone who you know and who knows you. This is a problem…

This last statement is an appropriate bridge to the next section that deals with the matter of smallness and self-censorship.

Smallness and self-censorship

Smallness can bring social and political dynamics that are beneficial for the strengthening and deepening of democracy (Anckar, 2002, 2010; Ott, 2000; Srebrnik, 2004). However, it can also become problematic if the interconnectedness of people, in general, and of journalists and powerholders, in particular, make the former refrain from investigating the latter. All but one of the respondents interviewed said that varying degrees of self-censorship is a common occurrence among Cape Verdean journalists. This has also been reported by Reporters without Borders (RSF, 2023) and an aspect that Mendes-Borges (2022, p. 3) also encountered in her recent interview study. One of the respondents explained that fear of repercussions made reporting on political matters a "no go:"

> Fear of reprisals is why I avoid covering political matters. I always write stories about the environment or society. I know that problems can arise from politics, from writing about people that you know personally. I've seen this happen to my colleagues. So, I don't go down the same road to avoid sanctions and reprisals.

Another one of the journalists expressed a similar sentiment and followed up the argument by saying:

> Island states are small states, where everyone knows everyone. Journalists want to do deeper work, but there are major limitations. At the end of the day, you want to keep your employment and we might end up not doing the work that good journalism requires of us.

One of the respondents said that smallness of society is just a fact, something that one cannot get around, but an aspect that certainly affects the practical possibilities of conducing journalism freely and without political interference.

One part of it has to do with self-censorship because the individual journalist is reluctant to report about potential transgressions when the powerholder in question might be an acquaintance, while the other part has to do with fear of retaliations of various sorts:

> Everybody knows you. They [the politicians] know where I live, where my child studies, where he goes to play, and so on. It's self-censorship sure, but people [journalists] are afraid to investigate political affairs.

Quite a few of the respondents discussed that there is not enough protection for journalists, and that there is a sense among individuals in the profession that they are "left to fend for themselves," suggesting that if there was some form of institutional protection, Cape Verdean journalists may be more inclined (and less afraid) to investigate powerholders, some of whom might also be their friends. One interviewee said:

> We must think of a mechanism that protects journalists and encourages us to have a sharper, more courageous journalism. It's no use being brave, knowing we are vulnerable.

Tying into the theoretical proposition of social norms being particularly strong in small states (Baldacchino, 2012; Saati, 2023), one of the interviewed journalists discussed at length the experience of "moral harassment." This person had experiences of being approached not directly by a specific politician that the news item investigated, but by someone in the politician's team saying that "you should be ashamed of yourself having written about that," and "you are doing your work in a lazy manner," and "that is not investigative journalism, it is obvious that you are sympathising with the other side." The "other side" implying either the opposition or the government depending on who was making the claim. During elections these types of harassments intensify. This journalist said that one time an overt threat was conveyed:

> I'm going to watch the news today and see the feature that you did, and I hope for your sake that I'm not bothered by it.

When asked whether these types of occurrences had influenced the way in which this journalist conducted their reporting, the respondent admitted that on several occasions it had. Even though there is an ethical code among the Cape Verdean journalists that their profession requires them to act as a watchdog institution, norms as to how to behave, what to do, and not to do developed in parallel with this ethical code. Thus, there appears to be many instances in which journalists refrain from covering political affairs due to various repercussions, including: losing employment, being shamed and ostracized, losing friends, and making enemies when reporting on powerholders that they know on a personal level.

Interviews also brought attention to the issue of sources being reluctance to make their voices heard. Thus, self-censorship appears to be multidimensional. Several of the respondents raised concern over the interconnectedness of people in Cape Verde, making individuals with information about politicians misusing their power afraid to step forward and inform journalists. One journalist said:

> The problem starts from the sources of information. It does not start with the journalist; it ends with the journalist. There are people with a lot of information relevant for the country, but they hide this information because they are afraid of being caught.

While another stated:

> Sometimes we go out to get a simple opinion about the country's development and many people don't want to show their face, they don't want to talk. They say "I don't want to talk because tomorrow there may be reprisals." It's a reality here in Cape Verde.

This is very far from the theoretical notion of members of the media sector acting as "facilitators" (McQuail, 2009, pp. 125–126), successfully encouraging citizens to be active and not mere recipients of information. In Cape Verde it appears that several circumstances impede this. While journalists might *want to* take on this role, they are either afraid to, or do not have the opportunity and encouragement from their editors to do so. For their part, citizens themselves do not always seem to be comfortable being overly active because of fear of being caught as whistle-blowers of sorts. These circumstances lead to questions of whether there is, and if so, to what extent, political interference in the media sector of Cape Verde. This is the focus of the next section of the article.

Political interference

Many of the interviewed journalists reflected on the appointment procedures for the head of the largest media outlet with the widest spread in the country named RTC. Up until 2019, the head of RTC was appointed by the government, but since then an independent commission holds this responsibility. In effect, however, the respondents expressed that not much has changed and that the commission appears to appease the sitting government in terms of appointing a head that the government wishes to see in that position. This is something that Reporters without Borders have noted as well (RSF, 2023). That this is, for all intents and purposes, a politically appointed position is cause for concern and undermines trust in different ways. For one, it is likely to undermine public trust in RTC. Second, it is likely to undermine trust

among journalists who are, or have been, employed at RTC, which is 70% of all journalists in the country (Mendes-Borges, 2022; RSF, 2023). In the words of one of journalist:

> There is a lack of trust in directors and editors. The government chooses the heads and administrators. So, there is not much trust [from journalists] in the director. When the journalist is then told to reveal his sources to the director, he does not want to because he does not feel confidence in him. And when I do not feel confident in revealing my source to the director, I simply do not move forward with the story as a matter of protecting my source.

This behaviour has implications for conveying relevant information to the general public. Journalists refrain from writing news items that can influence Cape Verdean citizens' perceptions of powerholders because they do not trust their superiors (directors/editors) to protect them or their source. This also influences the way in which some of the respondents view their own position as a member of the fourth estate. One went so far to say "the press in Cape Verde never plays the role of watchdog or vigilante, holding people to account." They continued:

> Whenever a journalist allows [themself] to do something that falls outside of the institutional agenda...whenever journalists investigate and come up with hot stories or delve deeper into issues, they always encounter problems. There are always voices linked to power that try to condition journalists.

This became critically apparent in 2022 when three Cape Verdean journalists were brought in for questioning by state authorities after having reported on a murder investigation involving the minister of internal administration, who at the time was deputy director of the judiciary police. The rationale for bringing the journalists in for repeated questioning was that by reporting on this matter, they had violated the secrecy of justice (CPJ 2022). One of the respondents reflected on this specific occurrence:

> For me, it is a big stain on the justice system and has an even greater impact by restricting and limiting the level of freedom of the press in Cape Verde because it generates apprehension and fear. This influences journalists. Many journalists will now think twice about addressing these issues, or directly criticizing the justice system, or taking on sensitive cases, because they may be made defendants and may have to respond in court.

Another journalist characterized these events:

> This is an example of political meddling. If a journalist tries to deepen a subject in any area, as long as that subject involves a politician, a member of the government, [they] will be barred in some way. [They] will be prevented in some way. And might stop being a journalist because of that. Because [their] name will be so muddy in the market. That's what is now happening to these journalists.

Undoubtedly, this also ties into the previous discussion about self-censorship, lack of resources and, on a general level, low living standards of Cape Verdean citizens, including journalists. When journalists who are newer to the profession become aware of how their colleagues were treated in this specific case, they might be reluctant to pursue similar stories. As put by one of the respondents:

> We are talking about a country where there are many young journalists facing job insecurity with fixed short-term contracts. This also causes journalists to self-censor. This is actually a point that has been noted in Reporters without Borders report on Cape Verde.

The matter of political interference is also prevalent during elections. Vote buying, "conscience buying" as phrased by one respondent, and quid pro quos in terms of "I will give you x, y and z in return for your vote," are prevalent. Most of the respondents also connected this occurrence, yet again, with low living standards for many and even poverty for some, suggesting that what may constitute a small amount of money for some, is enough of an incentive for others to sell their vote.

> Look, it is a poor country. People are poor. If you give them 50 dollars and say "come and vote for me," they will vote for you.

Another one of the journalists talked about political transgressions that occurred over and over again:

> By law, political parties are not allowed to make propaganda close to the voting stations, but they do it. They cannot transport people to go to vote, but they do it. They cannot take identification cards and help people to vote, but they do it. They cannot buy the vote, but they do it.

Since multiparty elections were introduced in 1991, all the respondents at some point had covered elections in their work (presidential, parliamentary and/or local elections), and all of them had experiences of observing misconduct and interference. One of the journalists interviewed witnessed a political candidate distributing money and building materials. This respondent said that "of course this can affect the opinion or the vote of the person who receives it." Another journalist saw "people who buy identity cards, and people

who vote more than once." One of the journalists witnessed people receiving donations and food baskets, and another one said that "during the years I've been working, I've seen ballots disappear and nobody knows where they go." Still another journalists said:

> Political parties take advantage of the vulnerable among the population. We have a population that is mostly poor, so through a simple gift – a bag of cement or a monetary handout – they [politicians] are able to change their vote.

Another one phrased it as:

> Everyone has their price. Imagine a person in need, and unable to put a pan on the fire to feed himself. And then someone comes up to him and says he needs his vote in exchange for something. Of course, he's going to give it. It's convenient for both sides.

Conclusions

Interviews with Cape Verdean journalists strongly suggest that their experiences of conducting their work by acting as the fourth estate through investigating matters that relate to the exercise of power is severely circumvented. As many of the accounts above illustrate, there appears to be a lack of funding for privately owned media houses, in particular. This, of course, has bearing on the possibilities of conducting in-depth investigations. Needless to say, attending press conferences, taking notes of what is being said, and reporting it back to the public does not consume the same amount, nor the same type of resources compared to what is needed to thoroughly investigate state officials. At the same time, when discussing resources, financial aspects and time are only two factors. In this context, willingness might also be considered a resource. A resource that appears to be in short supply. Not among the journalists themselves, at least not among the majority of the ones interviewed for this research, but rather among their superiors, i.e., editors and, in the case of RCT, also among heads/administrators. Thus, even if the individual journalist aspires to conduct investigations into, for example, state expenditures, they will face obstacles either through an outright rejection when proposing the topic to the editor or by being asked to reveal their sources, at which point the story is killed as most journalists will never accept to do so. The answers from some of the interviews also reveal something that can only be understood as a culture of fear taking grip of the profession. When saying that they have seen what investigating political matters has implied for their colleagues, and therefore have opted out of doing such investigations themselves, it is difficult to draw any other conclusion. The 2022 case of the three Cape Verdean journalists taken into questioning because of having investigated one of the current government ministers, will most likely add to this fear, which was suggested in some of the interviews.

Media has a crucial role in a democracy. The theoretical notions as to why and the different roles that media agents can take were elaborated earlier. Obviously, these aspects have merit regardless of the particular population size of the country in question. The media as a watchdog institution, as the fourth estate, as a potential "facilitator" to use McQuail's (2009, pp. 125–126) terminology is equally valid in a populous country such as, France or Spain, as in a small island country such as Cape Verde. But the practical realities differ. This is where we see that theoretical notions of smallness and democracy come into play and juxtapose theoretical notions of media and democracy. The rules of the game, if one can express it as such, are inherently different in a small island state. Close bonds between journalists, editors, sources, and those who are to be investigated, i.e., the politicians, become problematic, and from this problematic situation grows self-censorship. Journalists are reluctant to investigate acquaintances and perhaps even friends, regardless of them being state officials. Likewise, sources (in other words, ordinary people) are reluctant and afraid to reveal information that could be potentially damaging for their acquaintances, and, perhaps, even friends, regardless of them being state officials. The prior theoretical notion of smallness giving rise to sense of togetherness on small island jurisdictions, also appears to have this drawback; togetherness also makes one reluctant to report misdemeanours due to fear of losing friendships and employment. What does this imply for the media in Cape Verde and other small island countries? Surely the conclusion cannot be that only external media, external journalists, can conduct serious investigations into the undertakings of power holders because national journalists are either afraid to or do not receive the necessary resources to be able to. Rather it appears, as suggested by one of the journalists that was interviewed in this research, that legal protection for journalists needs to be improved. As this journalist said, "It's no use being brave, knowing we are vulnerable." For this to occur, however, willingness is key. And not the willingness of just anyone. In essence, *political* willingness is key for such legislation to occur. This means that the same individuals, i.e., the politicians who might have the most to lose and who have the most at stake, are the same individuals who need to be brave enough to take the necessary steps to propose the legislation needed so that Cape Verdean media can be the watchdog institution that every democracy needs and deserves. Such legislation would likely also serve to address, and come to terms with, the current lack of reporting on serious transgressions in relation to what occurs around and close to the ballot on election day. That votes are being bought, that people are being transported to voting boots around the island, and that people are being offered food and cement in exchange for their vote are all occurrences that are to the detriment of democratic practices and procedures. Journalists must be able to report on these matters, which also speaks to the relevance of introducing legislation that protects this profession and allows them to conduct their work as the fourth estate that they were intended to be.

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