

Full Length Research Paper

A social-semiotic engagement with representations of President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai in *The ZimDaily.com* from June 2008 to July 2013

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THE FIVE-YEAR government of national unity tenure in Zimbabwe that brought together three leading political parties namely the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties came to an end when the country held successful parliamentary and presidential elections in July 2013. As was the case in 2008, the ruling ZANU-PF party won the 2013 election. Using the social-semiotics approach, this paper examines the representations and portrayal of President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai through editorial cartoons. Specifically, this paper assesses how, why and to what extent *The Zimdaily.com* editorial cartoons representations reflected the happenings on the ground. Key research methods used in this study are qualitative archival research, textual analysis, semiotics and content analysis. Based on the mass communication theories of gate-keeping, agenda building, representation, media and political economy theories, this paper argues that old fashioned conflict resolution and conflict prevention tactics and strategies need to be improved as the modern society becomes networked than ever. It was clear that peace building approaches such as those recommended by the 1992 United Nations resolution could not apply to Zimbabwe, but modern societies such as those found in Zimbabwe need a multi-task diplomacy approach such as the one employed by the then South Africa President Thabo Mbeki in resolving the Zimbabwean problem. The Zimbabwe conflict had become a sub-continental problem and could have spilled into an armed violence or even an insurrection but for the regional intervention and other multi-task diplomacy approaches, as manifesting through the editorial cartoons, the result was the government of national unity and not war.

Key words: Diaspora media, inclusive government, agents of regime change.

INTRODUCTION

The coming of the information technology through the Internet in Zimbabwe and the continent of Africa at large coincided with the almost unstoppable wave of political

change process that swept long time rulers in Africa in the 1990s. These included Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Hastings Kamuzu Banda

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of Malawi among others. The so-called Arab Springs have also been ascribed to the ability of the opposition parties to use electronic newspapers and other social sites to unseat governments. The electronic newspaper is seen in this period as the power behind the forces that empower ordinary citizens to participate more directly in their political system. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora have come up with a number of online newspapers and the *ZimDaily.com* is one such online newspaper seeking to explain the performance of President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai during the life of the government of national unity in Zimbabwe from June 2008 to July 2013. The broad approach of this research paper is to employ a social semiotic understanding of the representation of the president and the prime minister in a political marriage of convenience.

Background and context

The use of electronic newspapers as an alternative media in Zimbabwe emerged in 2004 as a result of the shrinkage of the hard copy locally produced newspaper space due to the closure of four privately owned newspapers. *The Daily News* and *The Daily News on Sunday* were closed in 2003 for failing to register with the now defunct Media and Information Commission (MIC). *The Tribune* was closed in 2004 after failing to account for its transfer of ownership from Media Africa Group to The Tribune Group. Another privately owned newspaper stable, *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Mirror* closed shop after a tag-of-war erupted between the owner Ibbotson Mandaza and his partners who among them were known Central Intelligent Organization operatives according to *The Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper.

It is the reporters affected by the closures that went on to establish online newspapers. Being journalists first before being economic refugees, the professionals also realized the need for electronic newspapers to satisfy these virtual communities with updates from home. Diaspora media can and should be understood as much more than simply a means by which information of interest to a given community can be exchanged, or a means for communicating images of that community to a wider society (Smith, 2001). Thus we need to understand these media as spaces for communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of Diaspora community are continually constructed, debated and re-imagined (Mano and Willems, 2008). This paper therefore, looks at the representation of President Mugabe and his arch-enemy Prime Minister Tsvangirai during the inclusive government in Zimbabwe by the *ZimDaily.com* site operating from the United Kingdom. .

Internet use in Zimbabwe

According to O'Brien (1997) the Internet is the largest

network of interlinked computers in the world since it does not have a governing body or a central authority governing it or the amount or the use of content transmitted. The Internet was established in the USA by the defence department in 1969 to enable lateral communications between the government and research institutions. Computers were also expensive and only elites and experts could afford them (O' Brien, 1997). Deuze (1999) argues that the coming of the Internet led to a new type of journalism called online journalism which is characterized by "multi modality, hypertextuality and interactivity." This was supported by Dixit and Coronel (2002) who said the Internet's relative freedom from control allows small, underfunded and virtual unknown groups to have a global presence by resisting authority in through the use of information and communication technologies in their fight for emancipation. Grazian (2005) believes these technological changes encourage the greater creativity, innovativeness, autonomy and empower individual cultural producers, from web-based gossip to grassroots political operatives.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU 2008) states that 1 351 000 people have access to the Internet in Zimbabwe representing a 10.9 percent figure. Wurure (2005) states that the posts and telecommunication in Zimbabwe have the Internet backbone and offer leased lines and dial-up services to Internet Service Providers (ISPs). He added that the telecommunications was responsible for registering domains such as .org, .zw, and .gov. The number of ISPs grew from Six (6) in 2003 to the present 27 and this is ascribed to growing interest in Internet subscription both by the business community and the general public according to Shadreck Nkala, chairman of ISPs in Zimbabwe. However, the fact that the telecommunications department has the right to lease lines to ISPs dampens the spirit of those clamouring for freedom of expression as this enhances the chance of an errant ISP to be deregistered. This paper brings out the influence of online newspapers in the policy making decision process in Zimbabwe.

Online newspapers black-listed

On 30 September, 2005, *the Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper reported that the ruling ZANU-PF had branded online media targeting Zimbabwean readers as "terrorists, mercenaries, and puppets" used by the British and the American governments to effect "regime change" in Zimbabwe as a way of stalling the successful and cruising land redistribution program. As a result, the party drew a list of 41 online publications saying they had launched a cyber war to promote a regime change agenda. *The ZimDaily.com* is among the blacklisted online newspapers. On 10 August, 2007 Dr Olivia Muchena, then minister of Science and Technology, "We are all aware that ZANU-PF is at war from within and

outside our borders. Contrary to the gun battles we are accustomed to, we now have cyber war fares fought from one's comfort zone, be it in the bedroom, office, swimming pool etc- but with deadly effects." Dr Muchena challenged her audience to pause and think about who was behind the creation of these websites, their target audience and market, their influence and the impact they have on Zimbabweans. In the article, Dr Muchena stated that the websites had become weapons used daily to fight the president (R.G. Mugabe) and the ICTs were now a "rogue platform for high-tech espionage" to peddle "virulent propaganda" and to delegitimize "our just struggle against Anglo-Saxons".

Nathaniel Manheru, believed to be the pen name for the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity George Charamba, wrote in his weekly column published in *The Herald* of December 13, 2008 that the former *Daily News* in the Diaspora were running "ghost sites" to spread lies about the political situation in the country. "This Anglo-American corporation is running a whole host of ghost sites and ghost reporters – buttressed by a phalanx of cameramen. There is huge, dirty money involved -party of it flowing into the public newsrooms. The line between these journalistic misdeeds and espionage grows thinner and thinner by the day. I happen to know that the authorities are about to put a price on those concerned, - and let no one cry," wrote Manheru.

The ZimDaily.com

The ZimDaily.com was started by Munamoto Maiswa in 2005 from the United Kingdom before Gilbert Muponda, who was based in Canada and also owns a number of companies among them GM Research Institute, GMRI Capital and 3MG Media, acquired a 50% controlling stake in 2008 to become the group's Chief Executive Officer. Muponda, briefly arrested in Zimbabwe on 11 August, 2011 and released the following day, almost six years after he fled the country, is a prominent banker having owned CFX, Century Bank and had shares in the Royal Bank, all of which were impounded by the state in a Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe initiated blitz on banks in 2005. He also owned ENG Capital, then the fastest growing financial institution in Zimbabwe, claims in his column that he was the first victim of the anti-graft political campaign meant to silence and eliminate independent business deemed undesirable by the government of Zimbabwe (*ZimDaily.com*12-09-09). Thus *The ZimDaily.com* project seeks to provide a platform for those hurt by the government of Zimbabwe.

Media in Zimbabwean politics

Waldah (2004) states that the yardstick of a critical

assessment of the role of the media in politics ought to be the principles that apply in a democracy and these include the assessment of citizens' participation in free public discussion of political and social issues without fearing undesirable consequences. Interpersonal communication has been the obvious alternative and has played an important information dissemination role in closely knit societies when debating on political situations but with the "great dispersion" of Zimbabweans because of the economic hardship bedeviling the country since the turn of the century, access to the media became increasingly necessary for both those in the Diaspora and at home seeking to acquaint themselves in political situation. The media, especially the online media, has the capacity to disseminate political messages quickly and widely enough to be able to influence public debate thanks to the coming of the Internet age. Thus the political importance of the media include among other things, to mediate a democratic political culture to the society. As a result, the media that is open to different political ideologies, which allow all sides to present their views, and defend people's rights to express their political options, strengthen the democratic foundations for any society (Coleman, 2000). Thus the premise of this paper is to closely analyze the role that the *Zimdaily.com* played in acquainting the Zimbabwean populace with information on the performances of the joint running of the political affairs of the republic of Zimbabwe under the inclusive government banner. This is done, knowing full well that the media that provide selective information make it difficult for people to keep themselves adequately informed of political matters shaping their destiny

Cartoons

Historically cartoons have been known for addressing topical issues inherent in a given society and these usually range from the rich versus poor relationship, the uses and abuses of political power, dictatorial tendencies, social iniquities and even the political situation in general. This study examines the use of cartoons in online newspapers against these normative expectations of the use of cartoons. The research also examines the liberative potential of Internet use in Zimbabwe where media practitioners have often complained of restrictive laws. According to Nyamanhindi (2006), cartoons are important tools that can be used to expose policy contradictions and defects in a democracy. Nyamanhindi believes a cartoon says more than a sermon of a thousand words saying it can ridicule absurdities of political actions or other human frailties in a light-hearted manner. Thus pomposity, cruelty, hypocrisy, virtues, vanity and venality are usually the primary targets of cartoons in the media. Cartoons have been very instrumental for positive and negative happenings throughout the world and as seen by events that took place in

Denmark (2005), South Africa (2008) and Rwanda (1993) where the cartoons were held responsible, among other forms of the media, for fueling the in-famed 1994 genocide.

RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The researcher applied mainly qualitative methods in data collection and analysis. The social semiotics approach anchored this research piece. A purposive non-probability sample of the *ZimDaily.com* online newspaper was taken. This enabled the researcher to identify the online newspaper that focused on the government of national unity in Zimbabwe as well as the use of cartoons. This was most appropriate because the research was not meant to generalize the study but rather to investigate the variable relationships. It was also appropriate because the researcher used *ZimDaily.com* as a convenient sample. Archival research, case study and trend analysis approaches formed the key data gathering methods. Available data was in the form of editorial cartoons as published from June 2008 to July 2013. Each edition of the online newspaper under study had an equal chance of being selected for the study. After the data was collected, the articles were analyzed using content, hermeneutics of interpretation and diagnostic approaches. According to Kerlinger 1986, (in Dominick 2006), content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for purposes of measuring variables. In the case of this study, editorial cartoons were studied for their theme, message and tone with regard to President Robert Mugabe and Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai. The cartoons were classified as those that were either promoting or critical of the two principals. This paper attempted to study the messages in the editorial cartoons with the sole intention of explaining how the inclusive government of President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai was represented in online newspapers. According to Priest (1996), semiotics is the study of signification and communication, signs and symbols. Thus in this paper, semiotics became central as the researcher sought to find out how meanings from editorial cartoons represented of the inclusive government were constructed and meant to be understood by the readers.

Research objectives

The major objective of this study is to critically assess the role played by *The ZimDaily.com* newspaper in engaging locals by painting a picture of the movement and performance of the inclusive government. It is also the objective of this paper to explore the political discourses forwarded in editorial cartoons under study by looking at the structure, the political discourse, shared interests and the political culture being forwarded to the readers.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

President Mugabe, as the face of the ZANU-PF regime and its policies, dominated the cartoons published by *The ZimDaily.com* and out of the analyzed 220 cartoons; he was caricatured in 160 cartoons. This translated to a 72.72 percent representation of the president during the period under study; 16.36 percent of the cartoons focused on Prime Minister Tsvangirai while other influential political figures claimed the remainder of the

cartoons. However, the cartoons raised different issues and themes as discussed below.

Failed ZANU-PF policies

Failures of the ruling ZANU-PF ideologies were correctly depicted through the cartoons which included representations of growing immigration and an increase in non-partisan voting patterns. The failures by ZANU-PF as depicted by their President were also clearly highlighted through the shaping of virtual identities through failed ideologies and information dissemination patterns. President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF regime were presented as a bunch of failures and as dictators in most of the cartoons. President Mugabe is portrayed as someone who never listens to advice and was not lenient to dissent voices within his party and also within the inclusive government. These were epitomized by the cartoon published on 10 September 2008 in which the President is figured as running away with the country which is personified as a human being. Prime Minister Tsvangirai and western donors were haplessly watching as the President refuses the prescriptions and methods of treatment being brought by western sponsored donors as a solution to the Zimbabwean problem.

Political failure, which may be explained through government interventions which lead to the inefficient allocation of scarce resources were so abundant in the editorial cartoons. This nearly showed that Zimbabwe is living in an era of failed ideologies such as capitalism (depicted by failure of Economic Structural adjustment programs), neo-liberalism approaches during the 1990s' waves of internet penetration, socialism and communism approaches of the 1980s soon after independence from Britain and Marxism approaches adopted during the early years of self rule.

President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF style of governance are shown as a people who do not want to listen to other people's ideas and especially to the ideas brought by Prime Minister Tsvangirai and his friends from the west despite them having a stronger financial arm and the ability to solve the economic and political problems. The cartoons however, seem to suggest that the solution to Zimbabwe's problems lie in the hands of Prime Minister Tsvangirai and the international community. All this resulted in clear manifestation of political failure as it resulted in mass protests, massive economic depression and the glaring exploitative arrangement of political and economic power and resource privileges.

The setting of one of the cartoons depicts a hospital, a hospital bed and hospital equipment. The country Zimbabwe is a patient and is on the brink of dying as the patient is in bandages and also on a drip. President Mugabe is seen taking away the patient at the sight of foreign aid which is in the hands of white people who are carrying aid kits. MDC-T leader Tsvangirai seems to be

directing the white and donor aids to the patient. The Prime Minister is in a state of shock. Prime Minister Tsvangirai has his own medical kit. President Mugabe does not have a medical kit but is carrying the patient away from those with medical kits. The context of the cartoon largely falls under the idea of the success of the inclusive government. The cartoon shows that the west, who are backing Prime Minister Tsvangirai have a solution to the hardships facing Zimbabwe but the dictatorial tendencies of President Mugabe make it difficult. The defiant President Mugabe and his regime are portrayed as a people who do not want advice and this is symbolized by his raising of a fist, dubbed the fist of fury, which depicts his defiance and an unwavering march against western ideologies.

Another cartoon shows that the solution to Zimbabwe's economic and political problems lies with President Mugabe accepting political assistance from none other than Prime Minister Tsvangirai and his western allies. President Mugabe, with a clenched fist, has come out clear that the solution to Zimbabwe does not lie in western aid. The fist shows that he is as defiant as ever and he is determined to go it alone should the need arise. This shows that *The ZimDaily.com* owners behind the cartoon believe in western ideologies. The cartoon implies that Mugabe has failed and is actually killing the country by taking it away from the medical kits. This is a wrong perception because not all countries following western ideologies are successful and this is shown by the Asian countries that are doing well without financial aid from the west. The Asian countries such as Malaysia and China are doing so well with very different policies to those of the west. Solutions to political and economic difficulties do not only lie in western aid. In pointing to the west as the solution, the ZANU-PF regime may be forgiven when they go on to point out that the Diaspora media are working in cahoots with foreigners and the MDC to effect regime change. The cartoons seem to imply that regime change is the solution to Zimbabwe's problems.

Crudely, the entire cartoon range on President Mugabe's ruling style during and before the government of national unity clearly showed that deference to power is socially, economically and politically crippling.

SADC intervention

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) initiated political negotiations chair by the then South African Preside Thabo Mbeki was very diplomatic in every sense. Employing the Multi-Track Diplomacy approach, President Mbeki proved decisive with his correct reading and analysis of the kind of political tension he was faced with in Zimbabwe. It was clear that the traditional rationalistic approach to peace making and conflict resolution would not apply to the case in

Zimbabwe because what was needed were preventive measures and to full blown conflict resolution tactics as if Zimbabwean were at war with each other.

Cartoons that covered the negotiations that resulted in the formation of the Government of National Unity indicated that President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF colleagues were to blame for the long period taken during the talks which began in July 2008 only for the Global Political Agreement to be penned down in September 2008. *The ZimDaily.com* drew a number of cartoons indicating that there was no light at the end of the protracted talks. The online paper was however, proved wrong. In the cartoon published on 08 August, 2008, President Mugabe, representing ZANU-PF and its policies and system of governance, is seen urinating on the "talks" pot which is already cooking. During this time, the nation was eagerly waiting for the outcome hoping that the warring parties would agree and map the way forward. *The ZimDaily.com* is however, playing with people's anxiety by using this depiction to point out who is to blame for the delay and probably suggesting that the only solution is the change of regime for Zimbabwe.

Another cartoon that quickly comes to mind is the one published on 17 August, 2008 in which the parties were reaching a deadlock and this is blamed on President Mugabe and ZANU-PF's dictatorial tendencies in which the president is portrayed as a dictator who is not ready to make concessions during the talks. *The ZimDaily.com* came up with what they thought was the role played by the regional bloc, SADC during the talks period and came up with a view which implied that its heads of state were more of parrots regurgitating President Mugabe's dictations and demands. The cartoon published on 11 November, 2008 depicts a parrot which, in the thick of negotiations, is heard telling Prime Minister Tsvangirai that President Mugabe is saying they should share the home affairs ministry. President Mugabe is not saying that himself as he is depicted in a serious mood with no intent to blink at a time when Prime Minister Tsvangirai is shown gaping his mouth in apparent shock and realization that the bloc was on the side of President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party. In another cartoon the regional bloc plays the role of judge, but as Prime Minister Tsvangirai and President Mugabe are in the dock, the then South African President Mbeki the chief judge is seated next to the image of President Mugabe who is assisting him to judge or decide the fate of the impasse on the thorny issues. The setting is the court, and Prime Minister Tsvangirai is seen pensively looking at the two judges in front but President Mugabe is composed and is actually looking down as if he knows the outcome. The consistence of the depiction of SADC shows that regional organ is seen as useless. Way after the beginning of the inclusive government on 30 October, 2009, the same bird, a parrot is used again but this time the regional bloc is on Mugabe's shoulder calling for the removal of sanction. The cartoon published on 22

November 2008 correctly implies that President Mugabe is a member of SADC decision making hierarchy by virtue of being a head of state. Thus being a member of the SADC head of states, obviously the position taken by the regional bloc would have President Mugabe's input. As such, when the SADC heads of state meet to discuss Zimbabwe, President Mugabe will be there as head of state and Prime Minister Tsvangirai is not there.

Legitimacy

The issue of legitimacy was at stake in the political tension that erupted in Zimbabwe following the disputed 2008 elections. Legitimacy in this case refers to the generalized perception or assumption that actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or inappropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions (Suchma, 1995). As such the selected editorial cartoons sought to explain and explore lack of legitimacy of leadership within the government of national unity.

A number of cartoons depicted the human rights abuses and squarely put the perpetrator as Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party thereby making it difficult for the inclusive government to get foreign help. Another cartoon shows President Mugabe with Prime Minister Tsvangirai's mask implying that aid for the inclusive government from the west can only be provided if Prime Minister Tsvangirai, who has no human rights abuse record, is used as the person to persuade the west to provide the aid. The cartoon implies President Mugabe intends to take the aid for his own use and ZANU-PF's benefit as soon as the aid lands in Zimbabwe. The cartoon also implies that the west is prepared to give the aid only if the right person is in charge of the affairs in Zimbabwe which is tantamount to say if the regime running the political affairs of Zimbabwe is changed. In the same vein, a cartoon published on 1 July, 2009 seems to confirm the issue of human rights and its relation to financial aid from the west. The cartoon says the financial aid had strings but the strings were a change of approach to human rights, good governance and rule of law. But a call of change of political approach simply means change of the ruling regime. Mugabe has indicated that he was in no mood to negotiate the appointments of Gono and Tomana to the extent that justice minister Patrick Chinamasa said removing Gono was equal to removing ZANU-PF in power as well in another statement where he said only the president has the right to investigate the conduct of the attorney general.

The ZimDaily.com saw it fit to shift the blame for the failure of the economy on the shoulders of the people who continuously vote for the perpetuity of the ZANU-PF leadership both within the party (ZANU-PF) hierarchy and the general voters. Thus the cartoons in this category showed that those around him are doing everything to convince him that he is the right person and his

leadership is needed. This is a subtle way of mocking the ZANU-PF hierarchy for failing to face the president and challenge him even in party election. The cartoon below depicts President Mugabe as the only Cock with a whole host of hens which are representing all those within ZANU-PF. *The ZimDaily.com* in this cartoon uses words spoken by former ZANU-PF member Margaret Dongo. The cartoon seems to imply that the yearly internal elections to choose ZANU-PF leadership would not yield a change of policies as no one within the party had the "balls" to challenge President Mugabe. The cartoon therefore implies that the solution to Zimbabwe's problems lies in change of the ruling regime itself. All levels of legitimacy were depicted in these cartoons.

Malnourished Povo versus Obese political elites

Communist and socialist ideologies apply the democracy theory that focuses more on content than on form. In this case, the approach seeks to give importance to socio-economic rights of citizens instead of formal independence of state power. As such a number of editorial cartoons sought to portray abuses and imbalances within the Zimbabwean society in which the rich were becoming richer whilst the poor were becoming poorer than ever.

The fat people images were so much recurrent throughout the cartoons and were used to depict the evil, the corrupt and the insensitive people who are in positions of leadership. In one such cartoon, a fat obviously political figure is seen hovering his forlorn figure above the shell shocked nurse and the cholera patients. He is clearly unshaken by the way the patients are sleeping in twos for a bed made for one patient. With his fist raised and commandeering the patients to shout happy birthday to the president at the count of three means he does not care for anyone except his president who let him get rich.

The rich evil people are also seen in the cartoons in juxtapose with the thin hungry people. The fat big people are seen happily enjoying life at a time when the thin ordinary people were suffering. One such cartoon was published on 13 October, 2009. The cartoon is read in the context of the call for the removal of targeted sanction by the ZANU-PF elite who seem to continue enjoying the fruits of having fought in the liberation war at the expense of the majority of the people. The cartoon suggests that the ordinary people are being used by the politicians who happen to be the business people and also happen to be the same people on the sanctions list. The depictions show that the women and ordinary people were the ones suffering from the economic, political and even religious corruption inherent in the Zimbabwean society that *The ZimDaily.com* saw it fit to use these people to garner support from the masses against what they called the abuses power by the elite. The relationship between

people in power and those being ruled seems to be that of the horse and rider relationship even as the ordinary people are the ones whose numbers would have voted these people in power.

The povo, in a cartoon published on 02 October, 2009, who are the ordinary men and women in society and have been used to vote for politicians, are being depicted as a people now distrustful of those with power, emblematic of the history of a people enslaved and then subjected to social, legal and political oppression after the end of direct oppression. Thus the cartoon shows the social injustices inherent in the Zimbabwean society and blames both the politicians for taking advantage of the povo's economic situation for manipulation as well as the povo's failure to emancipate themselves by voting against the real oppressors who are making them suffer on a daily basis. The elite are throughout the cartoons depicted as the corrupt and this is seen by big fat bodies to the extent that in one of the cartoon the fat man is calling his wife to come read the scale for him as he is failing to read it for himself because of the big body which the cartoon believes became more big because of the coming of the inclusive government. The cartoons on the fat and thin ordinary people imply that the inclusive government did not make things better for the ordinary Zimbabwean but actually made things worse and more convenient for the corrupt who happen to be the elite.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean conflict could and should be viewed at three levels, namely: scarcity conflict, group identity conflict and economic deprivation conflict. It was clear from the selected cartoons studied that the root of discounted came from the growing gap between the rich and the poor and it took the ever diplomatic South African President, Thabo Mbeki to calculatively smother the otherwise monumental looming humanitarian and political crisis into a preventable one. What was clear from the manifestations of the editorial cartoon was that the Zimbabwean crisis had eclipsed the normal national crisis into a sub-continental crisis if not an international crisis that needed to be diplomatically checked. The cartoons also showed that what was at stake in Zimbabwe was an erosion of human security as well as clear deprivation of economic, social and political basic needs.

The editorial cartoons also drew their symbolic depictions from the colonial legacy and newly independent African states jubilation era in which state structures clearly reflected and duplicated political party domination of economic elites and in the case of Zimbabwe domination of the so called "liberation war veterans" who are depicted as untouchables. Civilian passivity was also very clear in the editorial cartoons and this was depicted by the inability of the ZANU-PF and the MDC political parties failing to communicate at all level leading to the

SADC intervention.

From the depiction of the SADC intervention, it is clear that the 1992 United Nations peace building adopted approaches could not be applied to the Zimbabwe situation as it was linear in design for seemingly monumental task at hand and it also emphasized more on the military aspects of the preventive approach, a negative approach to conflict prevention and resolution. Instead, Mbeki and his SADC team employed a positive approach in which they sought to foster co-operation and integration between and among key political and social groups thereby embracing a pro-active processes and notions of civil and sustainable societal norms.

The SADC intervention diplomatic policy also showed that when different actors intervene at appropriate intervals and using relevant tools and language can lead to the construction of a cohesive network for preventive action and conflict resolution. As a result, governments, political parties and the civil society can build peace constituencies around this appealing idea of conflict prevention than to wait for the stage of conflict resolution. As such, as shown by the editorial cartoons in which Zimbabwea key political players were at the fore front of the discussion, the conflict preventive measures calls for ownership of the peace process by the warring parties as well as understanding of the root cause of the conflict in the first place.

Patience is key to the implementation of this conflict resolution root as depicted by the cartoon showing President Mugabe urination on the "talks" pot. At the heart of a diplomacy approach such as the one employed by Thabo Mbeki at the SADC group, is the notion of prevention of an all out conflict such as an armed conflict.

The media, through the cartoon depiction of the GNU five year governing period, were not helping matters as they helped the perpetuation of old fashioned stereotypes, traumas and hate language that demonized and de-humanized the "other" depending on the political inclination of each media entity.

The theory of legitimacy as employed by the media through cartoon depiction of the GNU in Zimbabwe offered a powerful way of appreciating the unforced social and political disclosures made by the political leaders and their parties during this time which resulted in the provision of a platform for public political debate. The cartoons depicted both the macro and micro levels of legitimacy as they focused on both the moral and the individual approval of the political leadership from the society. Establishment, maintenance, extension and defending of political legitimacy were all at the fore front of the depiction of cartoons that focused on lack of legitimacy on the party of ZANU-PF and its leader President Robert Mugabe. As explained by Ashford and Gibbs (1990), the cartoons under study showed that legitimacy activities are normally intense and reactive as political parties sought to counter threats of lack of it.

Power and equality theories were also at the forefront

of the cartoons depicting the GNU leadership as some cartoons indicated that social equality should be based on common ownership of economic resources in an egalitarian perspective. It seems as if that the Diaspora media were calling for the socialist form of equality whose core focus is the absence of profound social, economic and political divisions and differences among the Zimbabwean people whether residing in the Diaspora or at home. The editorial cartoons were rejecting the liberal equality that focuses on legal equality but lacking social, economic and political equality.

Conclusively, the findings confirm the main theoretical underpinnings of the role of the press in society which includes, among other concepts, the agenda setting and agenda building theories, the ideology and hegemonic theories, the network society theories and the theories of power and resource allocation.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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