

## **Interpersonal management in print media discourse and the interpretation of 'local' beneficiaries of the Tokwe-Mukosi dam: an analysis of the Chronicle**

Hugh Mangeya

### **Introduction**

The media plays a critical role in that it has the capacity to influence or, at the very least, shape both public knowledge of and attitudes towards certain kinds of issues or events impacting on society. It can function as advocates for social change or institute a change of opinion in so far as society perceives a particular event. The change advocated for can either be positive or negative, depending on the ideological value-positions they seek to advance vis-à-vis the reader's own position. In so-doing, media texts can make valuable contributions in so far as shaping and/or swaying public opinion is concerned (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2000). The present study it analyses two articles in the Chronicle newspaper of Zimbabwe on who the primary beneficiaries should be following the completion of the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam. Being the country's biggest inland water body, there was a potential very range of groups of people, from different backgrounds throughout the country who had a vested interest in the dam and therefore had a right to be considered for benefiting from this resource. This necessarily entails a competition for consideration in which there naturally be people who will lose out, based on one factor or the other. The media therefore plays a big role by shaping readers attitudes in so far as who deserves to get preferential treatment as well as why they should get it. Thus it provides the framework or parameters within these attitudes are predicated and therefore come out as justifiable. Those parameters are conceptualised as the ways in which media texts seek to align or persuade readers to form their opinions guided by the ideological value-positions they advance. The two articles under investigation identify the Chivi district people as the group that should be the primary beneficiaries of the socioeconomic developmental endeavours that are associated with construction of the dam in what is conceptualised as their own background. It employs the ENGAGEMENT system, from Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Framework to analyse how interpersonal management is used to justify this value-position by the authorial voices. Discourses on and around such big national undertaking or projects as the construction of mega-dams have mainly centered on the inherent 'paradox of victim of development' narrative, among others. That is, the apparent irony that for there to be significant and tangible national development there is bound to be a group of people who are negatively affected, more often than not in very adverse ways such as displacement from their cultural sociocultural roots and the associated loss of livelihoods that comes along with it. It is a fact that there is bound to be collateral damage (a group of people constructed as the fodder/fuel that enables economic development). One question that arises from this is whose side the media chooses to align with. That is, will it choose to sympathise with the functional or economic dimension whereby it lauds the development economic development (specifically rises in GDP levels) or will they instead choose a more 'humane' approach and focus advocate for the rights of the victims of these state projects? In the case that the media chooses to go for

the latter approach, questions further questions can be raised pertaining to who is envisioned as the 'real' victim and the ways in which they can be compensated for their losses. The two newspaper articles from the articles analysed in this chapter were written in the first half of 2017. The timing is significant especially in the backdrop of the completion of the dam in early December. As such, the articles were written at a time when government was ostensibly still in the process of identifying and selecting groups of people to benefit from the presence of the dam and the various in which they would actually benefit. The two articles are therefore analysed to seek answers to these questions. Efforts to determine victimhood in the context of national development inevitably involve the identification of weak and marginalised who cannot defend themselves. In more cases than one, people in rural areas have generally been the victims of the constructions of dams since it where they are mainly sited. This is also further complicated given the fact that rural land is usually held in trust by the president. Rural folk don't have the rights (in the form of title deeds) over what they perceive as their land. As such, they can be moved without much financial recourse. This is so in spite of such protective frameworks as African Union's Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and United Nation's guiding principle(s) on Internally Displaced Persons. The fact that these issues keep on emerging with little to nothing, being done to hold the responsible governments and ensure the protection of the affected people suggests that more should be done to alleviate displaced people's plight. The media can then come in to play a critical role in advocating for the rights of the internally displaced people, particularly making noise with regards to their inclusion in socioeconomic development ventures arising from dam constructions. Van Dijk (1996) defines an opinion as prejudices largely represented as schematic pictures in our heads. These pictures are discursively constructed throughout our daily interactions. Opinions, just like is the case with ideologies, have prominent social, political and cultural functions in that they are evaluative beliefs that play a big role in the formation and change of public opinion, in setting the political agenda, and in influencing social debate, decision making and other forms of social and political action. From an Appraisal framework perspective, opinions have an evaluative dimension that necessarily involves an implication of such parameters as good or bad and right or wrong among others. In the context of the present study, it is important to establish how voices are called upon by the authorial voices in a bid to build and shape the public's opinion on the fate of the Chivi district people vis-à-vis their share of the 'Tokwe-Mukosi cake'.