

The effect of media law on selected Zimbabwean editorial cartoons during Zimbabwe's 2008 harmonised general elections

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During the 2008 elections the Zimbabwean media laws had a direct impact on the way that editorial cartoonists expressed themselves. The study contextualises an understanding of the editorial cartoon as practised in an environment of freedom of speech and defined by the four categories identified by Press (1981) and Manning and Phiddian (2004), and delineates the effects of media law on the newspaper industry in Zimbabwe. We review four editorial cartoons reading the semiotic nonverbal communication and meaning principles as defined by Du Plooy (1996) according to the criteria: symbols/metaphors, exaggeration/distortion, stereotypes, caricature, irony, captions and background knowledge as developed by Fetsko (2001). A comparative analysis of the cartoons reveals that objectives and functions of the unmediated *zimonline.co.za* and mediated *Herald* newspapers are exactly the same. They are propagandistic representations of Zimbabwean politics that are more of an extension of political ideology than they are a reflection of the country's socio-political landscape.

Key words: editorial cartoon, Zimbabwe media law, press freedom, censorship, Robert Mugabe

Die uitwerking van media wetgewing op geselekteerde Zimbabwe redaksionele spot prente gedurende die 2008 geharmoniseerde algemene verkiesing in Zimbabwe

Gedurende die 2008 verkiesings het die Zimbabwe media wette 'n direkte impak gehad op die manier hoe redaksionele spot prent tekenaars hulself uitgedruk het. Die studie kontekstualiseer die verstaan van die redaksionele spot prent, beoefen in 'n omgewing waar vryheid van spraak heers, soos gedefinieer deur die vier kategoriee van Press (1981) en Manning en Phiddian (2004), en skets die uitwerking van media wetgewing op die koerantwese in Zimbabwe. Ons beskou vier redaksionele spot prente deur die uitlees van semiotiese nieverbale kommunikasie en betekenis beginsels soos gedefinieer deur Du Plooy (1996) en volgens die kriterium: simbole/beeldspraak, oordrywing/verdraaiing, stereotipes, karikatuur, ironie, onderskrif en agtergrond kennis soos ontwikkel deur Fetsko (2001). 'n Vergelykende ondersoek van die spot prente bring aan die lig dat doelwitte en funksies van die ongeredigeerde *zimonline.co.za* en die geredigeerde *Herald* koerante identies is. Hulle is slegs propagandistiese uitbeeldings van die Zimbabwe politiek en meer 'n verlenging van politieke ideologieë, as wat hulle 'n uitbeelding is van die land se sosio-politieke landskap.

Sleutelwoorde: redaksionele spot prent, Zimbabwe media wette, sensuur, Robert Mugabe

In countries where freedom of speech is promoted the editorial cartoon is a platform for the cartoonist to push the boundaries of this freedom by exercising 'a right to mock' on the one hand, while on the other taking into consideration legal and ethical implications of misrepresentation. Cartoonist Linda Boileau (as cited by Colldeweih 1998: 48) maintains that "cartoons must have a bite to them, you've got to burn some ego, get the knife out now and then, because if you don't, you're just not worth your stuff." Pulitzer award winner Michael Ramirez¹ concurs, "you've got to push the issue to extreme" (Langston 1998: 189). He adds that he feels "neither regret nor guilt about his work, even when some people find it offensive" (Langston 1998: 189).

Media laws protect the right to freedom of speech in the work of media personnel. In many countries of the developing world media laws are routinely redefined to curtail media personnel, leading to 'one sided' or 'political propaganda' in newspaper content. For example the proclamation of two media laws⁷ in Zimbabwe in 2002 led to the closure of several independent newspapers, including the largest independent daily in the country, the *Daily News*. In 2008 when Zimbabwe held its general elections on 28 March, as well as the presidential run-off on 27 June 2008, the country's radio and television was in the hands of the government and the only source of locally produced printed independent news was the weekly newspapers, *The Financial Gazette*, the *Zimbabwe Independent* and the *Standard*. By 2008 Zimbabwean daily published news presentations were only available either in the state media or in a non-regulated online media, the latter created by former independent daily newspaper the *Daily News* staffers who had lost their jobs after the media laws in the country effectively resulted in the paper's demise.

In this paper we evaluate the possible differences in editorial cartoons published in *zimonline.co.za*, with no media restrictions, to those published in the state controlled newspaper *The Herald* during the 2008 general elections in the country. The *zimonline.co.za* editorial team were based in South Africa and not subjected to the Zimbabwean media laws. In order to simplify the study for the purpose of this paper only four cartoons commenting on the defending President Robert Mugabe have been considered. The significance of this comparison lies in the fact that the findings have the potential to highlight the impact of media laws that restricted freedom of speech during the 2008 election period on the content and roles of the editorial cartoon.

We proceed by firstly contextualising the understanding of the editorial cartoon as practised in an environment of freedom of speech² and defined by the four categories identified by Press³ in 1981 and further elaborated on by Manning and Phiddian⁴ in 2004, as well as contextualising the effects of media law on the newspaper industry in Zimbabwe. We continue by reviewing four editorial cartoons, reading the "semiotic nonverbal communication and meaning principles" as defined by Du Plooy⁵ (1996: 112-141) according to the criteria: symbols/metaphors, exaggeration/distortion, stereotypes, caricature, irony, captions and background knowledge as developed by Fetsko⁶ (2001). We conclude by comparing the analysis of the cartoons depicting Robert Mugabe published at *Zimonline.co.za* to those published in *The Herald*, state media publication, in order to determine the effect of media regulation on the editorial cartoon.

An understanding of the editorial cartoon as practised in an environment of freedom of speech

In the broadest sense, an editorial cartoon is described as being made out of two principal elements – graphic art and commentary (Zyglis 2003: 13). This definition is too broad and encompasses other forms of graphic art such as comics and illustration for advertising. Scholarly studies on editorial cartoons, or cartoons in general are a fairly recent phenomenon. Zyglis (2003: 14) makes a distinction between editorial cartoons and other forms of graphic art by stating that, "a work of graphic art with commentary is an editorial cartoon only if its commentary conveys a distinct editorial message portrayed in a clever or witty manner". Though the above distinction appears to detach the editorial cartoon from all other forms of graphic art, it is not without its shortcomings. Some sections of comic art have drifted into political subjects such that the distinction between them and editorial cartoons is hardly noticeable. However, Harrison (1981: 14) offers three elements that not only differentiate editorial cartoons from other forms of graphic art, but also stand out as the facets of the art that the ruling elite has had problems

with since their inception. These include; “[the editorial cartoon’s] savage ability to depict in unflattering caricature; the ability to crystallize complex issues into a simple metaphor, and the cartoon’s availability, even to those who may not be especially literate or politically aware” (Harrison 1981: 14).

Press (1981), a prominent scholar in the field of editorial cartoons, identifies three different categories of editorial cartoons. He however concedes that one of them is too broad and requires further subdividing. Researchers Manning and Phiddian (2004) take up the challenge and establish an additional fourth category. Editorial cartoons can therefore be grouped into the four categories: 1 – descriptive; 2 – laughing satirical; 3 – destructive satirical and 4 – savage indignation.

The first category consists of the descriptive editorial cartoon. This is arguably the most neutral of all since it does little more than describe situation or events (Press 1981: 75), albeit with a little humour (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 8). It may well make readers laugh, but only in response to general humour rather than satire (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 27). It is a very basic form of comic commentary that makes comments on the affairs of the day, and its objective is to merely amuse readers while “their chief side effect is to naturalise the political process for the audience” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 27). Because of this, they are consequently “especially suited to the expression of status quo viewpoints” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 28). Manning and Phiddian (2004: 27) add that at one point or the other, all cartoonists draw this form of cartoon, “when they lack strong convictions about the subject they are working on” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 27).

The second category comprises the laughing satirical editorial cartoons. These are most common in Western-style democracies. They have “a ‘corrective’ tone indicating that although the political system the cartoonist is commenting about is generally viewed as legitimate, there is need for reform and for the politicians and the powerful to modify their behaviour” (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 8). These editorial cartoons accept the legitimacy of authority, but point out whatever flaws are inherent in the system. They are the “checks and balances” of a democratic system and they “make it difficult for people to get away with abuses of common standards or morality, probity, and wisdom” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 30). Press (1981: 75) adds:

The cartoons are aimed at reform of administration rather than destruction of the system. They are the [sic] corrective in keeping politicians honest without chastising them severely. A kind of chaffing tone, with some bite suggests a message: ‘You have these faults and we wish you would reform but whether you do or not, we will still support and perhaps even like you’.

The destructive satirical editorial cartoon found in the third category is not as lenient as the laughing satirical cartoon. In fact it is ‘revolutionary’ and fails to accept the legitimacy of the political system about which they comment (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 9). They are not merely critical, but use language and signs bordering on contempt, radicalism and hate. Though in rare cases the satire may be harmless humour, it is mostly “hate [that] shines through, uncontrolled and slightly insane... since the drawing is meant to be cruel and to hate” (Press 1981: 76). Destructive satirical cartooning is clearly extremists’ views that “come out of revolutionary fervour or social despair” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 30). Given the nature of the message in them, they are not widely distributed. “They tend overwhelmingly to circulate among the already converted”, therefore “seldom change minds, though they may strengthen revolutionary cadres in their convictions” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 30).

Editorial cartoons that depict savage indignation form the final category. This category is identified by Manning and Phiddian and adds to the categories formulated by Press. The two researchers argue that it is possible for an editorial cartoon to “express quite deep reservations about the established patterns of distribution of power and resources without hating the system and its minions or seeking their wholesome destruction” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 29). They seek “revision of the world without demanding revolution” (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008:8). “For savagely indignant cartooning, the legitimacy of the system and those who hold office is not the urgent issue” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 31), but poorly handled national issues or scandals within the political system are. Issues and scandals such as the lies over the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the President Clinton sex scandals or the Jacob Zuma rape trial fit in this category. “The tone of these cartoons is more urgent and there is a sense that the issues covered are of great concern” (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 8), though “they do not propose a systematic solution to society’s ills” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 30). The primary objective of these cartoons is “to say something like, ‘Whether or not most things are OK in this country of ours, this act/inaction is rotten. Any citizen of good faith needs to concentrate on fixing this plight’” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 32). With savage indignation, “the cartoonists are expressing their alarm [for example] at the distribution of wealth and power and the urgent need for action on the issue at hand” (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 8). Manning and Phiddian however warn that if “done too persistently or predictably, savage indignation can descend into alarmist preachiness”, but if done well it has the ability to “provoke serious thought about the distribution of power, wealth and justice” (Manning & Phiddian 2004: 32).

The effects of media law on the newspaper industry in Zimbabwe

Since the establishment of independence in 1980, Zimbabwe’s traditional newspaper media landscape has been dominated by strong state-owned publications (Moyo 2005). Shortly after independence the Robert Mugabe-led government bought the Argus Company of South Africa out of its controlling stake as the country’s main media group and initiated the setting up of a new company, Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers). Zimpapers inherited three newspaper titles, two dailies, *The Herald* and the *Chronicle*, as well as the weekly *Sunday Mail*. It added to the stable *Kwayedza*, a vernacular weekly newspaper in the early eighties, and several community newspapers through its affiliate, Community Newspapers Group (CNG). The creation of Zimpapers was a noble idea meant to keep the public informed about the country’s political and social landscape (Moyo 2005: 112). However, its independence was short-lived as government started to meddle in the day to day running of the company almost immediately after its establishment (Saunders 1991: 8). Moyo (2005: 113) points out that the interference led to a “peculiar type of journalism that avoid[s] confronting those in power”. The Government, by making part of the media its public relations department, narrowed the definition of the journalism profession and in fact gave itself the role of determining what was in the public interest. Since independence, and particularly during election periods, titles under Zimpapers deteriorated into propaganda mouthpieces, losing much of their credibility in the process (Moyo 2005: 113).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Zimbabwe did not have an independent daily newspaper until the launch of the *Daily Gazette* in 1992. Throughout the 1990s a number of daily Zimbabwe newspapers such as *The Tribune* and the *Daily Mirror* were established. Their impact and relevance in the country were minimal as their readership figures were low, compared to those of *The Herald*. The establishment of the *Daily News* in 1999 changed the print media landscape

in Zimbabwe. The paper, characteristically anti-establishment, fared well against the 100-year old *Herald*, at times even out-selling it (UNESCO 2002).

The *Daily News* did not last long. The Public Order and Maintenance Act (POSA) bill was enacted on 10 January 2002 while the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) was passed into law exactly three weeks later⁷. The Zimbabwe government maintained that the laws were meant to promote responsible journalism and greater accountability on the part of the media. Despite the government's assurance that no malice was intended by the promulgation of the laws, most observers did not concur. On 14 September 2003, the state used the laws to shut down the *Daily News* leaving the country with only two state-owned daily newspapers, *The Herald* and the *Chronicle*. A United Nations report in 2005 lamented that the laws were "extremely restrict[ive]" while Balule and Kandjii (2004: 122-124) concluded that both AIPPA and POSA were "broadly cast", "vague", "unclear" and "notoriously subjective", prohibiting legitimate criticism of both the government and the President and giving law enforcement agencies grounds for action against almost anything of a political nature which was published.

The demise of the *Daily News*, however, led to the establishment of new online newspapers managed by Zimbabweans living outside the country. Zimbabwean journalists, most of them former *Daily News* staffers, used computer-based technology to inform readers and escape prosecution. Among the pioneers to venture into this new medium in Zimbabwe was Geoff Nyarota, former *Daily News* Editor-in-Chief, who started *thezimbabwetimes.com*, a United States-based online newspaper. Ex-managing editor Abel Mutsakani and former senior reporter Mduduzi Mathuthu formed *zimonline.co.za* in South Africa and *newzimbabwe.com* in the United Kingdom respectively. The new online newspapers were markedly similar to the defunct *Daily News* in both stance and content, hence more or less filling the shoes left vacant in 2003. Since the majority of the staff reporting online lost their jobs as a direct or indirect result of the Zimbabwe laws, their stance towards the status quo may possibly be linked to their discontentment with government action. Since they published online, and were in most instances based outside of Zimbabwe, these publications were not bound by Zimbabwean laws. The choice for daily printed news on Zimbabwe by Zimbabweans was between a dominant, regulated state media and a new, small but vibrant online media community. The following section investigates how the publishing of editorial cartoons in these two markedly different media sources under varying degrees of freedom in a vastly polarized country affected the editorial cartoonists' approach to commenting on society during Zimbabwe's 2008 watershed elections.

The analysis of editorial cartoons depicting Robert Mugabe during the 2008 election period in Zimbabwe

The intention of the following analysis is to review the selected editorial cartoons in the light of how they could possibly be read as a comment on newsworthy issues. It is not the intention of the authors to advantage a particular political point of view neither the standing of a particular electoral candidate. The analysis should therefore not be regarded as pertaining to the political standing of the authors. It needs to be kept in mind that in order to limit the scope of the study only one electoral candidate has been chosen as the subject being commented on in both publications namely Robert Mugabe's portrayal in both *zimonline.co.za* and *The Herald*.



Figure 1

Published by the *zimonline.co.za* newspaper on 17 April 2008 (Zimonline, 2008a).

The editorial cartoon, shown in Figure 1, was published by the *zimonline.co.za* newspaper on 17 April 2008, about two weeks after the polling date in the Zimbabwe harmonized elections. It shows President Mugabe receiving a briefing from a member of the army regarding the outcomes of a particular mission. The mission, as made apparent by the text in the speech bubbles above the two figures, was to 'rig' the elections by secretly filling ballot boxes with votes to help swing the Presidential elections into Mugabe's favour. At the time the cartoon was published, the election results were yet to be made public, yet the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the independent body that ran the polls, had released a statement inviting competing candidates or their agents to present themselves for a recount of the ballots (Monster Sand Critics 2008). The editorial cartoon reflects concerns raised by the opposition figures and supporters. On 13 April 2008, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) spokesperson Nelson Chamisa said (New Zimbabwe, 2008):

We will not accept any recount because for us that is accepting rigged results. ZEC are in custody of the ballot boxes for two weeks and heavens know what they have done to the ballot papers. They might have stuffed them with their votes.

The 'might' in the last part of his statement shows the assertions are only fears and not fact based on available evidence. The editorial cartoon is therefore more speculative than it is a reflection of Zimbabwe's political developments.

The text and language used in the composition gives the impression that Mugabe uses the army to tip elections in his favour. The speech bubble attributed to the soldier shows the recently completed act of electoral fraud as a calculated and deliberate task, sanctioned by the Zimbabwean leader, who reciprocates with words suggesting satisfaction with the progress

made. The last two words attributed to President Mugabe, ‘this time’ alleges that the Zimbabwe leader is a ‘serial’ rigger of elections who has not participated in the act with the same character for the first time.

The irony provided by the composition is the suggestion that Mugabe who, as President, is supposed to adhere to strict moral and political codes has in fact gone beyond the laws governing democratic elections, not for the first time, to manipulate a democratic process in his favour. The editorial cartoon therefore depicts President Mugabe as a dishonest and cunning politician who intends to hold on to power at all costs, even against the wishes of his own people. The Zimbabwean army is reflected as a corrupt, convenient partner to Mugabe who is rewarded for all the dirty work with considerable wealth. Evidence of the army’s affluence is provided by the use of an indexical sign, the bulging stomach. The exaggerated soldier’s abdomen is a sign of living comfortably. It suggests abundance of wealth. In addition, the animated soldier’s face, aptly caricatured with large dark glasses suggests flamboyance. President Mugabe’s face is animated too, but the expression on the caricatured face points more to a happy reaction to the news he has just received than a reference to his personality. The composition uses the lone soldier as a metaphorical representation of the Zimbabwe army, implying that President Mugabe owes his continued stay in power to the uniformed forces.



Figure 2

Published by the *zimonline.co.za* newspaper on 14 April 2008 (Zimonline, 2008b).

The editorial cartoon, shown in Figure 2, was published by the *zimonline.co.za* newspaper on 14 April 2008, two weeks after the polling date in the Zimbabwe harmonized elections. It shows President Mugabe dipping his hand into a cookie jar and grabbing one cookie labelled ‘Presidential Elections’. The editorial cartoon effectively suggests that the Zimbabwean President orchestrated a deliberate plan to illegally and unconstitutionally retain political power that he had lost through the ballot box. Certainly, concern was raised with regards to the delay in the announcement of the presidential elections in particular – it took 34 days between the polling date and the official release of the result. The Zimbabwe Election Commission Chief Election (ZEC) Officer, Lovemore Sekeramayi insisted the delay was technical, as the commission had received ballots from the furthest and most remote areas in the country late. He urged the nation to “remain patient as ZEC... [went] through... [a] meticulous verification process”

(Nyamagambiri & Munda 2008). The cartoon, by suggesting the delay automatically translated to electoral fraud without any evidence available in the mainstream media or any public forum, challenges the notion of free speech. The cartoon does not comment on current affairs, neither does it creatively ‘invent’ a scene to place a comment into context, rather, it suggests an event that is at odds with reality. The results that were released two weeks after the publication of the editorial cartoon confirm this. When official results were finally announced on 2 May 2008, Tsvangirai had 47.9% and President Mugabe 43.2%, results that both candidates accepted and they expressed their willingness to participate in a presidential run-off called by ZEC, as under the country’s laws, one has to receive at least 50+1% to be declared winner.

Very short and precise text is used in the form of labels in the cartoon. The labelled cookies contextualize the ‘harmonised’ in the elections. It shows in addition to the presidential elections, parliamentary and senatorial elections were also contested. The lifting of one cookie labelled ‘Presidential Elections’ distinguishes it from the rest, and the use of the caption, ‘The Cookie Jar,’ as well as the attire and demeanour of the figure suggest the act by the Zimbabwean President is not that of ‘placing’ but ‘taking’.

Metaphorical representations feature strongly in the editorial cartoon. The school/boy scout uniform is used as a symbol to suggest mischief, naivety and immaturity of the Zimbabwe leader, while ZEC is depicted as a cookie jar and the elections the cookies. The metaphors feed into the stereotypical representations suggested by the editorial cartoon. ZEC is presented as a powerless body open to manipulation and the elections as neither free nor fair as they are open to abuse. President Mugabe is depicted as a power hungry, immature leader willing to go to extremes to maintain his position as President. The irony in the composition is the childishness of President Mugabe, who only two months before had celebrated his 84 birthday. He is shown wearing clothes associated with children and also caught in the act of a child-like deed. The caricatured face of the Zimbabwe leader shows his age, with several lines punctuating it. The lines on his forehead, the low jaw line, the wrinkles on the lower part of the face, the white hair and the dropped eyes suggests that the figure is too old to act in the manner he is seen taking part in. The facial features however, appear to have been exaggerated to contradict the youthful appearance presented by his attire.

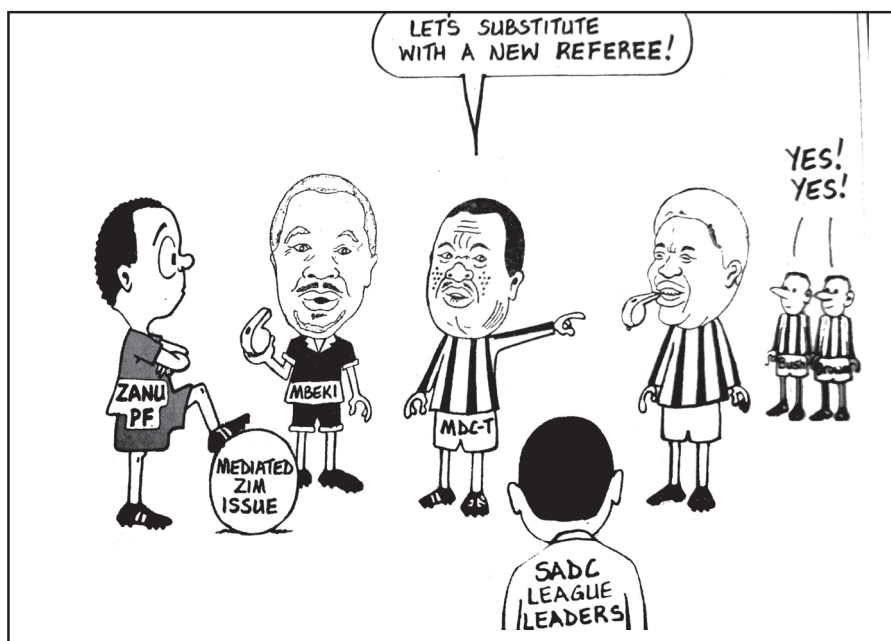


Figure 3
Published by *The Herald* newspaper on 23 April 2008 (The Herald, 2008a).

The editorial cartoon, shown in figure 3, was published by *The Herald* newspaper on 23 April 2008. It refers to behind the scenes negotiations for a power sharing deal between the MDC and ZANU(PF). Zimbabwe is part of the regional body – Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2008, SADC had 15-member states, namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (SADC 2010). SADC noted the deteriorating relations between the two main Zimbabwe parties and in 2007, at a summit in Tanzania, the regional body appointed South African President Thabo Mbeki to mediate, as a way to “to promote dialogue of the parties in Zimbabwe” (My Broadband, 2007). The harmonized elections held in 2008 and the SADC guidelines that regulated them were agreements brokered at the talks (BBC 2008a). Though Zimbabweans went to the polls to elect new leadership on 29 March 2008, talks aimed at securing a political solution were taking place behind the scenes.

Major fallout occurred at the talks in April 2008 when Mbeki said, “there is no crisis in Zimbabwe”, a statement he later elaborated on by insisting he referred to the election situation and not the broader Zimbabwe situation (Msomi 2008). This resulted in Tsvangirai questioning the ability of the South African leader to broker a deal acceptable to the MDC. On 17 April, Tsvangirai stated without elaborating, “We want to thank Mbeki for all his efforts, but he needs to be relieved of his duty” (Msomi 2008). Tsvangirai suggested that then Zambian President, the late Levy Mwanawasa should replace Mbeki, declaring, “We have asked Mwanawasa to lead a new initiative due to the urgent situation in Zimbabwe [caused by] the violence, intimidation and changing electoral conditions” (Msomi 2008). The G8⁸, a grouping of the most powerful states that include Britain and the United States, opposed Mbeki’s handling of the talks, suggesting that the South African leader was not putting enough pressure on President Mugabe for political reforms in Zimbabwe (Wintour & Elliott 2008). Yet, despite the reservations by the MDC and the Western countries, SADC refused to bow down to pressure and retained Mbeki as the mediator for the Zimbabwe talks. Zimbabwe’s government undoubtedly felt uneasy with Mwanawasa who had a year before had become the first African leader to voice strong public criticism of the government south of Zambia’s border, likening Zimbabwe to “a sinking Titanic whose passengers are jumping out in a bid to save their lives” (Muponda 2007).

The cartoon’s composition, a metaphorical representation of the Zimbabwe talks, shows the main players in Zimbabwe’s political paradigm in a soccer field. Action has however stopped as the players, referee and onlookers listen to Tsvangirai. Soccer is the most popular sport in Zimbabwe and the placing of the politicians in a field helps contextualize the topic being discussed. Text is used to label the majority of those present, namely Mbeki, SADC league leaders, 2008 American President George W. Bush and then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Though two other figures are labelled MDC-T and ZANU(PF), the context in which they are presented suggests they are Morgan Tsvangirai and President Mugabe respectively. Tsvangirai’s speech bubble reflects his 17 April statement that suggests Mwanawasa should replace Mbeki. The repeated shouts of affirmation by the two Western leaders in the background reflect the supposed twinning of Zimbabwe opposition views to those of their alleged handlers.

The irony in the composition is provided by the treatment of one particular artifact – the soccer uniforms. Tsvangirai, Bush, Brown and Mwanawasa are depicted wearing similar uniforms. Mwanawasa in particular is being suggested as a replacement for Mbeki, seen wearing an impartial black uniform, yet appears as part of Tsvangirai’s team. The irony is extended to include the two western leaders that are seen to be also playing for Tsvangirai’s team. The ball is understandably big, exaggerated to suggest the magnitude of the issue facing the Zimbabwe

leader. The two Western leaders in the background are depicted with exaggerated long noses, suggesting they are alien to the forum and subject being discussed. The exaggerated noses heighten the suggestion or sense of conflict caused by the interference by Western leaders on an internal issue that is being solved by fellow African leaders, and alludes to the familiar metaphor of ‘sticking one’s nose in when it does not belong’. The calmness shown by the Mbeki and Mugabe caricatures, juxtaposed with the animated portrayals of Mwanawasa and Tsvangirai, suggest that the appointed referee and one party (Mugabe) are ready for the talks that are being disrupted by a group coming to the negotiating field with bad intentions. As a result Mugabe, on the ball and with remarkably fitter physique in comparison to his rival, is seen as calm, physically fit and in control, while Mbeki is portrayed as a fair mediator. President Mugabe is depicted as quite young and almost innocent with ‘friendly’ big childlike eyes. Tsvangirai is viewed as a dishonest player seeking an unfair advantage in the negotiations; while Mwanawasa is seen as a willing participant in a charade plot to control Zimbabwe’s mediated issue. Bush and Brown are viewed as eavesdropping politicians openly meddling in Zimbabwe’s internal affairs to rid Zimbabwe’s political playing field of President Mugabe.

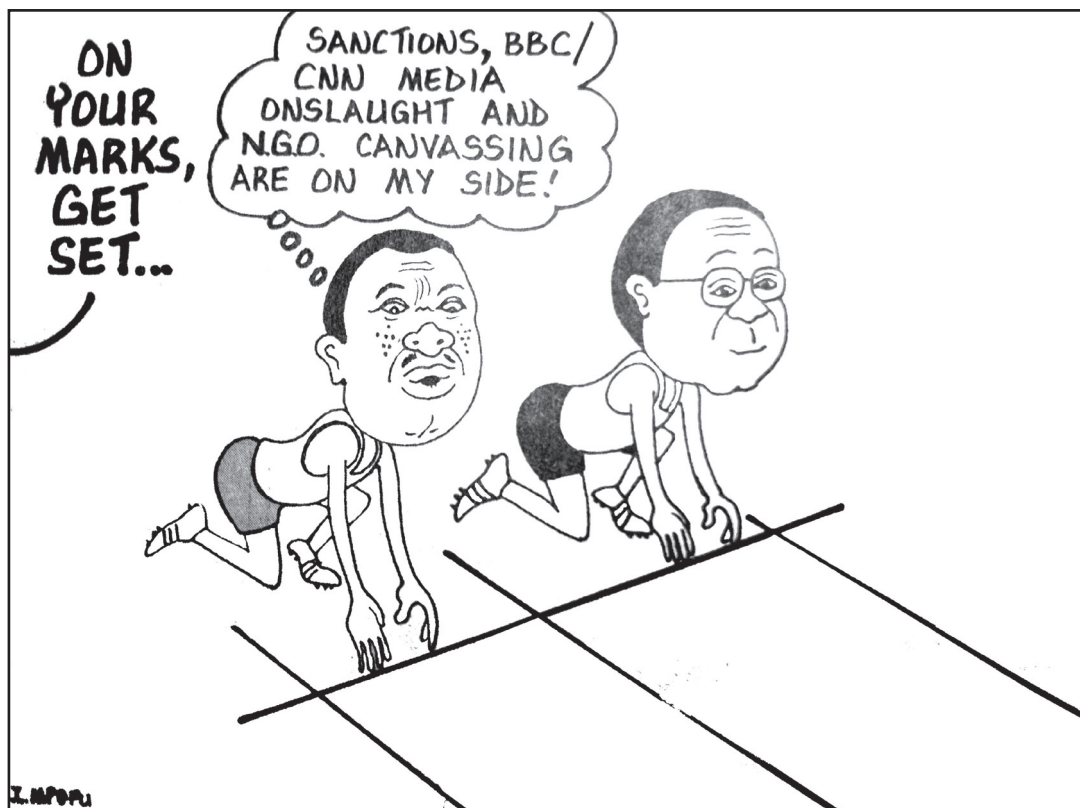


Figure 4
Published by *The Herald* newspaper on 16 May 2008 (The Herald, 2008b).

The editorial cartoon shown in figure 4 was published by *The Herald* newspaper on 16 May 2008. It refers to a looming presidential run-off between President Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai scheduled for 27 June the same year. Zimbabweans went to the polls on 29 May 2008 to elect among others, the country’s president. Under new electoral laws, a presidential candidate could only be proclaimed winner if he/she received more than 50% of the votes. Failure by any of the four candidates to get 50+1% meant that the two candidates with the most votes – Tsvangirai and President Mugabe – had to contest a run-off election (BBC 2008b). The composition uses a racetrack as a metaphorical representation of the run-off. Similar to an athletics running track,

the objective of the run-off was to determine one winner at the end of the race. The ‘athletes’ are depicted as ready and waiting in the official starting position, seemingly possessing similar physical attributes and ready to race.

The major difference between the two candidates may be identified in the language and text employed in the editorial cartoon. A thought bubble above Tsvangirai’s head discloses the opposition leader’s opinions. He reflects on three factors that were supposedly in place to enhance his chances of winning the election, namely sanctions, BBC/CNN media onslaught and non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs)⁹ canvassing.

Following a land reform exercise characterized by isolated but regular incidents of violence during the 2000 elections in Zimbabwe, Western countries, led by Britain, the former coloniser, led the European Union and United States in applying sanctions on Zimbabwe. The sanctions were said to be ‘smart’ or ‘targeted’, meaning that they only affected Zimbabwe’s ruling elite (Downer 2002). However, several Asian and African countries including China (Fin24 2011), Malawi (ZBC 2010), South Africa (Howden 2010), Namibia (All Africa 2011) openly opposed the sanctions, insisting they hurt ordinary Zimbabweans.

Meanwhile, Tsvangirai and his party supported the move and the Western countries insisted they would only act otherwise on the insistence of the opposition party (All Africa 2010). The British government also gave credence to ZANU(PF) accusations that the sanctions were less about punishing the country for human rights violations but more about effecting regime change in Zimbabwe. In 2004, then British Prime Minister Tony Blair told the House of Commons (Grebe 2010: 12):

We work closely with the MDC on the measures that we should take in respect of Zimbabwe, although I am afraid that these measures and sanctions, although we have them in place, are of limited effect on the Mugabe regime. We must be realistic about that. It is still important ... to put pressure for change on the Mugabe regime.

Blair’s assertions challenge the view that imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe were solely meant to address human rights issues in the country. Whatever the reason for their imposition however, there is little doubt that they gave Tsvangirai and his party an upper hand on the Zimbabwe political landscape, as restrictions placed on Mugabe and his close associates were not applied to the opposition.

By the time Zimbabwe held its harmonized elections in 2008, Cable News Network (CNN) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had refused the privilege to report from Zimbabwe for seven years (Plunkett & Holmwood 2009), having been accused by authorities in the country of biased reportage against the government. The Zimbabwe government accused the two media houses and other foreign media of fabricating negative stories on Zimbabwe and blatant support for the opposition. Representatives of the foreign media showed their open sympathy for the opposition at a press conference in 2008 when MDC senior member erroneously pronounced Tsvangirai as the winner of the presidential election. They reacted to the claims with rapturous applause (Tran 2008). The two media houses CNN and BBC however continued to report on, and at times under cover from, Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean government claimed that news by foreign media on Zimbabwe was mostly inaccurate and without verification and asserted that the MDC and the foreign media were deliberate partners. This encouraged the notion that most of foreign media reports were fabrications meant to tarnish the government’s image and improve the opposition’s position (Maimbodei 2007, All Africa 2007, Tyehimba 2006).

The government also had reservations regarding foreign-funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) accusing them of using a food distribution programme, which was under way at the time as a result of chronic food shortages, to solicit support for the opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. President Mugabe, specifically referring to the presidential run-off alleged, “Food assistance is required, ...[but] NGOs were cashing in on that and coming to you saying, ‘We are feeding you so don’t vote ZANU-PF, vote the MDC instead’” (AFP 2008). The government alleged that all of the above were orchestrated with the help and blessing of Tsvangirai. A Mugabe win in this instance and according to the cartoon would therefore be viewed as ‘honest’ and ‘sincere’.

The words on the extreme right of the composition, taking the ‘athletes’ through the starting rituals but attributed to a figure outside the composition show the source is the controller of the race with the power to start it. This means they are coming from the regulator of the elections, ZEC. These words signify that the start of the race is imminent and reflect the time the cartoon was published.

There is an interesting distortion of figures in the composition. Mugabe is depicted looking much younger than Tsvangirai, despite the fact that the Zimbabwe President, who was 84 in 2008, is 28 years older than his rival. In addition Tsvangirai’s face is highly animated, with numerous expressive strokes punctuating it. President Mugabe’s face on the other hand is depicted as spotless, making the 84 year-old leader look like a teenager. The caricatures and distortions feed into the stereotypical representations pronounced by the composition. Tsvangirai is seen as an anxious politician, not confident in his own abilities but counting on outside help to aid his win. The expressive lines on his face heighten the anxiety. President Mugabe is depicted as a calm and focused politician who keeps cards close to his chest. Unlike his rival, he is not immersed in deep thought; neither does he utter a word. He is portrayed as the perfect candidate, hence the idealized personality emphasized by the facial features. There is no sign of satire or irony in the composition. It is a somewhat serious presentation that is unusual for a government-owned newspaper to publish. It acknowledges the formidability of Tsvangirai’s challenge, though he is seen to have an unfair advantage. However, the cartoonist, perhaps prompted by the first round results that showed President Mugabe in second place for the first time in Zimbabwe’s political history gives the two rivals identical physical prowess but adds a slight advantage, to Tsvangirai.

A comparison of the editorial cartoon as published in *zimonline.co.za* and in the state media publication *The Herald*

This section compares the mediated versus the unmediated publications in order to establish the possible impact of media regulation within the Zimbabwean context. The editorial cartooning evident in the Zimbabwean context is then reviewed as a possible category, as determined by Press (1981) and Manning and Phiddian (2004), in an attempt to place it within the broader context of editorial cartooning.

In figures 3 and 4 President Mugabe is depicted in the state owned newspaper *The Herald* as faultless, ideal and speechless. The editorial cartoons support the view that the current President is the only option to follow for the country’s future. The editorial cartoons prefer to present him quiet, avoiding ‘putting words into his mouth’, presumably lessening the chances of accidental ambiguity. In addition, President Mugabe is portrayed as a victim of his political rival, who is battling against unfair and mostly unethical odds against him. The presentation of President Mugabe by *The Herald* is logical, given that the ZANU(PF) government is the

majority shareholder in the parent company that prints the publication. The role of the editorial cartoon in *The Herald* publication has therefore deteriorated into a propaganda mouthpiece.

Online editorial cartoons seen in Figure 1 and 2 refer to President Mugabe as undesirable as the country's president and, to a certain extent, a liability that Zimbabwe's politics could be better off without. They portray him as an election cheat, questioning his credibility, and by extension, his legitimacy. President Mugabe is depicted as an unpopular aging leader desperately seeking to cling to power at all costs. He is accused in the *zimonline.co.za* editorial cartoons of being a manipulator using unethical methods to gain political power. The end result of the online publication mirrors that of *The Herald* in that the real difference is that the roles are now switched and the disadvantaged of the regulated publication becomes the advantaged in the unregulated media. Both are therefore essentially propaganda mouthpieces for opposing political parties.

Zimbabwean editorial cartoons published in the two news sources are remarkably dissimilar to the general editorial cartoon forms. In the traditional sense, editorial cartoons should be "watchdogs", keeping power-holders "honest" and "accountable" (Press 1981: 56–7). However, the selected Zimbabwe editorial cartoons generally align themselves with political movements. Instead of "stimulat[ing] the intellect" (Tunç 2002: 49), a role they should play, the selected editorial cartoons act as forms of political persuasion or propaganda. The regulated editorial cartoons published by *The Herald*, supports Mugabe's candidature advancing his cause by depicting him as a simple politician 'ready' to fight for the position of president (see Figure 3 and 4). The *zimonline.co.za* editorial cartoons counter *The Herald's* viewpoints by presenting Mugabe as an undesirable candidate with only his interests at heart (Figure 1 and 2). The main argument presented, and the principal idea stimulating the reviewed *zimonline.co.za* editorial cartoons, is the questioning of Mugabe's credentials and his ability to hold the office of the presidency, while those editorial cartoons reviewed from *The Herald* endorse Mugabe and openly criticise his opponent Tsvangirai. The *zimonline.co.za* cartoons present a directly opposite view, one that criticises Mugabe and therefore essentially supports the oppositional, Tsvangirai's campaign. The objective in both forms of publications appears to be that of presenting one political side as 'good' and the other as 'undesirable'. There is also inherent in the editorial cartoons unproven arguments that are not supported by facts available at the time. Allegations that President Mugabe is an electoral cheat are not supported by objective reports from the period. However, the claims were started or repeated by political movements and therefore show that editorial cartoons were developed as a manifestation and reinforcement of political ideology.

It is therefore observed that when trying to categorise the Zimbabwean editorial cartoon discussed in this paper it does not fit into any of the four specific groups suggested by Press (1981) and expanded on by Manning and Phiddian (2004). The descriptive editorial cartoon is "neutral" and "merely describe situations and events" (Press 1981: 75), while the laughing satirical cartoons category had editorial cartoons that accept the legitimacy of authority, but point out whatever flaws are inherent in the system (Manning and Phiddian 2004: 30). The online Zimbabwe editorial cartoons are similar to the destructive satirical cartoon category in that they are "revolutionary" but that "they do accept the legitimacy of the political system about which they comment" (Townsend, McDonald & Esders 2008: 9). By depicting Mugabe in a dark suit and being offered respect by a supposedly senior member of the army, the online editorial cartoon says, 'though the Zimbabwean President is not our choice, we accept he wields enormous political power'. Editorial cartoons from both *zimonline.co.za* and *The Herald* do not depict savage indignation. They merely express and reinforce one-sided political ideology.

A possible new category for the editorial cartoon, termed ‘*advocacy editorial cartooning*’ can therefore be considered. An essential understanding of the Zimbabwean editorial cartoon indicates that this category reflects a specific viewpoint that is closely related to political movements. Other editorial cartoons that may fall into this category include those that support or campaign against war in such times, those presented by political parties in their publications, and cartoons used in political advertisements, especially those published during elections.

Conclusion

Zimbabwean editorial cartoons published in the two news sources display characteristics that cannot be placed within the general theoretical editorial cartoon categories defined in this paper (Press 1981; Manning & Phiddian 2004). In the traditional sense, editorial cartoons should be “watchdogs”, keeping power-holders “honest” and “accountable” (Press 1981: 56–7). However, the selected Zimbabwe editorial cartoons tend to align themselves with political movements. Instead of “stimulat[ing] the intellect” (Tunç 2002: 49), a role they should play, the selected editorial cartoon instead acts as forms of political persuasion or propaganda. The regulated editorial cartoons published by *The Herald*, a state-owned newspaper supported Mugabe’s candidature, helping his cause by depicting him as an uncomplicated politician ‘ready’ to fight for the position of President, displaying the tendencies identified in the theoretical descriptive category but not a complete fit due to the political propaganda present in the commentary. The *zimonline.co.za* editorial cartoons countered the state media’s viewpoints by presenting Mugabe as an undesirable candidate with only his own interests at heart displaying the tendencies identified in the theoretical laughing satirical category but once again not a complete fit due to the political propaganda present in the commentary. The main argument presented, and the principal idea stimulating the selected online editorial cartoons is the questioning of Mugabe’s credentials and his ability to hold the office of the presidency, while state media editorial cartoons endorse Mugabe while attacking his main rival in both compositions. Though the state media editorial cartoons essentially support President Mugabe’s candidature and dismiss that of opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai, while the online cartoons present a directly opposite view, the objective on both sides appears to be that of presenting one political side as ‘good’ and the other as ‘undesirable’. There is also inherent in the editorial cartoons baseless arguments that cannot be supported by facts available at the time. Allegations that President Mugabe is an electoral cheat could not be support by objective reports from the period. However, the claims were started or repeated by political movements and therefore show that editorial cartoons were developed as a manifestation and reinforcement of political ideology.

Possible reasons for *zimonline.co.za* mirroring the propagandist approach when commenting on the political situation, as reflected on in this study, could include: 1 – the cartoonists of the *Daily News* were previously exposed to or conditioned by the mediated form of commenting; 2 – the *zimonline.co.za* cartoonists were biased against Mugabe as a direct impact of the *Daily News*’s closure due to restrictive media laws and 3 – the cartoonists were attempting to counter the biased favour shown to Robert Mugabe in *The Herald*.

As a result of the stereotypical representations in editorial cartoons from the two media sources, it may be concluded that the objectives and functions of the *zimonline.co.za* and *The Herald* newspapers are in essence the same. They are propagandistic representations of Zimbabwean politics that are more of an extension of political ideology than they are a reflection of the country’s socio-political landscape.

Notes

- 1 The Pulitzer Prize is the highest honour bestowed on journalists in the United States. The list of recipients includes editorial cartoonists. The Pulitzer website indicates that Michael Ramirez won the 1994 prize for “his trenchant cartoons on contemporary issues” (The Pulitzer Prize).
- 2 Both Britain and the United States are signatories to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), which guarantees the right to freedom of expression. Article 19 of the bill says, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (British Council 2004: 1). In addition, the United States’ first amendment mentions that, “the government cannot control what is printed in newspapers... or offered online (Freedom Forum). Under the United Kingdom’s 1689 Bill of rights, “the Government cannot arrest any man because he disagrees with the Government’s policies” (BritsAtTheirBest).
- 3 Press’s *The Political Cartoon* (1981) is a definitive book exploring the meanings and roles of political/editorial cartoons in Western democracies.
- 4 In *Censorship and the Political Cartoonist* (2004), Manning and Phiddian identify categories of editorial cartoons and their possible role in a Western society.
- 5 Du Plooy deals with nonverbal communication and meaning in *Communication and the Production of Meaning* (1996), edited by Pieter Fourie.
- 6 William Fetsko developed the seven properties for editorial cartoon analysis as an educational package titled, *Using and Analyzing Political Cartoons* (2001). He says, “editorial cartoons... express opinions about very specific news events in the real world” (Fetsko 2001: 7). Fetsko’s properties are: symbols/metaphors, exaggeration/distortion, stereotypes, caricature, irony, captions and background knowledge.
- 7 Zimbabwe’s 2008 media laws AIPPA and POSA among other things makes it offensive for one to (Balule & Kandjii 2004: 122):

Publish or communicate a statement that is wholly or materially false with the intention or realizing that there is a risk or possibility of:

i) inciting or promoting public disorder or public violence or endangering public safety;

ii) adversely affecting the defence or the economic interests of Zimbabwe;

iii) undermining public confidence in a law enforcement agency, the prison services or defence forces of the country; or

iv) interferes with, disrupts or interrupts any essential service... Prohibits the publication of statements undermining the authority of the president or that are abusive, indecent or false about or concerning the president.
- 8 The G8 is a grouping of eight of the world’s richest and most powerful countries. It was created by France in 1975 and has the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada as its members (The Telegraph 2011).
- 9 Zimbabwe has several registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in various disciplines, such as civic society, law, elections, food, health, labour, constitution and gender-related issues. However, following post-millennium food shortages in the country, most NGOs were forced to make food security a primary objective.

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