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Committing journalism? A view of the Zimbabwean 2008 General Elections as interpreted by Internet news cartoons[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper explores some issues of the contested Zimbabwean 2008 Presidential Election as it was represented in one-frame political cartoons published in a selection of Internet news sites in the Zimbabwean diaspora. It argues that the cartoons may constitute the contours of alternative communicative spaces, in which the cartoonists present arguments about the ongoing Zimbabwean crisis. The cartoons may be able to present, in a visual form, issues and processes that are not so easily covered in verbal journalism. The cartoons thus constitute elements of journalistic practice in their own right.

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[1] Permission to reprint cartoons has been granted from *ZimOnline*, *ZimDaily* and *Zapiro*, provided that they be duly credited.
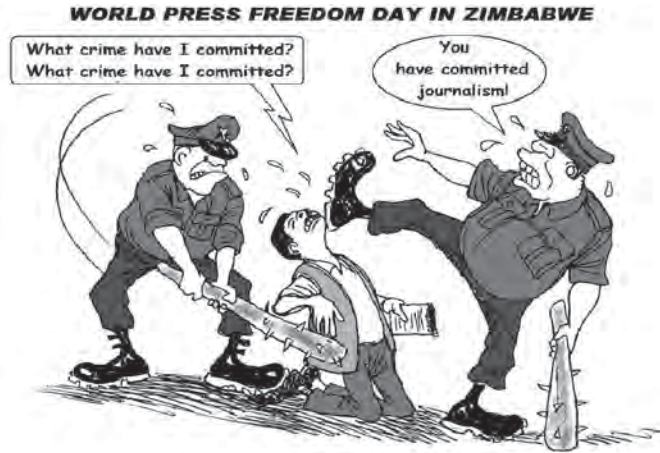
Figure 1

INTRODUCTION

In the cartoon above, two men in uniform beat and kick a man who is on his knees, clutching what seems to be a notepad in his hand. While holding a spiked baton, one of the men who might be police officers gives the following explanation for the use of brutal force against the man who is most probably a journalist: "You have committed journalism!"

In the contested 2008 Elections in Zimbabwe, "committing journalism" without the required licence was considered a crime under the country's draconian media laws[1]. Other journalists operating in Zimbabwe without a licence may thus have shared the fate of the male journalist in the cartoon above. The implication of the cartoon, however, goes beyond its reference to the alleged mistreatment of an individual journalist. Symbolically, the cartoon's rendering of such an infringement of a journalist's right to practise journalism points to the fate of the entire journalistic profession and the role of freedom of expression in Zimbabwe. The cartoon thus aptly suggests how democracy took a beating during the country's elections in 2008. Furthermore, it illustrates how news cartoons may serve as commentaries in their own right.

The above cartoon was published on the Internet news site *ZimOnline.co.za*[2]. This site is one of many news sites established by Zimbabwean journalists and editors who left the country for

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[1] The accusation of having committed journalism was a common one during the 2008 elections. The accusation was also for instance used against a foreign journalist, Barry Bearak, who was the co-bureau chief of The New York Times' South African bureau. He was arrested, detained, and finally deported from the country. See for instance: http://www.wan-press.org/3may/2009/articles.php?id=997&lang=en [1 May 2009]

[2] http://www.zimonline.co.za/Cartoon.aspx?ArticleId=3679, 5 May 2008. [Retrieved September 18, 2008]

political and/or economic reasons as the crisis intensified after year 2000. Many of these sites carry cartoons that comment on current events in Zimbabwe or elsewhere. Cartoons that comment on current events have been a part of the news print media in Zimbabwe since the 1950s. In these days of communication via the Internet, Zimbabwean cartooning continues to be a vibrant field with several active cartoonists who now present their cartoons online as visual arguments and as commentaries on the situation in the home country.

The paper explores certain issues of the contested Zimbabwean 2008 Presidential Election as it was represented in some political cartoons published in a selection of Internet news publications aimed at the so-called Zimbabwean diaspora[3]. It approaches this topic in an interdisciplinary manner, and with the aim of exploring how the cartoons in question may constitute arguments in their own right in the ongoing journalistic practice inside and outside Zimbabwe. Although the point of departure for venturing into this topic can be found in media studies, and in particular in discussions of democracy, media freedom, and freedom of speech (Habermas, 1994), this study also draws on the field of new and social media (Flew, 2005; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). From visual studies, it draws on concepts such as visual metaphors and visual stereotypes, as for instance found in El Refaie's studies of the visual metaphors in political cartoons (2003, 2009). More than merely engaging in a treatise of the various visual elements of the cartoons, the paper finds support in Refaie's argument that when studying visual metaphors, it is necessary to be "sensitive to the socio-political context of the metaphor use" (El Refaie, 2003:92). Hence, an attempt is made to consider both the metaphors and the individual visual elements as signs in communication. Furthermore, the paper explores political cartoons as spaces for political commentary and issues of democracy in general, which is relevant in particular in repressive regimes like the one in Zimbabwe under President Robert Mugabe, which places severe restrictions on the possibilities of the media to function as facilitator of public debate. To this end, I explore whether political cartoons may be considered *alternative communicative spaces*, to use a term employed by Spitulnik (2002).

1. CARTOONS STUDIED

To analyse the 2008 Election as seen through news cartoons on Internet news sites, this study looks at cartoons from a variety of sites and publications. However, only a few of these cartoons

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[3] While the bulk of studies and conceptualisations of diasporas concern the 'old' diasporas such as Jewish diasporas, several authors argue that the African diasporas have emerged along different routes. In the article *Rewriting the African diaspora: beyond the black Atlantic*", P.T. Zeleza (2005:54-55) distinguishes the 'historic' African diasporas from the '"contemporary' ones. With historic African diasporas, Zeleza refers to the diasporas formed before the establishment of the colonial states, and which were the result of slave trade, trade patterns etc, and which could be ethnic or religiously based. By comparison, contemporary African diasporas are, according to Zeleza, those which have been formed since the late 19th century. He distinguishes between diasporas of colonization, decolonization and structural adjustment, and argues that the concept of African diasporas needs to be pluralised

are discussed here. The cartoons were selected from the Internet sites, *The Zimbabwe Times*[4], *ZimDaily*[5], and *ZimOnline*[6]. I selected cartoons from the Internet editions of the weekly business paper, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, and its Sunday newspaper, *The Standard*[7]. Some cartoons were drawn from the Internet edition of *The Zimbabwean*, a weekly newspaper edited and published in the United Kingdom, printed in South Africa, and then hauled into Zimbabwe in order to get around the media restrictions in the country[8]. For a perspective from South Africa, cartoons were also drawn from the online version of the liberal newspaper, *Mail and Guardian*, where the popular South African cartoonist, Zapiro, publishes his cartoons[9].

During the 2008 election and its aftermath, the above-mentioned publications' Internet sites regularly published cartoons commenting on the election in Zimbabwe in particular and the situation in Zimbabwe in general. Some of these sites are established media publications in their own right, are either continuations of established publications that have had to close down inside Zimbabwe, or they are news sites that have been established outside Zimbabwe by editors and journalists who have left the country. They are all, however, on the pro-opposition side of the political spectrum[10]. The state news media inside Zimbabwe have not been included here, as they did not publish political cartoons in their Internet editions.

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[4] http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com/. The managing editor of *The Zimbabwe Times* is Geoffrey Nyarota, who was previously editor-in-chief of the *Daily News*, a newspaper that was banned by the Mugabe regime in 2003. Nyarota is also a former editor of the state-owned newspaper *The Chronicle*. In March 2010, the site for *The Zimbabwe Times* was transferred to the new site of *The Daily News*.

[5] http://www.zimdaily.com/ is a US-based news site staffed by Zimbabwean journalists in exile.

[6] http://www.zimonline.co.za is a South African-based news site for Zimbabweans.

[7] http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com/, and http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com. As well as having Internet versions, these independent newspapers in Zimbabwe continue to be printed in paper form.

[8] http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/. The paper was established by Wilf Mbanga in 2005 in the UK, and appears both as a print newspaper and as a news site.

[9] http://www.mg.co.za/. As with the other sites in this article, I have accessed the online version of the newspaper, which in many respects differs from its print edition. The owner of *Mail and Guardian* is the Zimbabwean publicist Trevor Ncube, who is also the owner of Zimbabwean newspapers *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*.

[10] See (Arntsen, 2010; Mano, 2008; Mazango, 2005; Moyo, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009; M.N. Ndlela, 2009; N. Ndlela, 2003, 2009; Rønning, 2003, 2009; Rønning & Kupe, 2000; Saunders, 1991; Zaffiro, 2002) for further details regarding media legislation and media structure in Zimbabwe. See Makumbe (2002, 2006) for an overview of the electoral system, and Laakso (2002) for details on the major elections in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe until 2000. Both authors chronicle the fuzzy details of the electoral system and several incidents of voter intimidation. Waldahl (2004, 2005a, 2005b) discusses aspects of elections in Zimbabwe with a particular emphasis on the coverage in the media.

All cartoons in the above-mentioned newspapers or news sites were collected from the beginning of 2008 until the swearing in of the Unity Government on 11 February 2009. From this corpus of several hundred cartoons, the study concentrates on discussing merely a selection of those that were explicitly dealing with the 2008 elections[11].

2. CARTOONS AND ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY

In an overview of the media structure in Zimbabwe during the first twenty years after Independence, media scholars Rønning and Kupe (2000) argue that Zimbabwe's media system has been marked by a dual legacy of authoritarianism and democracy. They argue that these two conflicting streams of development have their roots in the colonial period, and that the first two decades of Independence did little to change this situation. Furthermore, in an overview of the Zimbabwean media situation after the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwean media scholars Chiumbu and Moyo (2009:209) argue that the media were "the main theatre of struggle" in what has commonly been referred to as the 'Zimbabwe crisis'. These two points are well worth rehashing when addressing cartoons in Zimbabwe.

In his book, *Africa's media, democracy and the politics of belonging* (2005), Francis B. Nyamnjoh argues that rumours and cartoons play a part in the democratic functioning of the media in African countries. His point is that no understanding of media and democracy in Africa is complete without a focus on the role of radical or alternative media. Nyamnjoh (2005:204) draws attention to Spitulnik's term *small media*, which include graffiti, flyers, underground cassettes, Internet listservs, slogans, jokes and rumours. Small media can, according to Spitulnik (2002:177), be seen as "vital and pervasive undercurrents and reservoirs of political commentary, critique, and potential mobilisation". To this end, Nyamnjoh examines the creative use of information technologies, rumour, and political cartoons, as options that are available to the public and to the media with a view to discussing state authority, political accountability, and representation in Africa in general. Political cartoons may thus be seen as precisely such 'undercurrents' of 'political commentary' that Spitulnik (2002:177) suggests.

The public often manage to circulate rumours and images despite the official attempts at curtailing their voices and restrict their access to information. Political cartoons have proliferated in several countries in Africa during the past two decades, in particular because they have been able to comment on the goings-on in the governments of the day, and doing so for quite some time before catching the wrath of government censors or being stopped by government restrictions (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Nyamnjoh argues that in Cameroon, for instance, political cartoons were not considered as threats to public order because their impact was seen as negligible. This proved to be far from the case, however, and cartoonists had to draw with care in order to avoid prosecution. Political cartoons have, to use Nyamnjoh's (2005:220; 2009:99) words, "joined the bandwagon of

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[11] See Willems (2006) for a discussion of political cartoons in Zimbabwean news media and their depiction of everyday life in the country.

political commentary and satire". After the media legislation in several African countries opened up for multipartyism during the 1990s, more news outlets included political cartoons as a means of issuing comments on the powerful in society. Unlike in some countries, where certain media outlets have specialised in cartoon journalism, where the journalism is brought to the readers by means of cartoon strips, and where moreover regular written news stories are kept to a minimum, a number of exiled Zimbabwean media outlets now publish cartoonists' work as a way of commenting on the issues of the day. Although each news site may only have one or two cartoons per issue, these cartoons can be regarded as key to understanding the editorial stand of the news site.

Furthermore, Spitulnik (2002:178) argues that small media have a "significant potential to mediate state and society in contemporary Africa". One of the defining characteristics of small media, in Spitulnik's (2002:178, emphasis original) understanding, is that they are "not always in *direct* dialogue with agents of the state". She argues that in many understandings of communication it is precisely the openness of the communication that makes it serve as public space communication in the Habermasian sense (Habermas, 1989). Spitulnik (2002:178) rightly points out that it is the context-specific emergence of such media that enables them to communicate their message and thus mediate between state and society.

3.   ASPECTS OF THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN ZIMBABWE

Cartoons and comic strips that deal with social issues have a long history in the print media in Zimbabwe. The first Zimbabwean comic strip, *The Adventures of Ninepence*, appeared in the first issues of the magazine *Parade* in 1953 and ran through 1955, although syndicated cartoons had appeared since the 1930s, according to one of the early scholarly accounts of comics and cartoons in Zimbabwe (McLoughlin, 1989a; 1989b). During the heyday of the political and ideological struggle against the minority regime, political cartoons appeared regularly and even cartoon strips appeared on a regular basis (McLoughlin, 1989a). In the pre-Independence period, the cartoons and comic strips adhered to the ideology of the settler state, and emphasised characters and situations familiar from everyday life, rather than simply funny stories (McLoughlin, 1989a:123). If humour was one of the main points, it often dealt with mischief, deceitfulness and ended in an ironic judgement (McLoughlin, 1989a:126). Despite the preponderance of less than controversial issues, some cartoons with a critical edge did appear. One outspoken critic of the minority regime, Catholic Father Michael Traber who worked for the magazine *Moto*, was allegedly deported from the country over a cartoon in June 1969 (Lent, 2009b:222). After Independence, McLoughlin (1989a:127-128) argues, the ideology changed from optimism to cynicism in the comic strips, and after Independence there were only a few cartoons that pointed to the blunders of the political elite.

Well into the 1990s, political cartoons were an integral part of several of the print news media in Zimbabwe, despite the fact that cartoons that commented directly on political issues involving the president or the ruling party had to be avoided. Social and cultural issues were common themes in the cartoons, as were the plights of common people versus the power holders. The pro-

government daily newspaper, *The Herald*, had a resident cartoonist as part of its editorial team, and published political cartoons that adhered to the ideological and political stance of the paper. Cartoonist Tony Namate, who first cartooned for the state-owned newspaper, *The Herald*, before moving on to a variety of Zimbabwean independent media titles - such as *The Daily Gazette*, *The Independent*, the news magazine, *Horizon*, and finally *Daily News* - once commented that his strategy for avoiding trouble was letting any harassment or threat against him be publicly known (Namate quoted in Lent, 2009a:26). According to Lent, Namate was threatened with a libel suit after the publication of one of his cartoons in *The Zimbabwe Independent* in 1997. The cartoon contained a drawing of three folded newspaper pages. One newspaper was headlined: "Mengistu Flees", the second was headlined "Mobutu Flees" and the third newspaper captioned "Tomorrow's Headlines?" was headlined "Mugabe Flees". By means of the chronological line in the headlines of the three newspapers, the cartoon seemed to suggest that President Robert Mugabe would be the next to flee his country, following in the steps of Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko and Ethiopia's Mengistu. More significantly, however, by juxtaposing Mugabe and the two dictators, the cartoon suggested that Mugabe deserved the same as these two leaders[12].

The establishment of *The Daily News* in 1999 granted both political cartoons and comic strips by Zimbabwean cartoonists a large and regular place in the newspaper (Willems, 2006). While journalists, editors, and newspapers became frequent targets of arrests, searches, denial of licences and even bombings of the editorial offices, Willems suggests that the cartoonists were largely left to continue drawing without interference. Willems (2006:4) suggests that the cartoonists may have been left alone because the subtleness of the message in the drawn images made it difficult for the authorities to issue legislation to restrict their actions. After *The Daily News* had been forced to close down in 2003, and because of the draconian laws restricting press freedom in Zimbabwe, the possibility for cartoonists of having their work published inside the country became limited. After a while, cartoonists found new possibilities of being published in the new media outlets created by Zimbabweans in exile, such as Internet news sites. The main chronicling researcher on cartoons worldwide, John A. Lent (2001), documents that moving into exile in this manner is not uncommon, stating that at least 30 of the world's leading political cartoonists went into exile during the 1990s.

Throughout the 2008 election period, a number of the Zimbabwean exile Internet publications carried cartoons commenting on topical political issues. Indeed, it seemed that the number and frequency of cartoons available increased as the election period progressed. Towards the second half of 2008, even Internet sites that had not carried cartoons so frequently at the beginning of the election period began publishing cartoons on a regular basis. A number of news sites even published a clickable 'cartoon of the day' that had to be accessed in order to get further into the main news site. This was the case for instance with *ZimDaily* and *ZimOnline*.

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[12] According to Lent (2009a: 25), the cartoon was published in *The Zimbabwe Independent* on 23 May 1997. See also information about the cartoonist here: https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/416/11/22536.html, 8 March 2008, retrieved April 1, 2009.

4. CARTOONS VERSUS COMICS

Studies of cartoons suggest that this is a vibrant field of journalism both in African countries and elsewhere (Eide, Kunelius & Philips, 2008; Eko, 2007; El Refaie, 2003, 2009; Lent, 2001, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Mbembe, 1997), and that the recent controversies over the Mohammed cartoons serve as indication that cartoons no longer circulate merely within the country of publication (Eide et al., 2008; Kunelius, 2007). Cartoonists' own views on their work suggest that cartoon studies hold ample themes for further research (Maliki, 1987; Mason, 2001; Namate, 1998).

Cartoons are here understood as one-frame drawings with content and form that are easily recognisable and that comment on topical political and social events or processes. They differ from comic strips that typically consist of multiframe drawings with a narrative (McLoughlin, 1989a:120; Willems, 2006:4). It can however be argued that even cartoons have a narrative. In the material analysed here, the narrative chiefly occurs in between cartoons rather than in the multiple frames of the same cartoon drawing. This is discussed in point 12 entitled 'Visual Arguments'.

Comic strips often have a central fictitious character around whom the narrative unfolds. One example from Zimbabwe is *Nyathi*, the cartoon that used to be published in *The Chronicle*, and that was later published in collected booklets (Maliki, 1987). The character Nyathi is a local executive with an appetite for beautiful women, visits to the shebeens and with an impatient wife waiting at home. *Nyathi* comments on business issues, such as corruption, and social and cultural issues, but hardly any political ones.

Political cartoons on the other hand, offer comments on ongoing political, cultural, or social events or processes. Hence, the characters in the cartoons are usually well recognisable actual people, such as politicians, or key public officials, such as police officers or military officers. Other people depicted in the cartoons may represent the fictitious man or woman in the street. The visual language thus depends largely on stereotypes, excess and well-known icons. The cartoons often employ satire to achieve their critical edge. To this end, they use both visual language and verbal language, through speech blobs, cartoon captions or identifying explanations on the drawing themselves. The names of less recognisable politicians may be written across their chests; the names of political institutions may be written on the buildings that house them; or the cartoon may be captioned in a manner that facilitates the understanding of what is depicted. In short, cartoons "throw some topical issue or personality into critical relief" (McLoughlin, 1989a:120).

5. WHAT ABOUT THE VISUAL?

Cartoons employ images and sometimes a few words to communicate with their readers. In one of the few studies of the explicitly visual characteristics of political cartoons in Africa, Eko (2007:222) argues that cartoons communicate by means of metaphors, either linguistic metaphors (words) or visual metaphors (images). Visual metaphors, in turn, consist of types, archetypes and stereotypes to caricature people. In short, the cartoons bare the metaphors down to their essence, in the search for the particular way of drawing something that captures a characteristic trait of the

person, thing or process. Thus, the drawings in cartoons exhibit easily recognisable metaphors that "delimit their content, form, meaning and interpretation", Eko argues (2007:222)[13].

The key feature of the cartoon message thus rests with its easily recognisable form. In the case of politicians, for instance, their physical characteristics are exaggerated and repeated over time, which both refines the visual character of the cartoon and guides the reader as to who is being depicted. Caricature such as this often exaggerates some element of the character in question. More importantly, however, the way of drawing functions as a visual argument in its own right. The thin moustache and the glasses of President Robert Mugabe are two such characteristic traits that serve as visual clues that enable the readers to recognise him in cartoon drawings. At the same time, they may also function as a visual argument in their own right through their exaggeration.

Another key trait of political cartoons is their ability to mask the message in an uncontroversial form, or rather, in a seemingly uncontroversial form. In times of political oppression, the cartoon's ability to conceal the overt political message at first glance is of utmost importance. Often, the cartoonists take great care not to publish anything that might endanger themselves or their news publication, and the readers develop reading practices that consider such elements. The practice of 'reading between the lines' is a common strategy for readers of news during times of political censorship. In the case of cartoons, the corresponding practice might be termed 'drawing between the images' or 'reading between images'. The practice of reading between images may be set vis-à-vis one particular image, or vis-à-vis a series of images. In both instances, the polysemic characteristic of the visual image renders such practices possible.

It follows from the above discussion that political cartoons can be regarded as a genre that is both journalism and work of art. Media scholar, Karin Becker (2008), points out this double position of the cartoons, and further argues that news cartoons and caricature tend to be intended as political critique. With this in mind, let us now turn to some cartoons, to see whether they may potentially constitute spaces where political messages can be discussed.

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[13] Eko (2007) seems to suggest that the cartoons offer only limited possibilities for interpretation. As far as I can see, the reading of actual cartoons by real readers may prove this point wrong. From audience studies within media studies, we know there will be a multiplicity of audience readings of any given image or text.

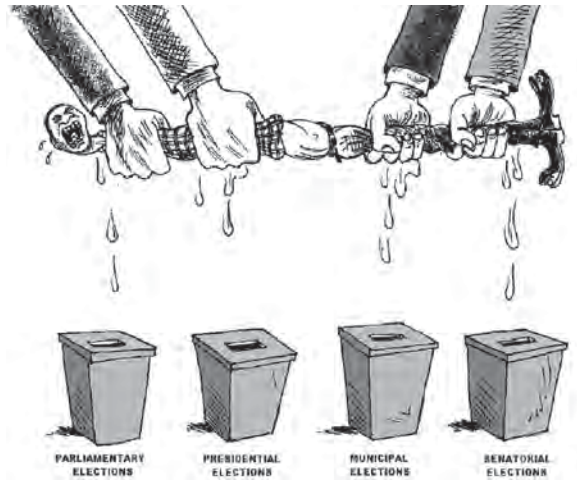## 6. THE 2008 ELECTIONS IN THE CARTOONS

Figure 2

The 2008 Presidential and General Election became a spectacle of oppression, vote rigging, threats, and violence, and, in the end, of contested election results (Alexander & Tendi, 2008; Kabwato, 2009; Moyo, 2009; Vollan, 2008). On 29 March 2008, elections were held for the position of president, for members of both houses of Parliament and for local councils. A cartoon published on *ZimOnline* a month ahead of the elections contained the image of a man being wrung and squeezed by four strong hands over four ballot boxes[13]. Underneath the ballot boxes, the various elections to be carried out were written in: parliamentary elections, presidential elections, municipal elections, and senatorial elections. At the metaphorical level, the thin man here represents the Zimbabwean people or more precisely the Zimbabwean electorate, who are being squeezed yet again into giving it all in the polls. The squeezed man is left with no options about how to behave, and he is merely able to scream at the fate of the strong hands that wring the last drops from his body, i.e. from the electorate once more. This is done is by using the metaphor of wringing a washcloth, implying that the people of Zimbabwe are being wrung into the four ballot boxes that incidentally look curiously similar to dustbins.

A handful of candidates campaigned for the presidency. The chief contenders were incumbent President Robert Mugabe for ZANU PF, Morgan Tsvangirai for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC Tsvangirai), and former Finance Minister Simba Makoni was running as an independent candidate. Arthur Mutambara (MDC Mutambara) campaigned too, but subsequently supported Simba Makoni.

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[14] Figure 2: http://www.zimonline.co.za, 21 February 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008] Reprinted with permission.

Throughout this period, voter intimidation was rampant. There were many newspaper reports about this.Not surprisingly, election violence was one of the most frequent themes in the cartoons during that time. One cartoon from *ZimOnline* suggests that President Mugabe is behind giving

What should we do with Dabengwa, Ndebele, Mbudzı, Chung, Tekere and Dongo?

Figure 3

the mobs their orders regarding whom to attack[15]. A thug with a baton asks President Mugabe what 'we'should do with well-known political opponents and some politicians who once were part of the ruling party[16]. He implicitly asks whether to attack those people too. The thug is wearing torn clothes, his muscles are big and we can see, from the way his face is scarred, that he is no newcomer to performing acts of violence. The President on the other hand, is drawn as impeccably dressed in a dark suit and a tie, and he appears to be calmly considering the question put to him by the thug. The cartoon suggests that the mobs attacking political opponents were taking orders from the highest office in the country, that of the President.

The so-called service chiefs, i.e. the heads of the military forces and intelligence services, often featured in the cartoons. In a cartoon from *ZimOnline* in March, one of these service chiefs was seen pondering the question of the possible successor to Mugabe[17]. The chief, drawn from the side, is dressed in his uniform and with the hat down to his nose. His protruding belly is well visible in the

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[15] http://www.zimonline.co.za, 5 March 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008]

[16] The thug asks what to do with former member of the Zanu PF Government, Fay Chung (Minister of Education) and with former political opponents Edgar Tekere and Margaret Dongo who both used to belong to Zanu PF

[17] http://www.zimonline.co.za, 26 March 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008]

Figure 4

profile position. His female conversation partner is drawn facing him, carrying a child on her back. She is clad in a headscarf and a simple dress, and she is wearing slippers, not shoes, on her feet. In the blurb, the service chief says: "I will never salute Morgan Tsvangirai if he becomes President." The woman answers "You won't have to. He will replace you as soon as he is sworn in."

This cartoon appeared a couple of days ahead of the first election day. It reflected the actual statements among several of the Zimbabwean service chiefs that they would not take orders from the MDC leader if he were to be elected president. What is central in this cartoon is not the fact that we see the fat service chief who seems to have been enjoying a lifestyle that has not been attainable by the poor emaciated woman. It is also not the fact that he claims not to be willing to salute Tsvangirai should he be elected president, and thus indirectly threatens people to vote for President Mugabe if they want to avoid the anger of the military. What is significant here is the woman and her reaction. The woman may be seen to represent Zimbabwean people or the common person in the street. She does not appear to be threatened by the service chief. Rather, she counters, the service chief may be the one who has something to fear, as she defiantly looks him in the eye while talking. From her statement, she seems to be of the opinion that the MDC will win the election, and she appears confident that, once he has assumed office, Tsvangirai will get rid of the service chief, and, presumably, others who have helped President Mugabe maintain power. The woman's comment may thus also be read as a threat, suggesting that people should vote so that this situation will not take place.

A woman drawn with a baby on her back, such as the one in the cartoon described above, is a recurrent feature in a number of the cartoons during the 2008 election. More often than not, she

occupies a role that suggests that she represents the Zimbabwean people, those who suffered under the political regime and who have not reaped the benefits of liberation from colonial rule in the country. Often, the women offer comments such as the one above, that otherwise could be difficult to put in a standard news article. Sometimes, the women in the cartoons may give voice to sentiments common among the public, and often they offer pieces of advice to the power holders.

This strategy of letting certain characters offer both political standpoints and popular reactions among the people is well known from other political cartoons. Through the cartoons, the woman thus occupies a public role that the ordinary person in the street might not easily enjoy. Other common images of the people in these cartoons are a few men sitting under a tree where they are discussing politics together, offering a piece of advice to the power holders. Yet another common theme is the ordinary man and woman sitting by a fire, and offering some comment on a current event. More often than not, the power holders are depicted as fat-bellied men, hiding behind oversized sunglasses, sporting fat cigars, or sitting in luxurious cars. They are thus drawn as being far removed from the harsh realities of the common people, who are depicted as thin-bodied, with torn clothing or without shoes. By employing the man or the woman in the street to tell the power holders the opinions of ordinary people, the cartoonists put common sentiments into public debate through the cartoon images. At the same time, the cartoons may also give voice to the cartoonists' themselves - in their capacity as journalists or political commentators. This is one of the reasons why cartoons may constitute such potent visual arguments, and possibly one of the reasons why cartoons continue to be popular both among readers and on the editorial pages in news media.

7.   DELAYED RESULTS

In the first round of elections, the ruling party ZANU PF did not secure the majority vote. It is generally held that the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), secured the parliamentary majority, judged from the results posted in the individual polling stations. The official election results were not only severely delayed but they were also contested. Zimbabwean commentators argued that President Robert Mugabe had "stolen the election"[18]. Throughout the election process and afterwards it was generally held that the election had been rigged. Not surprisingly, this was the theme in several cartoons. South African cartoonist, Zapiro, also commented on the elections in Zimbabwe. In one of his cartoons published on the *Mail & Guardian* website, President Mugabe can be seen busy filling in stacks of blank ballot papers all by himself behind closed doors, while eager knocks on the door indicate that people are waiting for the results. President Mugabe drawn amid the high stacks of blank ballot papers yet to be filled in, becomes a metaphor for vote rigging. The cartoon also suggests the reason by means of the written comment pencilled in as a banner over the drawing[19].

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[18] Previous elections have been characterised as 'hijacked'. See for instance the article "Zimbabwe's Hijacked Election" (Makumbe, 2002).

[19] *Mail & Guardian*, 10 April 2008 http://www.mg.co.za/zapiro/imageToday.aspx?YearId=2008| MonthId=4|DayId=10, 10 April 2008 [retrieved April 10, 2008].

Figure 5

The announcement of official results of the presidential elections was delayed by five weeks, and even when they were announced, these results were contested. Because the official results showed that no candidate had attained sufficient majority, a run-off was set for 27 June. In the time after the initial election round, vote counting and the announcement of another round, several cartoons dealt with this situation of waiting and speculation. *The Zimbabwe Standard* published a cartoon by cartoonist Nutshell on 10 May 2008 in which two people are seen in the window of a large office building. In the blurb, the one person says to the other: "Dates for the election run-off? But, we are waiting for Zanu PF to tell us.[20]" The cartoon is captioned the 'zec-run-off-date'. By means of this information, the cartoonist suggests that this building is not just any ordinary office building in Harare, but rather the offices of Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, where the officers are awaiting orders from the ruling party. In this way, the cartoon suggests a reason for why the public had to wait for the election results, and casts doubt on the independence of the Electoral Commission.

8. *ELECTION VIOLENCE AND VOTER INTIMIDATION BEFORE RUN-OFF ELECTIONS*

Violence marred the period after the March election date and before the run-off in June. MDC's presidential candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai, withdrew from the run-off a few days ahead of the election, allegedly because of the high level of election violence, when people were risking their lives to vote for MDC, and because of threats and physical violence against the MDC leader

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[20] http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com/cartoons/18081-zec-run-off-date-cartoon.html, 10 May 2008 [retrieved 15 September 2008] The Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC), appointed by the President, supervises the conduct of elections in Zimbabwe (Makumbe 2006:53).

himself. The election went ahead as planned, although President Robert Mugabe was now the only candidate. The voter turnout, however, was a record low, despite the violent threats to people's lives if they did not vote for Mugabe.

Coming soon... the run-off.

Figure 6

Violence against the people is a recurrent theme in the cartoons during the period before the second election. In a cartoon published on 24 April 2008, *ZimOnline* comments both on the long wait and people's willingness to vote despite the rampant violence[21]. The scene is outside an election booth, with a line of people patiently waiting to cast their votes. Every single one of them has either an axe, a machete, an arrow fastened on their bodies, or they have broken arms, or legs or even the entire body wrapped up in bandages. One woman practically carries a man who has a large lump on his head. Here, the people waiting in the line share the metaphor of what we can call *the battered body*. The metaphor suggests that despite all the acts of violence against the electorate, they do not give up but attempt to cast their vote. It also suggests that despite the hardships, the electorate makes use of the democratic right to vote.

A cartoon from *The Zimbabwe Standard* depicts three youngsters who seem to have been involved in the election violence, as they are wearing ragged clothes, T-shirts with the image of Mugabe and headbands, and carrying axes or sticks. One of them asks a man in a suit: "Chief, now that we have succeeded, what next?" [22] These bodies are battered, too, but in a different

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[21] http://www.zimonline.co.za, 24 April 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008]

[22] http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com/cartoons/18444-jobless-militia-cartoon.html, 28 June 2008 [retrieved September 15, 2008]

manner: there are no wounds or axes in the heads as with the above cartoons; rather, the cartoon suggests that while these bodies are battered, they are battered because they have received orders from above to commit acts of violence against others. The cartoon thus suggests a double meaning of these battered bodies. It is as if the cartoon poses the question whether the militant youths - unemployed, with poor clothing and carrying primitive weapons, such as batons, sticks or axes - are likewise victims of the system.

9. THE UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

A number of election cartoons employed sports metaphors, and especially those of bad sportsmanship. *The Zimbabwe Standard* published a cartoon immediately prior to the run-off elections, with Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai on the starting line at the track field, both clad in tracksuits[23]. Tsvangirai's one foot is tied to a long rope fastened to the ground behind Mugabe, on his side of the track. The stadium is filled with crowds of spectators, but no one tries to interfere with the obviously unfair situation under which the MDC leader competes. *The Zimbabwe Independent* also uses the sports metaphor in a cartoon published on 26 June[24]. The cartoon depicts a football field, but there are only two people on the field. There is one football player and there is one referee. President Mugabe is the sole player, dressed for the occasion in shorts and a T-shirt. The referee is also in shorts, but he is also wearing dark sunglasses. The scoreboard behind them has only one team listed - the ZANU PF. On the referee's shirt, the letters 'ZEC' (Zimbabwe Election Commission) are visible. The referee's dark sunglasses are a visual metaphor commonly used to refer to crooks and criminals, the bad 'guys'. Here, they seem to imply that the referee is not as impartial as referees ought to be, nor as their status of the election commission would imply.

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[23] http://www.thezimbabwestandard.com/cartoons/18342-run-off-race-cartoon.html, 14 June 2008 [retrieved September 15, 2008]

[24] http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com/cartoons/20631-one-man-match-cartoon.html, 26 June 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008]
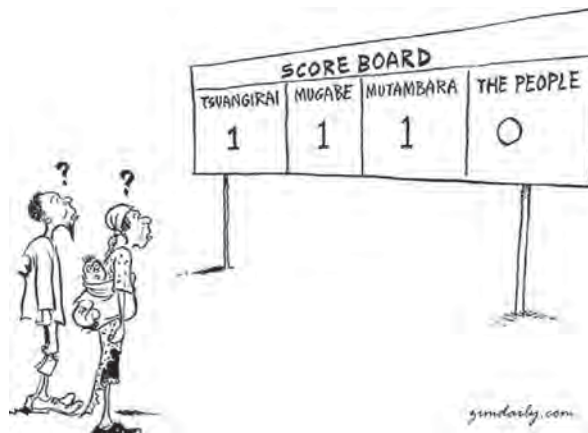
Figure 7

A cartoon from *ZimDaily* suggests that it is rather the people who may have lost in this unfair sports competition, not the three political rivals. In the cartoon from 9 October 2008, two puzzled-looking people view a scoreboard, where the results are one point each to the three rival political parties, but zero to the people[25]. The two adults drawn in the left corner of the picture appear worn, tired and emaciated. They both have a question mark above their heads. This may suggest that they doubt the correctness of the results posted on the scoreboard.

Together, the metaphors of the track competition, the football game or the sports scoreboard suggest that the elections were not considered to have been free and fair. By using these metaphors, it was possible for the cartoonists to make critical remarks on the process, without making strong allegations that had to be supported by documentary proof.

10. MUGABE WINS THE RUN-OFFS

President Mugabe proclaimed himself as the winner of the presidential election. In August 2008, he officially opened Parliament and swore-in certain Cabinet members, without having the majority of the votes behind him. Mediated by the then-South African President, Thabo Mbeki, power-sharing talks between ZANU PF and the opposition parties, MDC-Tsvangirai and MDC-Mutambara, resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding power-sharing on 15 September 2008[26]. However, the MoU was not specific on the vital issues of power-sharing

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[25] http://www.zimdaily.com, 9 October 2008 [retrieved November 15, 2008] Permission to reprint has been granted.

[26] http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-08-27-mugabe-to-form-new-government [retrieved August 27, 2008] The negotiation was mediated by the then-South African President, Thabo Mbeki, who was ousted from his office a few days after the Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony in Harare.

between the parties, the distribution of cabinet posts, and specifically regarding which powers President Robert Mugabe and the ZANU PF had to relinquish. A long battle at the negotiating table followed - often away from the table - as the country was going through a severe cholera epidemic, an unprecedented inflation rate well into billions of percent, soaring unemployment figures, and civil servants staying away from their jobs because of a lack of pay. During this time, many cartoons dealt with the negotiations, in particular the mediation by the South African President, Thabo Mbeki. The troubled relationship between the three parties who signed the Memorandum of Understanding became a common theme.

Figure 8

One cartoon first appearing in *ZimOnline* and later in *The Zimbabwean*, has President Mugabe and Professor Arthur Mutambara in focus. Mugabe is pondering the following question put to him by Mutambara: "If I fail to become Deputy Prime Minister, I wouldn't mind being deputy First Lady."[27] Mutambara, drawn with an extended back head, is also drawn as wearing a miniskirt, high-heeled boots, and nail polish. Mutambara is here drawn as the stereotype of a commercial sex worker. The implications of this cartoon are many. First, the visual metaphor of the commercial sex worker suggests that MDC-Mutambara is a political prostitute and has 'sold out' to ZANU PF in order to gain access to the bargaining table, something that is also suggested in several other cartoons. Secondly, the parallel is drawn with the sex scandal and court case in the 1990s involving the previous President Canaan Banana and his bodyguard over charges of sodomy.

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[27] http://www.zimonline.co.za, 17 August 2008 and The Zimbabwean 18 August 2008.

The bodyguard was then referred to as 'Banana's Wife'. *ZimOnline* had even a few days earlier published a cartoon of Mutambara in bed with President Mugabe, while Morgan Tsvangirai is sitting in another bed looking on. In that cartoon, Mutambara says in the blurb: "Astute... I like that word. It rhymes with 'prostitute'[28] ". Here, the allegations against MDC-Mutambara as being pro-Mugabe are again couched in sexual metaphors, something that is further continued in the three-bed set-up of the cartoon. By implication, the cartoons thus criticises the two MDC factions for being bedfellows with Mugabe by seeking to enter into government with ZANU PF.

11. GOVERNMENT AS A BUS

Figure 9

In the period before the signing-in of the new Unity Government on 11 February 2009, the bus became a key metaphor in a number of cartoons[29]. The bus appeared either driving towards the edge of a cliff, as totally broken down and stranded at the roadside, as a driverless bus, or as having both Mugabe and Tsvangirai as drivers at either end and at the same time. In a cartoon published on 17 August 2008 in *ZimDaily*, we can see a stranded bus, with Mugabe running away with the steering wheel in his hand. South African President Mbeki appears to be looking at Mugabe, but not making any effort to catch him. Morgan Tsvangirai is also standing still, exclaiming that Mbeki should stop Mugabe from running away. Here, the only person with agency

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[28] http://www.zimonline.co.za,14 August 2008 [retrieved September 18, 2008]

[29] MDC member, Tony Bennett, who was about to become one of the Cabinet members, was arrested on the day of the swearing-in ceremony. He was only released a week later, after considerable international pressure. When this paper was being written, Bennett was still awaiting trial.

is Mugabe, who seemingly wants to take control of the situation and not give in to the negotiations at the bargaining table. The other two appear as not having the guts to stop him.

A similar cartoon from *The Zimbabwe Times* featured a bus with drivers at both ends[30]. Not surprisingly, one driver is President Mugabe, the other is Morgan Tsvangirai, and each is steering in the opposite direction. At Tsvangirai's end, there is a large man in a suit pushing the bus in the direction of Mugabe. We can infer that this man is the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Gideon Gono. The bus has the letters GNU written on the side. Underneath the bus, the caption explains the acronym as 'Government of National Uncertainty', and not Government of National Unity as it was officially termed. Apart from featuring the two drivers heading in opposite directions, the bus is shown to be filled with several pairs of eyes blinking in the dark. The cartoon seems to suggest that the people are left in the dark while their leaders are firm at the steering wheels - each going in an opposite direction - although it is in fact the Governor of the Reserve Bank who decides the direction the bus is going.

12. VISUAL ARGUMENTS

One definition of cartoons argues that cartoons have a narrative that unfolds within each cartoon, and not in multiple frames of the same drawing, as in comics. Yet, when analysing a large corpus it becomes evident that cartoon narratives unfold even more forcefully between the various cartoons. The time has now come to go into further detail in this part of the argument. In cartoons, we may generally acknowledge that all visual elements are there for a purpose. They are consciously drawn by the cartoonist, and are part of the cartoon's message. The intention may be to create a message, a context, a character trait, a statement, a comment or an outright allegation. Lent (2009a:1) has suggested that cartoons communicate by means of 'hints'. As illustrated when describing the cartoons here, it is possible to read several of these hints, just as it is possible to read a message or a statement. Following a line of reasoning similar to that followed by Barthes ([1964]1994), we can argue that all visual elements in a cartoon are there for a reason. The visual elements, taken together, aim to produce the cartoon's intended meaning, or to suggest the way the cartoon can be read. However, there may also be a number of different arguments in the said cartoons. Here, the author has concentrated on her own reading of the visual metaphors in the cartoons in question. Undoubtedly, this reading would differ depending on the political stance of the reader, or on the cultural or political context in which the argument is being presented. Some of the Zimbabwean media and Internet sites where these cartoons have been published, have in various ways already opened up for readers' comments and readers' debate around the cartoons or in connection with their news articles. Several of the sites provide opportunities for comments and debate with each published cartoon. Judging from the comments posted there, it is clear that the meaning of the cartoons is often contested, and the cartoons often spark lively debate. This study has not included these readings, but that would be one of the avenues to pursue in future research on these cartoons.

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[30] http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com/wp-content/gallery/cartoon-archives/cartoon101108.png, 11 October 2008.

13. ALTERNATIVE SPACES OF COMMUNICATION?

One of the premises of the cartoons studied here is the assumption that they have the potential of creating alternative spaces of communication. Spitulnik's (2002:177) understanding of alternative small media in Africa is central to this argument. She argues that people use small media to "establish alternative spaces of communication" and maintains that people do this principally in attempts to challenge state power.

The cartoons constitute satirical or critical comments on current events or on the situation current in the country in general. It is also in line with Spitulnik's (2002:178) argument about the small media's "humorous reworking of state discourse in jokes and slogans". Spitulnik (2002:179. Emphasis added) argues that "overall the new communicative spaces created by small media can best be understood as vital and pervasive undercurrents and *reservoirs of political commentary, critique, and potential mobilization*".

The cartoons studied here are available on the Internet. Despite the fact that some of them also appear in the print versions of the news media in question, it can nevertheless be argued that these cartoons chiefly exist, circulate and in some instance are redistributed in cyberspace particularly for the Zimbabwean diaspora. This is illustrative of Spitulnik's point that the small media transgress the borders of the nation state. She comments that the "new communicative spaces created by small media thus range across nation-states and across continents and in fact challenge the very notion that processes of civil society always occur within the physical boundaries of the nation state" (Spitulnik, 2002:179). With such an understanding of the cartoons in mind, it is easier to combine the analysis of cartoons published both in Zimbabwe and beyond its borders. As long as the selected cartoons deal with the Zimbabwean election, and more importantly, address the Zimbabwean public, the said cartoons constitute a reservoir of public commentary, as Spitulnik points to with regard to small media. Furthermore, they constitute spaces of analysis and critique of the election. Sometimes the cartoons were able to voice criticism through graphics that journalists would otherwise have found difficult to express in words. This can most clearly be seen from the cartoons initially published beyond Zimbabwe's borders. Many of the cartoons published in South Africa have a much more explicitly critical edge towards Mugabe. Cartoons published elsewhere in the diaspora also contain criticism of key political players; yet political fronts may not be so clear-cut as to highlight only the pros and cons of the ruling political party, ZANU PF. While it may be too simplistic to argue that the cartoons speak with one voice against the political situation in Zimbabwe, they do however appear to function as visual representations of political opinion and of common sentiments among the public.

Although the cartoons analysed here cover a wide array of political issues, they nevertheless cover far fewer issues than they could have in order to function as an effective arena of critical debate. The elements of satire and outright ridicule mean that the cartoons target the power-holders. Specifically Mugabe and ZANU PF were initially the prime objects of ridicule in the cartoons. As the election process progressed, cartoons critical of the two MDC fractions also started appearing. The cartoons discussed here do in various ways 'commit journalism' not only

by their selection of particular themes; they do so just as much in the manner of drawing, in how they angle the topics, or in how people in the limelight are portrayed. Overall, the cartoons appear as visual and critical commentary on the ongoing political debate, and provide, in one way or another, elements well worth considering as journalism in their own right.

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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