MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION

<u>DISSERTATION TOPIC:</u>

THE DIALOGIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASS MEDIA AND SOCIETY: AN ASSESSMENT OF TRIADIC RECIPROCAL DETERMINISM OF ZIMBABWEAN MASS MEDIA WEBSITES

BY

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Dissertation submitted to the Department of English and Communication, Midlands State University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts English and Communication Honours Degree.

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2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone that contributed towards making the four years that culminated in this degree possible. First and foremost my gratitude goes to my parents who made it possible for me to be part of this Earth. My gratitude also goes out to my aunt, Mrs S. Mabuto, and my Uncle Mr. J.Mabuto without whom the last four years would have been impossible, your faith in me and your financial assistance is the bedrock of my current and future success, and may God bless you immensely for all you have done. My supervisor Dr H.Mangeya your intellectual prowess is unquestionably the fuel that has driven this research paper to its completion. Thank you very much may you continue to grow in your academic endeavours.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my brother from another mother, Babson Ndhlovu, for being a true friend and being supportive throughout the four years of research, work and study.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my unborn Son. May it serve as an inspiration for you to pursue

greater things. Remember the sky is not the limit, it is the beginning.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this research is my original work that has never been written before by

any other student for any purpose whatsoever within or outside the confines of

Midlands State University.

Date………………………..

Signature _____   Signature _____

Supervisor   Researcher

ABSTRACT

Zimbabwean mass media has profoundly been polarised by two significant camps, pro-government and anti-government mass media establishments. Public opinion has primarily been centered on the binary ideological inclinations of these two camps. The heavily censored political environment in Zimbabwe since the imposition of the Public Order and Security Act 11 17(POSA) resulted in political interaction and expression of personal dispositions being subverted thereby resulting in 'silences' as far as the conceptualisation of mass media and its role and effects on society is concerned. Social media networking platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and websites have ushered a plethora of non-elite media spaces and contexts for studying how audiences create meaning and influence each other in the interpretation of information distributed by mass media entities. This is a qualitative research aimed at exploring the dialogic nature of mass communication with particular attention being paid to the notions of interaction and negotiation of meaning between mass media in Zimbabwe and the audience/society in a news website. The research is underpinned by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Social Constructionist Theory. Critical Discourse Analysis on the one hand is used to explore discourse and ideological interaction occurring between mass media and its audience in the news website comments section. The Social Constructionist Theory on the other hand is used to explore how online communication as a triadic reciprocal social practice and construct is both modelled and remodelled by society through processes of co-production and negotiation of meaning. The research also takes into account the varied titles/names that the participants employ in their online interaction. This research therefore attempts to explore a

specific site of discourse as an environment for social change and transformation of the media genre.

Key terms: Dialogue, reciprocal, mass media, identity, discourse and ideology

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study:

The development of mass media in Zimbabwe can be categorised into four distinct epochs, the colonial and nationalist (pre-1980); transitional (1980-1990), post-transitional (1990- 2003) (Mukasa 2003) and the digital epoch (2003-present). The ideological and socio-political environment prevalent in Zimbabwe at each specific epoch played a pivotal role in shaping the editorial practices of the mainstream mass media in Zimbabwe.

The main tenets of this period were a rhetoric of white racial superiority and government propaganda that supported the displacement of black people and the sustenance of the economic privilege of white people. A case in point is the highly positive portrayal of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of 1965 that was done by the State controlled *Rhodesian Herald* newspaper.

The independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 fundamentally transformed the mass media landscape. The restructuring of mass media in Zimbabwe chiefly took place under the auspices of the Mass Media Trust which culminated by the establishment of Zimpapers (Rusike, 1990; Saunders, (1991). The transitional epoch was characterised by the appointment of editors who were State-controlled in their editorial practices (Windrich, 1981; Frederikse, 1982). The immediate post-

independence period was characterised by a subversion of perspectives that were in contention with the dominant State discourses or master codes.

It was characterised by the emergence and proliferation of private owned media establishments such as *Daily News, NewsDay* and *The Financial Gazette* that offered alternative views to the ones propagated by Zimpapers. The mainstream mass media in Zimbabwe thus was profoundly polarised, with private news outlets such as *NewsDay* and *Daily News* being deeply influenced by anti-government editorial tendencies and the Zimpapers controlled newspaper *The Herald* being aligned with the interests of the government.

Mass media in Zimbabwe up until the end of the first decade of the 21st Century was dominated by printed text. The digital revolution that swept across the world and gained considerable traction in Zimbabwe in the second decade of the 21st Century brought to the fore technologies such as the internet that enabled individuals to communicate with each other in mass media websites. Therefore, the internet created a virtual space were mass communication can be conceptualised as a triadic reciprocal process involving communication between the mass media and the audience and communication between audiences. Jacques (1985) further propagates a perspective of conceptualising this communication as 'strong interactionism'.

This research focuses on *The Herald* news website, www.herald.co.zw . An article that appeared on *The Herald* news website titled *#ThisFlag Campaigner Mawarire Freed,* is the basis of the analysis. The article is a news report on the release from custody of Pastor Evan Mawarire a prominent anti-government corruption activist at the forefront of an online activism campaign

titled #ThisFlag. He was arrested on 12 July 2016 under charges of inciting public violence. When his case was presented at the Magistrate's court Mawarire was accused of plotting to overthrow a constitutionally elected government. He was released from custody after the Magistrate dismissed the case levelled against him on grounds that the case brought to the court was different from the case the accused was informed at the time of arrest.

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Much research has been done on the dialogic relationship between mass media and society. However, limited research has been done in the study of this dialogic relationship between mass media and society with specific attention being paid to the Zimbabwean context. More so there is a paucity of research that adopts a Social Constructionist and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of mass media websites. This research therefore, fills this void by engaging in a systematic analysis of the Zimbabwean context

More so Charaudeau (1984) argues that mass media assigns itself a role of being a neutral speaker and uninvolved observer. This creates a conception of society being an inactive recipient of impartial information from the mass media. Thus the present research engages in a qualitative analysis of *The Herald* news website in order to explore the subjectivity of the information relayed by the mass media entity. Thereby showing how language is used by mass media and the audience in the construction of reality.

1.2 Aims and Objectives:

This research is aimed at:

➢ identifying the ways in which audiences and mass media houses use language to construct reality

➤ identifying the ideological tenets embedded in the communication occurring between mass media and society

1.3 Assumptions of the study:

The study is founded on several context based assumptions. The virtual space where *The Herald* website is located is a dynamic context that enables one to approach the context with specific expectations. The assumptions of the study are as follows:

➤ Virtual spaces, such as news websites, do not have a unidirectional dissemination of information.

➤ Reality is both modelled and remodelled by mass media houses and audiences through interaction and coproduction.

➤ Mass media houses do not have a direct influence on public opinion.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study:

➤ The research only focuses on one specific article and analyses the ways language is employed in the coproduction of meaning by mass media and society, with society acting as active participants in the mass communication process.

➤ The research also identifies and analyses the ways in which ideology is communicated by mass media and audiences.

1.5 Limitations of the Study:

➤ The study does not offer an analytical study of whether the ideological interaction between mass media and society is a continuous trend or a phenomenon prevalent in only one context.

- The research does not explore how ideology is communicated in the interaction between anti-government mass media entities such as *NewsDay* and *Daily News* and the audience. (This in part is due to the constraints levelled on the research such as the limited number of pages that the research must be.).

- The research does not identify the influence of public opinion beyond reasonable doubt due to the inability to have access to the minds of the audience. However, using available evidence the research approximates the extent of this influence.

1.6 Significance of the study:

An interest in evaluating the ways through which individuals, groups and societies use discourse to resist institutional or dominant constructions of consensus and hegemony has had a growing interest from multiple scholars (Chilton and Ilyn, 1993; McNair, 1991; Jakubowicz, 1994; Sparks and Reading, 1994). However there is a paucity of research that is quintessentially concerned with discourse and social change in the mass media field of particularly postcolonial States (Threadgold, 1989; Blommaert, 1990; Love and Morrison, 1990; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Akioye, 1994). This research attempts to explore a specific site of discourse as an environment for social change and transformation of the media genre. The present research goes a long way in studying and helping improve our understanding of the communication that occurs between mass media and society in news websites.

More so the conception of mass communication as 'strong interactionism' that this research proposes enables one to go beyond a linear, unidirectional conception of mass media, thereby creating a conceptualisation of mass communication as a circular and transactional process that has coproduction and negotiation of meaning. Turkan (2012) underscores the importance of, pluralism in the development

of democracy and new media channels, such as social media to enhance democracy through wide exposure and proliferation of different views.

1.7 Research Questions:

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How is language used in the modelling and remodelling of reality by mass media and audiences through interaction and coproduction?

2. How is ideology embedded in the communication occurring between mass media and society?

1.8 Definition of Terms

- Dialogic – refers to a process whereby there is a response to utterances or feedback

- Triadic – is a system that connects three participants in a communication event i.e the mass media, and two or more members of the public

- Reciprocal – refers to a communication event that is characterised by interaction and engagement.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The extent of the impact of mass media on public opinion is a question that has attracted the attention of researchers in multiple fields. There has been considerable research that has been carried out to understand this intricate relationship between mass media and society. This chapter reviews some of the relevant literature that was directed in understanding the relationship between mass media and society and the extent of the influence of mass media on public opinion. It also discusses Social Constructionism and CDA which are the theoretical frameworks in which analysis of data is made.

2.1 Literature Review

Locke (1689) conceptualised the human mind at birth as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate). Essentially all human knowledge, according to Locke, was a product of experience from the environment. This suggests that notions of reality are a product of interaction where knowledge is attained through processes transactional communication. Hu and Zhu (2015) observe that individual opinions are shaped by the opinions of friends and content that one reads or watches in the mass media. One's opinions about a particular phenomenon are shaped by social influence processes (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). People depend on the perspectives of others in deciding their personal position on any particular issue.

When one lacks information on a particular subject they have the option of seeking that information from associates such as friends and family and also from texts such as books and

newspapers (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). The virtual space is also a particularly crucial context were individuals seek other people's perspectives on particular issues. Virtual discourse communities that share socio-political and economic interests have also sprung up. There is scholarship that focuses on the importance of social media in resistant movements such as the secessionists of Biafra in Nigeria (Duruji, 2009; Jegga, 2003; and Nkolinka, 2007). Chiluwa (2012) asserts that, individuals have gradually assumed the role of keeping members of the public informed through social media and by so doing they hold governments accountable by re-shaping news agendas. Influence moves from a modern, anonymous society back to the honeycomb of face-to-face relationships and anonymous virtual characters, so it moves from the mass media to human communicators as the chief purveyors of influence (Simonson 2006). The anonymity of communicators in virtual spaces also serves as a means to transcend boundaries of communication that are enforced by repressive legislations.

Traditional media, such as newspapers, essentially relied on printed text to convey their messages to the general public. This placed mass media as a communication form that is directly the preserve of the literate members of society. Those that were illiterate could therefore only depend on those who could read to relay the information in the news article. Those members of society that are literate became a form of 'opinion leaders'; thereby, in the process, transforming them to gatekeepers of information. However, the emergence of social network sites radically transformed the mass communication landscape. Written texts are essentially guided and constrained by the logic of time and sequence whereas social networks are guided by the logic of space and simultaneity (Kress, 2003). Different modes of expression are experienced simultaneously. Unlike written texts where one reads words in sequence, in social media

platforms information is presented in a variety of modes such as images, words and, in some instances, videos are all available at the same time.

 The interaction of images, written words and sounds opened up the mass communication landscapes to new participants and more complex ways to relay information. Even illiterate members of the public, with the emergence of social media can now directly experience mass media through sound and sight. What one could not read, now one could see or hear. In a way most people now had direct access to information from mass media establishments. Consequently these opinions evolved owing to the multiplicity of opinions that were interacting in social networking platforms (Clifford and Sudbury, 1973; DeGroot, 1974; Holley and Liggett, 1975). On a news website, for instance, one can come across comments from individuals in different cities of the same country and some participants commenting from different countries. As far as the Evan Mawarire article is concerned, one can note the proliferation of perspectives whereby there were those that were pro-government and those that were anti-government.

Furthermore, the interaction between members of the public due to the emergence of social media became broader. The public could now participate in interaction on news websites and these participants could be drawn from a wide array of communities. Physical boundaries such as geographic location were dissolved. Contemporary media forms such as the video resulted in the emergence of multiple forms of meaning conferral that challenge and often negate the relevance of earlier forms such as printed text (Altheide 1989). The mass communication environment became a space constituted of 'strong interactionism' (Jacques 1985).

By considering the nature of the communication process in light of the views of Jacques (1985) there is the possibility of going beyond the simplified idea of the communication process which characterizes traditional linear approaches. The conception of mass communication as 'strong

interactionism' enables one to go beyond a linear, unidirectional conception of mass media, thereby creating a conceptualisation of mass communication as a circular and transactional process that has coproduction and negotiation of meaning. Mass media does not exert an absolute influence on public opinion. A considerable influence on public opinion is directed by other members of the public who are acting as commentators on a news website for instance.

Commenting on a research conducted by Katz (1961); Simonson (2006) posits that, casual conversations among family and friends were said to be main influences on personal opinions by voters whose political opinion changed over the course of the election. Opinion leaders that were noted in the research were characterized with having read more mass media texts such as magazines and newspapers, than those who were influenced by their opinions, therefore the mass media remained an important resource as part of the nexus and diffusion of decision making (Simonson 2006).

Cheng (2011) posits that mass media at times disseminates information that is directed at changing public behaviour. A typical example is when *The Herald* news website published news articles about the negative state of electric resources in Zimbabwe to encourage members of the public to use electricity responsibly. Cheng (2011) further notes that, the goal of such messages by the mass media is achieved when members of the public receive this information and transform their behaviour as recommended by the news article. Mass media therefore plays a crucial role in propagating, reinforcing and opposing particular perspectives.

Individuals conform to certain opinions either as a conscious act of trying to be accepted by a particular group or as an informational response whereby they take note of the responses of others and use this input to redirect their own personal opinions accordingly (Deutsch and

Gerard, 1955; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Conformity as an informational response involves a great deal of observation and imitation of dominant views or the opinions of the majority. Social networks are very well suited for effective informational responses because they involve a proliferation of opinions from a wide array of participants.

Turkan (2012) underscores the importance of, pluralism in the development of democracy and new media channels, such as social media enhance democracy through wide exposure and proliferation of different views. These are the sort of nuances that make social media central in this research because it allows an engagement with key issues from the point of view different social players in one communication context.

However, despite this elaborate effort to understand the interaction occurring between mass media and the audience, the specific role played by mass media in this communication process continues to be dogged by contention (Hubbard, 1975). This leaves adequate room for research and analysis to improve scholarship on understanding the nature of communication between mass media and society. The emergence of social networking only adds to the complexity of mass media communication. Such complexities also create unique opportunities for investigating and analysing the communication occurring between society and mass media establishments. For instance, on news websites one can access comments from members of the public that reflect public sentiment.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research employs two theories to analyse data. The two theories that used in this research are Social Constructionism (SC) and CDA. Fairclough (1989) asserts that CDA is a conceptual framework that examines the construction, reproduction and naturalisation of hegemonic

discourses. It is a theory founded on the development of the concept of discourse. Foucault (1978) posits that discourses are systems of thought, or knowledge claims, which assume an existence independent of a particular speaker. CDA therefore is positioned as a theory that attempts to expose the sources of discourse and the ways in which the 'naturalness' of a discourse is constructed and sustained. It also explores the ways that alterity is achieved by contestations from other discourses that seek to dispel or transform hegemonic discourses (Fairclough (2009).

CDA is imperative in this research because it emphasises that language is a meaning-making process (Rogers et al, 2005). This is a process that is pivotal in this research because it establishes the ways in which vocabulary and grammatical structures are used to confer ideological perspectives and value judgements in news reports (Chiluwa 2012, Fairclough (2009). This is further noted by Mills (1956:48) who posits that, "through CDA we may examine the style, rhetoric or meaning of texts for strategies that aim at the concealment of social power relations." Hegemony and counter hegemony exist in a state of tension; each derives shape from the other (Stoddart 2003). Therefore texts such as the comments section of a news website are sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance. CDA becomes particularly vital in this research in that it captures how identities reflect and resist dominant perspectives.

However, in spite of the interaction that occurs between communication participants in the coproduction of reality, there is no equality in terms of the extent of the influence exerted by each entity. Some participants are more dominant in part due to aspects such as that they might

be more educated or more informed about certain issues. Consequently, those individuals, who form a class that one might term opinion leaders, tend to have greater influence than other members in the communication process. This research aims show how mass media and society work together to construct reality and perspectives.

The concept of SC has multiple disciplines that influence its formulation such as psychology, sociology and linguistics (Burr, 2003). To say of something that it is socially constructed is to emphasize its contingence on aspects of our social practices (Mangeya 2014). SC for instance is used in linguistics to understand how human conventions use language to describe and shape reality. The sharing of knowledge is a social practice. The way members of a society collaborate in the use of lexical items and phrases is instrumental in how that particular society generates and conceptualises meaning. Language becomes a pivotal means of communicating perspectives about reality and the more society accepts these perceptions, is the more these perspectives become ingrained in the identity of that society (Burr, 2003).

Berger and Luckmann (1967) make the observation, that reality is actively constructed as a direct result of the creation and shaping of the world in social interactions. The notion that they advance in this view of SC is that reality is not shaped by a unidirectional process whereby one entity 'deposits' ideas into another entity rather entities interact and actively shape reality together through a process of negotiation. The aspect of interaction is particularly integral because meaning is not the preserve of a very small elite group such as mass media but rather meaning is a product of negotiation and co-production through interaction between the mass

media and the audience. This is the interaction of mass media and audiences that this research attempts to capture through an analysis of *The Herald* news website.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the key literature that exists in terms of the study of the relationship between mass media and society. The intricate nature of mass communication in news websites was shown to be particularly unique in that it offers insight to public opinion from various segments of society. There was also reference made to the two theoretical frameworks that inform this research, these being Social Constructionism and CDA. These two theoretical frameworks were chosen because they enable an approach to the research that is broad.

CHAPTER 3

<u>Research Methodology</u>

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the methodology and the research instruments that are employed in this research. An overview of the type of data used in this research is part of the main gist of this chapter. It explains how the data is collected and assessed using the Social Constructionism and Critical Discourse Analysis theories. The chapter also explores the limitations of the methodology that is employed in this research.

3.1.0 Primary Data

This research uses primary data that has not been used in a preceding research. The primary data that is used in this research consists of news articles and audience contributions and feedback that appears in the comments section of the news website. These extracts are subjected to a thorough analysis in an attempt to identify salient ideological positions negotiated by the contributions and feedback from the audience. This thorough analysis is achieved by means of assessing the language and discourse used in the comments section. Comments that are in vernacular are translated into English and analysed accordingly. The news article and the comment section in its entirety are found in the Appendix section of this research.

3.1.1 Secondary Data

This research uses secondary data that is in the form of academic journals, books and dissertation papers. These are used to assess existing literature on the subject and how it can be employed to assess specifically the primary data that is used in this research.

Secondary data sources are also critical in this research because they consistently work to guide the research in terms of locating the research gap and keeping the research in focus.

3.2 Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach. This research approach is well suited for this research because it enables the researcher to engage with interactions between individuals which cannot be equated to numerical variables which is central to quantitative research. Ranjit (2011) notes that qualitative research is mainly concerned with the description and exploration of phenomena. A qualitative analysis of the data can offer comprehensive insight into the implications of the lexical items and sentence structures used by individuals in the comments section. Flick (2002) posits that when studying life worlds of participants, qualitative research is indispensible because it is flexible. Contexts that are dynamic therefore need to be given greater attention and extensive description so as to ensure that the varied perspectives of participants are captured and not compromised by the biases of the researcher. Qualitative research thus is critical in ensuring that there is a pluralism of viewpoints.

Taylor (2006) further supports the notion that the qualitative approach is best suited for research in communication when he asserts that, communication contexts are fluid and revolving and not rigid and structured such as those that are researched using a quantitative approach. The participants in the news website comments section do not have rigid and structured views. Their positions in relation to particular issues are subject to changes that can be in part due to the pressure from those with the majority perspective. These are the sort of nuances that qualitative research can capture without compromising the quality of the data analysis.

3.3 Research Design

For Rupapa (2013) research design refers to a formalized and strategic set of, procedures and specifications for carrying out a research project. A research design essentially is the conceptual structure within which a research is conducted. De Vaus (2001) posits that the importance of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables one to address the problem of the research effectively and logically. A research design plays an important role in guiding a research towards its intended goal (Kumar 2005). The research design is therefore integral in keeping the research in line with its initial objectives. It uses a descriptive research design. This is a pivotal research design that explores varies language structures and the way they function. It is imperative in the exploration of how aspects such as emphasis and subversion are achieved. This, therefore, leaves information bare to plural interpretations.

3.4 Sampling Procedures

The Herald news article was chosen because it is a popular news website in Zimbabwe and the news article on the release of Pastor Evan Mawarire from police custody was an event that generated a lot of public interest. This story and *The Herald* news website therefore were important sources for identifying the dialogic relationship between mass media and society/audience. The research does not analyse all of the comments posted by members of the public. Extracts that are used in analysis are the ones that contributed intricate details to the interactions occurring in the comments section of the news website.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Extracts form the news article are assessed using Social Constructionist and CDA perspectives. Social constructionism is used in the assessment of how language is used in the mass media to construct particular forms of reality in the news article and CDA is used to explore the

contestations of power that are embedded in the news article particularly paying greater attention on ideology. This ideological position is exposed by an analysis of diction and how sentence structures achieve emphasis and subversion.

Assessment of the communication is done on multiple levels. The first level under the heading *Neocolonial discourses* focuses on language and images with particular attention being paid on diction and sentence structures in the news article showing how it is embedded with ideology and how it expresses ideology through emphasis and 'silence'. The second level titled *Dialogic Co-production of Discourses* explores how members of the public contest the ideological positions of the mass media institutions and the third level titled *Religious values and Leadership* is on how media consumers contest each other's views through their interaction in the comments section. The last section assesses some of the pseudo names used by participants in the comments section based on a random sample.

3.6 Population Sample

Altman (2004) defines a population sample as a portion of a population that is used to carry out a research. The population sample that is used in this research is one constituting members of the public commenting on an article titled *#ThisFlag Campaigner Mawarire Freed* in *The Herald* news website comments section. This comments section is particularly crucial in this research because participants are anonymous and this enables the participants to be more frank in their engagement because their identities are not exposed. Members of the public that support opposition politics can also feel free to express their views without fear of direct prosecution. This makes the virtual space a much more enabling context with a proliferation of views and differences that are representative of the wider society.

Limiting the sample population that is used in a research is integral in ensuring that the research is thorough in terms of analysis. If the sample population is too large the research can end up overgeneralizing certain information and thereby limiting its depth of analysis. The length of the research is also relatively short hence a relatively small representative sample population can be analyzed more effectively within the limited size of the research paper.

3.7 Limitations of methodology

The research is constrained by the following factors:

➢ The use of a population sample limits the research because it does not represent the full breadth of the population, thus results have a very limited scope

➢ The sample used in the research is from one news website and thus may not accommodate the different nuances from other news websites

➢ Translation of utterances in a vernacular language to English can result in some parts of the vernacular meaning being lost in translation

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored the research methodology that is employed in this research and showed how the qualitative approach is best suited for the task at hand which is the analysis of communication in a news website. The research design was also explained in terms of its importance to this research and how the descriptive research design deals very well with the nuances of this research. The sources of the data that is used in this research are also mentioned and the way in which Social Constructionism and CDA are used in the analysis of the primary data.

CHAPTER 4

Data Presentation and Interpretation

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of the data that was mentioned in Chapter 3. Analysis of the data is couched in SC and CDA to assess both the news article and the comments by the audience. In the process it explores how the participants use language to both construct reality and subvert, reinforce and create new power relations. The chapter therefore explores the audience's perception of economic challenges in Zimbabwe; neo-colonial discourses; dialogic co-production of discourses; religious values and leadership and participant names.

4.1 Perceptions of Economic Challenges in Zimbabwe

It is imperative to note that the Zimbabwean political environment is strongly characterized with repression and violence against political opposition parties. It is also of great importance to note that violence perpetrated by opposition parties is also prevalent in society. Owing to repressive laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) many people with alternative views conceal these views or only share these views with close associates. The comments section of *The Herald* news website presents an intricate and conducive space for engaging with political issues that are otherwise censored in public spaces. Participants on the comments section tend to be confrontational in their critique of the government. One participant in Figure 1 on the comments section called Realest Negus Alive posits that,

> "Focus on the corruption that is happening in broad daylight…until you start dealing with
>
> (the) low hanging fruit that does not require bloated foreign delegations to foreign lands".

Realest Negus Living ➔ Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) • 2 months ago

Tsano, tikwanirei. There is no point in dwelling on sanctions because hapana kumabvisa kwa muchaita. Why focus on zvinhu zviri out of your control? ==Focus on the corruption that is happening in broad daylight!== That you can control. ==Focus on the incompetence in our public officers!== That you can control. Your "revolutionary spirit" is looking to fight a war in Westminister when the real battle is at Rotten Row in Shake Shake building. Until you start dealing with low hanging fruit that does not require bloated foreign delegations to foreign lands you will remain a joke to all thinking Zimbabweans.

Figure 1

This sort of confrontational tone towards the government were corruption and gross mismanagement are pointed to as the key issues plaguing the government is critical because, such an accusation cannot be made in public spaces where legal instruments are in place to censor such discourses.

my revolutionary spirit gets provoked! ==To the chagrin of all stooges of the West, I continue to argue that sanctions must go so that our economy can freely interact internationally without being shackled by evil behind the scenes machinations of the West.== The presence of dethroned Boers(farmers) among the demonstrators at the court speaks volume about who controls the pastor`s political tail! If the pastor is being sponsored by Boers, I swear, in the name of Ambuya Nehanda that the land reform is a no go area for sellouts. We died for ``dis lendi`` with our black blood! I rest my patriotic comment

Figure 2

More so there exist also supporters of the government who do not engage in a systematic response or direct denial of the accusations against the government rather they choose to place focus on other aspects that are beyond the control of the government that are causing social and economic problems. For instance a participant called Cde Mzvinavhu in Figure 2 accuses foreign sanctions against the Zimbabwean government as the bedrock for the government's failure to resuscitate the economy. The government corruption and mismanagement posited by the alternative participant, Realest Negus Alive in Figure 2 does not get full engagement by this response from the government supporter. Two alternating versions of Zimbabwe's reality are therefore presented in this scenario. One which claims that economic challenges are caused by corruption and gross incompetence of the government and the alternating 'version' of reality which accuses foreign governments of conspiring against the Zimbabwean government through sanctions that cripple the economy.

Common Sense ➔ Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) • 2 months ago

Dwell on the big picture? How can you when your head is in the sand? Zimbabwe can't borrow until she starts paying back what she owes. She can't pay back because of PF policies and corruption, nothing more and nothing less.

Activat

Figure 3

Foucault observes that, in society everyone does not have an equal voice and power. The virtual space addresses this imbalance by giving the marginalized a space to air their views. Participants in the comments section act as key players in supporting either of the two versions of reality. This therefore becomes an act of coproduction amongst members of the audience. Common Sense (Figure 3) confronts this claim that sanctions are the source of economic challenges. The

participant asserts that, "Zimbabwe can't borrow until she starts paying back what she owes. She can't pay back because of PF policies and corruption, nothing more and nothing less". This comment responds to the reality posited by the supporter of the government and reinforces the reality that was constructed by the alternative participant who claimed that corruption and gross mismanagement were the key causes of the economic turmoil. What is critical to note in this instance is how coproduction is taking place through the enforcement by pro-government participants and subversion by the alternative participant of the government's hegemonic discourses.

White former commercial farmer Ben Freeth (centre) was among protesters who thronged the Harare Magistrates' Courts yesterday in sympathy of Pastor Evan Mawarire

Figure 4

4.2 Neo-Colonial Discourses

The #ThisFlag movement is associated with pro-western regime change agents by a participant who posits, that Mawarire is acting as a stooge of the West. The image (Figure 4) posted in the Herald news article of three Boer farmers seems to also support this perspective of Mawarire being a supporter of Western interests. Another participant called Prince interrogates the news article for its lack of images of black protestors that were present at the court room. The media engages in a selective representation of events that perpetuates and advances the dominant social and cultural views of the subject (Burton 1990). The dominant social and cultural views are usually those of the political hegemony. The land reform programme constituted of rhetoric that emphasised that land in Zimbabwe was the main preserve of black Zimbabweans. White Zimbabweans were therefore marginalized and viewed as colonial agents that resisted the emancipation and empowerment of blacks.

The image of white farmers at the courtroom therefore emphasizes the association of #ThisFlag with counter narratives of neo-colonial resistance. The omission of images of black protesters present at the courtroom is an act of representation (Burton 1990). The omission suggests that the media house does not consider the black protesters as central in the events that transpired at the courtroom. Alternative voices are being marginalized and subverted as the story is framed using neo-colonial discourse (Fairclough 1995), In as much as Griffin (1991) argues that those who shape meaning (the media) have more power than those who receive the meaning (the audience), it is crucial to note that the virtual space has a proliferation of alternative perspectives such that meanings are dynamic and in a constant state of remodelling. One can note that the constructions of reality perpetuated by the news article are challenged by members of the public through their comments. This shows that the recipients are not taking the news story at face

value. They are also offering alternative versions of what transpired at the court room. This is an integral instance of dialogic coproduction between the mass media and society.

 The title of the news article that reads *#ThisFlag Campaigner Mawarire Freed* is very suggestive of the perception of the mass media house with regards to Mawarire. The news title does not use his cause as the term to identify the persona but rather uses the title of the movement to identify the persona. The omission of the cause that Mawarire is advocating for is suggestive that *The Herald* does not want to suggest Mawarire resonates with the cause he is advancing. He is not recognized as an advocate for ending government corruption or mismanagement but rather the focus is placed on how he stands as the representative of a specific group. It is imperative to note that the media always has a political stance that it supports which informs the way it reports news (Griffin 1991).

The introductory statement of the news article refers to Mawarire as a member of the 'shadowy' #ThisFlag movement. The term 'shadowy' insinuates a lot about the movement. The media house is expected to act as an impartial transmitter of news reports but the term 'shadowy' implies a perception of the subject of the news article. The term suggests that the #ThisFlag movement is a dodgy group or movement.

Thomson et al (2008) identify two key voices that are employed in news articles to express attitudes. These two voices are the correspondent voice were the reporter uses references to notions of human capacity to make value judgments and the commentator voice which uses quotes from participants to make value judgments for example in the Mawarire news article, the reporter can interview one of the protestors in order for the news article to have a commentator voice. The news article does not feature extensive inferences of value judgments by the reporter. The news report does not employ key characteristics of the correspondent voice such as an

analysis by the reporter of the news story by reference to notions of human capacity (Sabao 2013). There is no quotation that features in the news article so the commentator voice is also not employed for attitudinal expression. Despite the absence of this overt attitudinal language, the article frames the story and creates the boundary in which the story must be conceptualized. The image of white farmers at the court room as protestors limits the scope of understanding the events that transpired at the courtroom. It places neo-colonial discourses at the epicentre of understanding the events that transpired at the courtroom, thereby subverting the concerns and interests of other protesters that thronged the courtroom.

Tsotso → Prince · 2 months ago

Yaaa say it again mwana wamambo, FOR A BIG MUSCLE TONING LAUGH!! Where is my brother Mzvinavanhu the Prof?? I am missing you man. Did you see those pink Zimbaz?? They sanctioned the magistrate into a coward??

Figure 5

4.3 Dialogic Co-production of Discourses

It is imperative to note that alternative commentators after conversing for a while without having a pro-government commentator involved. The request in Figure 5 for a well-known pro-government commentator to participate in the conversation is integral in that it shows that the virtual community is tolerant of opposition views and is constantly engaged in interaction. This is indicative of that participants in communication crave alternative views that they can engage or use to buttress their own perspectives.

There are instances of consensus between pro-government and alternative commentators. A case in point is the agreement on the importance of elections in political institutions. The pro-

government commentator acknowledges that the protestors have a right to protest but he advocates for the use of elections in expressing political discontent. Even though the alternative commentators did not overtly declare their agreement with the pro-government commentator's views on elections their lack of engagement with this issue is suggestive of their agreement with those sentiments. Thus one can posit that silence is an act of agreement in virtual spaces when there are great contestations.

A pro-government commentator also asserts that the violence that protesters engage in is detrimental and is a regrettable part of the protest culture. Another pro-government commentator posits that he is impressed by the peaceful protest that took place outside the courtroom. One of the alternative commentators does not buy into this argument, he points to how these protests led to civil servants getting their salaries. There is a contention amongst alternative commentators with one agreeing with the pro-government commentators on the importance of peace and the other siding with violence as an effective tool of protest.

4.4 Religious Values and Leadership

Mawarire is a Pastor of a breakaway church, that was initially part Celebration Ministries It is critical to note the binary nature of the religious values that are posited by the participant called Amai veZimbabwe (PHD) (Figure 6).

Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago
How do you tell a real Christian from a fake Christian?

The fake Christian will pray for a fake pastor, while a real Christian will pray for Zimbabwe's God-given leaders, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Amai President

Figure 6

The participant argues that those who prayed for Mawarire's release from remand are fake Christians and true Christians pray for 'God given' leaders such as President Mugabe and Amai President Dr Grace Mugabe. The dichotomy between 'true' and 'false' Christianity suggest several things about the people being prayed for. This assertion disqualifies Mawarire as being a true Christian and the mention of 'God-given' leaders implies that by opposing 'God-given' leaders Mawarire loses legitimacy as a legitimate/true Christian pastor. Amai veZimbabwe (PHD)'s assertions conform and perpetuate hegemonic religious sentiments that associate leadership with the will of a deity.

Another participant called ThisFlag challenges Amai veZimbabwe (PHD)'s construction of Christian standards, ThisFlag asserts that the dropping of the charges against Mawarire is testament of that God is in favour of Mawarire's actions of opposing the government.

Bro Mordekai → Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago
its true that we need to pray for our leader. however, if you don't know if one is a fake pastor or not, the best is to keep quite.

Figure 7

Bro Mordekai (Figure 7). agrees with Amai veZimbabwe (PHD) as far as praying for leaders is concerned but Bro Mordekai challenges Amai veZimbabwe (PHD)'s identification of fake and true pastors. Concerned citizen gives more of a systematic way of identifying leaders that are consistent with God's expectations. Bro Mordekai problematizes the aspect of justice, by arguing that Christians must stand for justice. This suggests that justice is the yardstick for determining if rising against certain leaders is justified.

Figure 8

FlyboyX (Figure 8) gives an elaborate list of the crimes that the government has been accused of perpetrating. These accusations range from misappropriation of funds, corruption and negligence. This list of accusations against the government ties with the benchmark set Bro Mordekai of justice being a premise for judging and identifying good leadership. There is a deliberate and cohesive effort of deconstructing Amai veZimbabwe (PHD)'s assertions about Christian values.

A participant called Truthfulness in response to Amai veZimbabwe (PHD) questions who was responsible for identifying leaders as 'God-given' and also whether Satan can also be responsible for giving things. These questions interrogate the legitimacy of these sources of knowledge and systems of conceptualization. It subverts religious hegemonic views that associate leadership with the will of a deity. Satan who is associated evil things is suggested as a potential source of problems such incompetent leadership. This flies in the face of popular religious sentiment and subverts hard-line Christian ethos.

4.5 Participant Names

The names that the participants use to identify themselves range from Shona names, adjectives and technical names. A pro-government participant uses the name Cde Mzvinavhu (Prof) which has military overtones. This could be suggestive of the association of the ruling party (ZANU PF) and its supporters with the armed struggle against colonialism. Another pro-government participant uses the name Amai veZimbabwe (PHD), this suggests that the participant is female and she is associating herself with the use of the 'Amai' title that is used by the first lady of Zimbabwe Dr Amai Grace Mugabe. It is critical to note that both participants refer to themselves as Professor and PHD respectively. These are academic titles that are suggestive of their association with the ruling establishment that has titles of Doctors and Professors in its echelons.

Alternative participant use a names such as ThisFlag, Concerned Citizen and Common Sense. These names suggest that the participant is strongly concerned with the welfare of the State and they buy into the cause advanced by Pastor Mawarire. The name Concerned Citizen places emphasis on the participants concern with the state. This is a concern that is also echoed by #ThisFlag movement which focuses on citizen participation in issues of national development and government accountability.

 Some participants stick to technical names such as Terabyte. These names can be said to be the neutral names in the interaction that is in the virtual space. They do not have military overtones that are associated with pro-government participants or the #ThisFlag overtones such as Concerned Citizen.

CHAPTER 5

<u>Conclusion</u>

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter was engaged in a systematic analysis of the research data. It explored the audience's perception of economic challenges in Zimbabwe; neo-colonial discourses; dialogic co-production of discourses; religious values and leadership and participant names. This final chapter serves as an over-view and summary of the findings of this research. By so doing the chapter synthesizes the various analytic findings of this research. Recommendations for further research is also be made at the end of this chapter.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The research explored how legal instruments such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) limit public interaction on political issues. It showed how the virtual space is intricate in allowing interaction to occur between members of the public. Participants in the comments section were shown to act as key players in supporting either of the two versions of reality. Anti-government commentators criticize government corruption and mismanagement as the major causes of the problems facing the country whereas pro-government commentators choose to focus on external factors such as sanctions as the main cause of the economic challenges facing Zimbabwe. The research therefore shows the contestations in the construction of reality.

The research also analyses the omission of images of black protesters in the news article. It shows how this omission suggests that the media house does not consider the black protesters as central in the events that transpired at the courtroom. Omission is explored as a form representation that says a lot about the biases of the mass media house. The significance of the event is minimized by excluding images of the many people that attended the event.

More so the inclusion of an image of white farmers is shown to be suggestive that the mass media house intends on associating #ThisFlag movement with neo-colonial discourses. The use of terms such as shadowy in describing the movement reinforces the mass media house's bias in reporting the events that occurred at the courtroom. Objectivity is subverted and a specific perspective is given prominence. Thus even with the lack of overt attitudinal references the mass media house creates an elaborate frame from which the events must be the conceptualized by the public.

Participants in the comments section are also shown to be actively inviting opponents to share their views. This interest in alternative is critical because it shows it shows that the virtual community is tolerant of opposition views and is constantly engaged in interaction. This is indicative of that participants in communication crave alternative views that they can engage or use to buttress their own perspectives.

The research also shows how religious discourses are used to assess the legitimacy of political leaders. Pro-government commentators argue that Mawarire is not a true Christian pastor because he opposes leaders that are appointed by God, These standards for 'true' and 'false' Christianity suggest several things about the people being prayed for. This assertion disqualifies Mawarire as a being a true Christian and the mention of 'God-given' leaders implies that by opposing 'God-given' leaders Mawarire loses legitimacy as a Christian pastor. Anti-government commentators problematize this conception of legitimate leadership and present justice as the key benchmark for judging the legitimacy of leadership.

The participant names are also shown to be mostly associated with the interest of the commentators with those who are pro-government using names that have partisan titles such as

Comrade (Cde) and those who are anti-government using names such as Concerned Citizen. Some use technical titles such as Terabyte but this constitute the minority.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

There are areas that can be explored further. These are as follows:

- ➢ An assessment of the dialogic relationship between mass media and society paying particular attention on news websites that are anti-government such as NewsDay and Daily News

- ➢ a comparative analysis of comments in a pro-government news website and comments in an anti-government news website

5.3 Limitations of the Study:

- ➢ The study does not offer an analytical study of whether the ideological interaction between mass media and society is a continuous trend or a phenomenon prevalent in only one context.

- ➢ The research does not explore how ideology is communicated in the interaction between anti-government mass media entities such as *NewsDay* and *Daily News* and the audience. (This in part is due to the constraints levelled on the research such as the limited number of pages that the research must be.).

- ➢ The research does not identify the influence of public opinion beyond reasonable doubt due to the inability to have access to the minds of the audience. However, using available evidence the research approximates the extent of this influence.

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Appendix

Terabyte → Dj_Fresh_Maputo · 2 months ago

nhai zvako,hapana shure inodarika yatasvitswa nekaharahwa aka

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

leemoyo → Kwangwari Gwayendepi · 2 months ago

Not really, Mari yema civil servants yakabuda wani due to these stay aways. This regime defies every odd if you look at it. 36 yrs experience but look at the incompetence. Then you have some who stay in hotels when the finance minister is begging, some building 50 roomed houses when unemployment is so high. Some flying every month with gangs of officials when we can't pay civil servants. FYI Libyans tried 3 times and 4th time u know what happened to the strongest henchman of Africa. died like a rat after being fished from a hole. His son was on TVs declaring " no Gaddafi's no Libya"

1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Kusvikazvanaka → Chief Svosve · 2 months ago

There were thousands of people for Evan but you chose not to even put a Picture of the 'SUPPORTERS " and you put unknown people,,...Ummmm Munoshamisa...muchafa pamwe nezanu PF

1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Mauya → Chief Svosve · 2 months ago

Anyone found the elusive button stick?

1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Mgcini · 2 months ago

We sidnt expect anything from you Gerald.
It was a glorious day. I am Zanu PF, well, I wa. Not anymore. My forefathers didn't die for this. Soomon didnt die for this. Time we claim back the country.

Mgcini · 2 months ago

We sidnt expect anything from you Gerald.
It was a glorious day. I am Zanu PF, well, I wa. Not anymore. My forefathers didn't die for this. Soomon didnt die for this. Time we claim back the country.

7 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Prince · 2 months ago

Hahaha! Is that all the information and picture you could publish about events at the court? Hahaha! Thanks to social media you've lost relevance. Imagine how many Zimbabweans have phones and ask yourselves whether what you're doing has any effect. The crowd that turned out to support Mawarire was huge and mixed.We now visit this site for a big laugh!

26 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

> **Mudzidzisi Ticha Bernard** → Prince · 2 months ago
>
> You can say that again.
>
> ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

> **Tsotso** → Prince · 2 months ago
>
> Yaaa say it again mwana wamambo, FOR A BIG MUSCLE TONING LAUGH!! Where is my brother Mzvinavanhu the Prof?? I am missing you man. Did you see those pink Zimbaz?? They sanctioned the magistrate into a coward??
>
> 1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

>> **Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof)** → Tsotso · 2 months ago
>>
>> I am alive and following all events, Professionally! I dwell on the big picture. The situation is under control. Its violence that has to go. I was impressed by the peaceful demo at the court as opposed to the thuggish stone throwing and road blocking last week that occasioned the clash that left some demonstrators arrested and some police officers injured. Those who complained about some demonstrators being beaten should

Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) → Tsotso • 2 months ago

I am alive and following all events, Professionally! I dwell on the big picture. The situation is under control. Its violence that has to go. I was impressed by the peaceful demo at the court as opposed to the thuggish stone throwing and road blocking last week that occasioned the clash that left some demonstrators arrested and some police officers injured. Those who complained about some demonstrators being beaten should compared yesterday`s demo and sober themselves. Nowhere in this world , even in the Holy Heaven,where violence is tolerated. After the technical acquittal of the topical pastor, his legal team must be weighting for a safe, Holy, practical and sober advice to their client,before he goes into political schizophrenia and neo colonial regime change false & futile nirvana! When nonentities start singing the old songs about people`s economic suffering , being oblivious to the satanic effects of sanctions, my revolutionary spirit gets provoked! To the chagrin of all stooges of the West, I continue to argue that sanctions must go so that our economy can freely interact internationally without being shackled by evil behind the scenes machinations of the West. The presence of dethroned Boers(farmers) among the demonstrators at the court speaks volume about who controls the pastor`s political tail! If the pastor is being sponsored by Boers, I swear, in the name of Ambuya Nehanda that the land reform is a no go area for sellouts. We died for ``dis lendi`` with our black blood! I rest my patriotic comment

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Common Sense → Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) • 2 months ago

Dwell on the big picture? How can you when your head is in the sand? Zimbabwe can't borrow until she starts paying back what she owes. She can't pay back because of PF policies and corruption, nothing more and nothing less.

Common Sense → Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) • 2 months ago

Dwell on the big picture? How can you when your head is in the sand? Zimbabwe can't borrow until she starts paying back what she owes. She can't pay back because of PF policies and corruption, nothing more and nothing less.

Oh and the thing 'swear in the name of' just got beaten to a pulp by the Being that is making this change happen... You can't win, never

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) → Common Sense • 2 months ago

You love GLASS ,without G and take away L,that is what you are politically, speaking!

∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

Realest Negus Living → Cde Mzvinavhu(Prof) • 2 months ago

Tsano, tikwanirei. There is no point in dwelling on sanctions because hapana kumabvisa kwa muchaita. Why focus on zvinhu zviri out of your control? Focus on the corruption that is happening in broad daylight! That you can control. Focus on the incompetence in our public officers! That you can control. Your "revolutionary spirit" is looking to fight a war in Westminister when the real battle is at Rotten Row in Shake Shake building. Until you start dealing with low hanging fruit that does not require bloated foreign delegations to foreign lands you will remain a joke to all thinking Zimbabweans.

3 ∧ | ∨ • Reply • Share ›

dehwa2 · 2 months ago

So the pic of three white guys including commercial farmer Ben Freeth was the highlight of the day. kkkkkkkkkkk Shame on you.In your twisted mind these three whites are the ones financing Mawarire and the so-called third force.The race card is tired and antiquated now. Change is coming and inevitable.

5 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

> **Department 6** → dehwa2 · 2 months ago
>
> they want it to turn it into a regime change agenda and political. #thisflag is apolitical nonviolent movement. besides Freeth is a Zimbabwean
>
> 1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago

How do you tell a real Christian from a fake Christian?

The fake Christian will pray for a fake pastor, while a real Christian will pray for Zimbabwe's God-given leaders, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Amai President Dr Grace Mugabe.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

> **Mudzidzisi Ticha Bernard** → Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago
>
> Excuse me..Who is God given?? My foot.
>
> 1 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

>> **SG** → Mudzidzisi Ticha Bernard · 2 months ago
>>
>> So what is the purpose of screening the above 3 whites. The court was packed to capacity with Zimbos is support of the flag Pastor. Enough is enough.
>>
>> 2 ∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

when your child is being raped don't stop the rapist pray for them. Christians are called to stand for justice.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

FlyboyX → Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago

If they are God given, they would not:
1) Oversee a government that steal 15bn dollars by their own admission and life goes on as if nothing happened.
2) They would not send their children to give birth in foreign countries where as the same care can be afforded at Avenues or Baines clinic
3) They would heed the call of the masses to deal with issues affecting them such as corruption(unless they are corrupt too)
4) They would not oversee a government that has literally looted the country dry but they would instead take measures against the looters, #### etc
5) They would not subvert my voice by first going through this message and not publishing it.....like what you doing right now

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Whateverman → Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago

It is also how you can tell a mentally challenged Christian from a sane one, HAHAHAHAHA!!! For for your oppressors by yourself, thanks.

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Truthfulness → Amai veZimbabwe(PhD) · 2 months ago

and who told you that they are God given. Saka Satan haana chaanopawo, iwe hurombe hwaunihwo wakapihwa naMwari here?

∧ | ∨ · Reply · Share ›

Load more comments

#ThisFlag campaigner Mawarire freed | The Herald

Evan Mawarire

Tendai Rupapa Senior Court Reporter

Evan Mawarire of the shadowy #ThisFlag campaign, who was facing charges of undermining a constitutionally-elected Government, was yesterday freed after his lawyers challenged his placement on remand.

When Mawarire was brought to court in the morning, he was being charged with inciting public violence, but when he appeared before magistrate Mr Vakayi Chikwekwe in the afternoon, the State had altered his charge to subverting a constitutionally-elected Government.

Mr Chikwekwe ruled that placing Mawarire on remand on a charge he was not aware of was a violation of his Constitutional rights.

Read more:

* #ThisFlag campaigner turns self in

He said the State was in contravention of Section 50 and 70 of the new Constitution which states that a person must be informed of his charge at the time of arrest.

White former commercial farmer Ben Freeth (centre) was among protesters who thronged the Harare Magistrates' Courts yesterday in sympathy of Pastor Evan Mawarire

"According to the new Constitution, a person must be permitted to challenge the lawfulness of the arrest," he said.

"Accused was detained in respect of charges of inciting public

violence according to his warned and cautioned statement. For reasons best known to the National Prosecuting Authority, the State for the first time in court preferred charges which accused was not informed of or warned or cautioned of. No statement was recorded from him.

"With respect to this, it is in conflict with section 50 (1) and also sec 70 of the Constitution. The Constitution is the supreme law of the country in terms of section 2 and it is binding on every person including the state.

"It is my finding that the NPA cannot charge the accused without complying with provisions of sec 50 and 70 of the Constitution. In the result the application to place him on remand on charges subverting a constitutionally elected Government is hereby dismissed."

Prosecuting Mr Jonathan Murombedzi and Mr Sebastian Mutizirwa applied for placement of Mawarire on remand on the serious charge and advised the court that Mawarire was to approach the High Court for bail issues since his charge was a third schedule offence.

Mawarire's lawyers led by Mr Harrison Nkomo, Irene Petras and Dzimbabwe Chimbwa challenged the placement of their client on remand on the basis that the State had ambushed him with new charges which he was not aware of.

The courtroom was for a moment turned into a church with several people taking turns to pray for Mawarire while the magistrate was in his chambers preparing the ruling.

It is the State's case that between July 1 and 6, Mawarire incited Zimbabweans to revolt against a constitutionally elected Government. It is alleged he urged people not to go to work or schools and to block roads.

Mawarire is also accused of urging people to assault police officers who were maintaining peace.

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