

ABSTRACT

A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR POLITICAL ADVERTISING IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF

ZIMBABWE

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Post-2000 Zimbabwe has been characterised by massive political contestations mainly between the President Robert Mugabe-led Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai. This battle has been fought on many fronts including the media and international forums with ZANU PF accusing the MDC of being ‘puppets’ of the British and Americans. On the other hand, the MDC accuses ZANU PF of ‘dictatorship’. This contestation has largely been more pronounced during election periods where it takes place through political advertisements in the media, music and election rallies among others. Whereas there have been many studies of the elections, media coverage of elections, alleged use of violence as an instrument of control, ZANU PF discourses through the media, official speeches and music among others, there has been little study of political advertising in Zimbabwe. This is despite the centrality of political advertising in political contestation in a democracy (Kaid, 2012). This paper, through a review and analysis of existing Zimbabwean literature on media coverage of elections, music nationalism, political journalism, cultural journalism among other political communication related studies, proposes a new theory of post-colonial African political communication and/or political advertising. It argues that existing scholarship tends to rely too much on Western theory and post-colonial essentialism to interpret ZANU PF discourses without acknowledging the peculiarities of the post-colonial African state which makes it different from the Western liberal democratic state and thus makes Western theory alone inadequate as an analytical tool to understand post-colonial African phenomenon. The paper argues that the practice of political advertising in Zimbabwe can best be understood through political communication theory and through acknowledging that the African post-colonial state is an 'artefact' of colonialism that has no link to any pre-colonial reality (Shaw, 1986).