

# When African media see through Western lenses

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The headline that appeared in one local private daily newspaper last month with the screaming headline '*PM says No to Mugabe*' denotes that some omnipotent prime minister in the Republic of Zimbabwe stood up to a hapless fellow called Mugabe.

The headline was meant to project an image of a power relationship, where the former was depicted as possessing superior legal and constitutional power and authority over this supposedly powerless Mugabe chap.

Such kind of journalism does not only expose the calibre of the editor of the daily, but also puts into perspective the role and function of the media in Africa, which of late have developed this notorious habit of copying Western framing of events with reckless abandon.

Only last year, our very own media fell into that trap of Western framing of events as they unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other crisis points, where Western coverage emphasised on the person of the leader, detailing how long the leader had been in power and that longevity being blamed for the ensuing riots and protests.

Regrettably, the demeaning headline in the local daily perfectly falls into the same type of Western framing, moreso as it relates to events surrounding or concerning the person of president Mugabe.

In fact, it is still fresh in the minds of most Zimbabweans how in the months of April last year there was a frenzy in both the international and local private media with speculation running at fever pitch over the president's health, following a "Prophecy" by some Nigerian charlatan that an African leader would die: which "prophecy" apparently "coincided" with the death of president of Malawi, the late Bingu Wa Mutharika.

Other sections of the private media and their apologists speculated or wished that the prophecy had president Mugabe in mind. Such, unfortunately, is the calibre of some of our editors in the private media.

Crudely treacherous, notoriously shameless, politically immature, and lacking in-depth. Would it then be hard for a discerning reader to deduce from such a misleading headline what the editorial policy of this newspaper stands for, nor would any reader of average intelligence find it difficult to interpret or give meaning to the editor's political leanings, given the regime charge crusade that has literally swept most private media houses.

It is apparent that the editorial policy of the said newspaper does not want to recognise the incumbent Head-of State and Government, but in their illusions and day dreaming propaganda schemata are desperately trying to elevate the person of

the PM, through such misleading headlines, who to all intents and purposes is a junior and a subordinate to the President in the current power relationships matrix.

It would therefore be no exaggeration to categorically state that the editorial policies of most private media houses as depicted in the headline in question are decidedly one-sided, shamelessly partial and panegyric.

That headline, as somebody observed, was meant to project the person of the PM as a non-nonsense man, totally in charge and in control of the government and all political processes in Zimbabwe and yet, this Mugabe chap, depicted in the said headline as a nonentity, is in fact the president of the Republic of Zimbabwe, the man who swore in Morgan Tsvangirai to become the PM of Zimbabwe.

The same Mugabe is indeed superior to the PM in every sense; be it in status, education and in terms of the Constitutional and legal power matrix, which the PM himself has on many occasions acknowledged even when addressing his own national executive council.

The question then that comes to mind is that what kind of a message does that kind of a headline seek to convey, where the President who is the PM's Constitutional superior is reduced to a title-less Mugabe?

Apart from showing that the editor, in his zeal to promote the image of the person of the PM, is in fact doing a great deal of a disservice as a political commissar of the party of his choice. That kind of attitude and the attendant language, which is demeaning to the president, puts into perspective another serious problem with the media in Africa, which according to Anvar Versi's publication in the 1998 *African Business* magazine, is a result of lack of research, borrowed framing, poor training, lack of confidence among African journalists and the removal of history and context from media stories.

It also puts into perspective the African people's expectations of the media which is to foster nation building and African values and ethos.

At one time, minister Shamu when officiating at the World Press Freedom day last year also expressed concern over the conduct of the media in Africa. He argued that the inclusion of journalists and the mass media on the UN Human Rights Commission would hopefully see the media fraternity in the forefront of promoting and defending human rights and to uphold the respect and dignity of all citizens in a manner that promotes the African philosophy of ubuntu/hunhu.

Regrettably, our donor-funded, donor-controlled and donor-owned private media have tended to take Zimbabweans for granted, with some editors imposing themselves on the Zimbabwean populace as political commissars of certain political parties, where they are subjecting us to a daily dosage of political garbage.

Indeed the media - particularly the so-called independent media - have become a forum and a platform for editors to manipulate readers through propaganda, targeted at the gullible groups who normally believe in every word that is printed. This group of people; because of their flawed political, religious, and ethnic beliefs, is usually the target of editors' manipulation, both as a regime change strategy and for the purpose of making huge profits for their media houses.

And yet the general expectation of people is that of media that are capable of articulating Africa's concerns, aspirations and to mobilise resources in the fight against hunger, disease, poverty and underdevelopment.

As if that is not enough, the African media have now become an ally in the current donor-funded trend where reporting anything newsworthy from Africa is always in a very pessimistic way. Emphasis is being put on poverty, dictatorships, corruption, disease and illiteracy, with those who fought and still continue to fight for Africa's emancipation being depicted as dictators with the attended negative connotations imaginable under the sun. The media in Africa should always be mindful of the fact that the expectations of the people of the African continent are high over its role; which is to help solidify the continent's long walk to both political and economic freedoms.

The media in Africa should also serve as the watchdog, always reminding the leadership - particularly the liberation

movement leaders in Southern Africa - not to deviate from the revolutionary values and ethos through acceptance of an overdose of neo-liberalism as is the case with the ANC leadership in South Africa.

This deviation from the liberation values and ethos usually starts with the constitution-making process where Western liberal decadent values are smuggled in as was the case with the South African constitution and what we see taking place in our current Copac draft which seeks, not only to weaken or undermine the state authority, but also to bring in homosexuality as a human right claptrap. Such neo-liberal constitutions are designed in such a manner that they are meant to work for the haves, with the have-nots being relegated to a life of misery, abject poverty and hopelessness. No wonder service delivery demonstrations and protests have now become a daily feature on the South Africa's political landscape. For what would one expect when the South African economy is literally closed to the average citizen, with such a slave wage economic structure, being backed by a crude and deceptive neo-liberal and manipulative media, capable of misleading the general public moreso as it applies to the power relational matrix as enshrined in the current global political agreement.

Apparently the media in Africa have been transformed into a tool and an instrument to glorify neo-liberal values, with outright sell-outs and political pimps being hailed as champions of democracy and human rights.

Our media has also become a convenient accomplice of the enemies of Africa through demonisation of our leaders and bastardisation of those sons and daughters of Africa who gallantly fought and who continue to fight for Africa's political independence and economic liberation.

As Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who was the founding chairman of the Organisation in of African Unity noted at the inauguration ceremony in 1963: "We name as our first great task the final liberation of those Africans still dominated by foreign exploitation and control." It remains our wish and hope that the media in Africa will one day embrace the same spirit that propelled Africa's liberation founding fathers to bring the continent closer to the ultimate goal of political unity and economic integration and independence.

It is also our hope that the media in Africa will one day, perhaps during this present generation, be able to play its role as a promoter and champion of ubuntu through focused developmental journalism where Africa's infractural development and its connectivity for an integrated Africa become an agenda setting topic.

For without connectivity and a strong infrastructure base, we cannot trade among ourselves leaving us forever the markets for products of other nations.

The media in Africa also need to focus on agriculture, food security, and land reform. In the case of Zimbabwe land reform has triggered an avalanche of criticism from the private media, who ostensibly get a cue from the Western funders who have been relentlessly on the forefront of vilifying and rubbishing our noble land reform programme.

Indeed Africa's land resources have the potential to contribute towards the continent's economic growth and to ensure that we are able to feed ourselves and contribute towards job creation and equitable income redistribution. Furthermore, with its richness in mineral resources it is the expectation that the African media should promote co-operative efforts in the exploration and extraction of those resources as enunciated in the Logos Plan of Action, ostensibly for the development of our economies and indigenous entrepreneurship so that our people assume greater responsibility towards achievement of both individual and collective goals.

The role of the media becomes more pronounced in health care and education as the health and education of nations is vital for the much vaunted economic prosperity, with the media assisting to identify institutions of excellence which can be shared without duplicating existing efforts in the field of science, technology, research and development.

It is, however, sad to note that the media in Africa have become the mouthpiece and promoters of neo-liberal decadence and in the process misleading the people through their misguided editorial policies.

Source: [allAfrica](#)

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