

# Mimicking power: visualising satire as journalism in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

*This article explores performances of satire as a form of journalism in Zimbabwe by analysing performances by satirists who mimic to mock journalistic conventions and political authorities. Through analyses of YouTube videos, the article explores the ways in which satire as journalism is visualised. Onscreen, satirists mimic the gestures, mannerisms and aesthetic objects connected to both political figures and state journalists on the state-run television station for ridicule. This paper argues that the parodying and mimicking of aesthetics of authority legitimises and professionalises satire as journalism, even as it seeks to critique notions of journalistic authority in an authoritarian state. Through analyses of three Zimbabwean satire shows on YouTube, the paper finds that, while satirists mimic journalistic practices and journalistic authority with the goal of mocking state media and the censorial state, a closer reading of their practices shows that they themselves become legitimate news tellers. This kind of satire plays with familiar broadcasting television aesthetics to signal authority, providing current news and otherwise censored critique.*

*Keywords: satire, mimicry, journalism, YouTube, Zimbabwe*

## 1. Introduction

Since television's introduction in Zimbabwe in the 1960s, what viewers watch has been highly censored. Under Prime Minister Ian Smith, state forces largely controlled news-telling and entertainment on Rhodesia Television (RTV), which catered to a white-minority government's priorities. In 1979, changes on broadcast television, which was now renamed the "Zimbabwe Broadcast Corporation" (ZBC) visually signalled the transition between regimes. Zimbabwe's first Black, female television newscaster, Mandy Mundawarara, appeared onscreen to cover Robert Mugabe's ascent who just a year earlier had been considered and framed as a terrorist by Rhodesian media.

However, questions still remained about whether the same rapture from the previous regime indeed meant a different approach to media practices on state television, so much so that in 1980, Jay Ross, the *Washington Post's* Africa Correspondent, wrote: "In a sense, the newly re-named Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) controlling radio and television has simply replaced one master for another, neither highly receptive to the idea of Western-style press Freedom" (Ross, 1980). At the time, the new minister of information, Nathan Shamuyarira, stated in an interview that while the previous regime had used mass media as a "propaganda machine" to specifically target its enemies, new leadership wanted to "change this entirely" (Ross, 1980). Shamuyarira's time in power later included the enforcement of censorship policies, including vetting foreign journalists and licensing laws that cracked down on forms of criticism against the government. Other veteran journalists who had been initially given a platform on the new ZBC, including Mundawarara, found themselves censored and left the country to produce journalism and criticise the government elsewhere in the diaspora.

It is under these circumstances that "doing journalism" and "speaking truth to power" in Zimbabwe has been challenging. But journalism has also continued to survive, often not under the standards and expectations of "Western-style press freedom." Forms of journalism have emerged through questioning, adapting and playing with other(ed) ways of telling the truth and telling the news. Magamba Network, founded in 2007, emerged from two media-makers in Zimbabwe, Samm Farai Monro (stage name "Comrade Fatso") and Tongai Makava (stage name "Outspoken") who have moved from slam poetry and musical performances at local venues to other modes of storytelling, including satire and journalism. The stage names Comrade Fatso and Outspoken highlight the subversive nature of their performances. The use of "comrade" can be read as a dissident, tongue-in-cheek appropriation of the use of the title "Cde," mostly used as a designation for the ruling political party's members and their allies. Ironically, Outspoken's background in the underground hip-hop scene and slam poetry in Zimbabwe provide a platform and a cover for reflexivity and truth telling in a context where transparency about the hardships of state-sponsored violence are highly censored.

In 2011, Magamba Network began producing *Zambezi News*, a programme distributed specifically to parody ZBC's propaganda-centred news. The "network" began distributing DVDs of performances of political satire because ZBC would not broadcast them. Magamba Network has since developed into "an alternative TV station showcasing popular political satire programming, a youth-led political reporting initiative undertaking the live coverage of Parliament, and all alternative multimedia platform" ("Magamba Network –Sigrid Rausid Trust," 2020). Magamba, which means "heroes" or "freedom fighters" in Shona, builds on terminology and naming practices that characterised the subversive liberation struggle in Zimbabwe from Rhodesian rule, while also gesturing towards how the same politics have been co-opted by the state.

In response to censorial conditions on the ground, media makers in Zimbabwe and its diaspora have turned to YouTube to deliver the news though parodying the news as an alternative way to speak to power. Magamba Network now has grown from a collaboration between friends to include several different shows on its YouTube Channel, Magamba TV, and a team of media makers, producers and other creatives. Magamba TV and its online content serves as the main case study of this paper because of its wide audience reach in Zimbabwe and diasporically through YouTube (it has 43.5 thousand subscribers as of October 2023). It is Zimbabwe's leading (at least by online views alone) producer of politically inclined satire and comedy performances and creates content that critiques *both* journalism and governance in Zimbabwe. Magamba TV addresses

living under the Emmerson Mnangagwa regime that took over from the Mugabe regime by coup in 2017, but still experiencing the “hyperinflation, disillusionment, and political oppression” characteristic of the Mugabe regime under which Magamba Network was founded in 2007 (“Who We Are,” 2007). While it is difficult to determine whether Magamba TV is the “most censored” satirical organisation in the country, it has certainly remained at the forefront of fighting charges protecting satire and journalism from government censorship.

This paper examines the aesthetics and situational comedy that result in the mimicry of both ZBC as a news broadcast authority and a dictatorial government as an authority on Magamba TV. It begins with a dictionary understanding of mimicry here as “the act of copying or imitating closely” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.), but complicates that definition by exploring what “copying” or “imitation” can tell us about storytelling genres in Zimbabwe, but also seemingly opposing storytelling genres like journalism and satire writ large. While imitation and impersonation are certainly involved on Magamba TV performances that mock authority, the act of mimicry is distinguishable because the performer maintains their “own sense of identity but takes on that of some familiar person” (Berger, 1993, p. 37). Mimicry is a form of humour that involves a person maintaining his own identity while, at the same time, “‘stealing’ or ‘borrowing’ the identity of others” (Berger, 1993, p. 42). While “intentional” and “unintentional” mimicry may be enacted in different contexts for different ends (Bhabha, 1984; Ferguson, 2002; Filani, 2016), the mimicry as mockery engaged in this paper is not for the purposes of adulation but to parody and mock power.

However, because of the slipperiness of mimicry as humour, mimicry can also be difficult to read and critique even as it critiques power and can serve as an “ironic cultural practice” that “resists and subverts the actions and actors that have been previously accepted and revered” (Filani, 2016, p. 91). Mimicry is relational; the satirist engaged in mimicry “must place his or her voice in relation to the voice that is being mimicked” (Park, 2013, p. 85). This positioning in the context of Magamba TV’s satire necessitates the satirist to take a stance against the government and/or problematics of journalistic practice.

The moments where satire and journalism meet as storytelling genres invested in critiquing power illuminate the objectives that these genres have in common, such as “truth telling,” agenda setting, trust and connection with the audience, and providing current, “timely” news through the rituals that define each storytelling genre. The two in some ways even “mimic” each other even as they differentiate themselves as genres. For example, they both require performative aspects, they tend to be focused on some imagined audience and they often rely on notions of timing, urgency and a sense of temporality particular to the genre (e.g. “comedic timing,” “breaking news”) in order to deliver messages.

To tease out the aesthetics and politics of mimicking power in a military dictatorship, this paper relies on snippets from data from 142 episodes of three YouTube shows by Magamba TV: *Zambezi News*, *The Week*, and *Tsaona*. The corpus of episodes was posted over four years from 2017 to 2021. This time period captures key political moments re-imagined and mimicked by Magamba TV satirists, including the coup from the Mugabe regime to the Mnangagwa regime, the Covid-19 crisis and government mishaps, elections, an internet shutdown, anti-government protests and the arrests of journalists and activists in Zimbabwe.

Beyond the scenes on *Zambezi News* and *The Week* that directly mimic what is immediately recognisable as broadcast news practices and aesthetics, such as news anchors, reporters on the street, and news round-up shows, this paper also analyses the kinds of aesthetics that emerge from the show *Tsaona*, a collaboration between Bustop TV and Magamba TV on YouTube as an

example of alternative filmmaking and news making practice that appears in a difficult and highly censored media environment. The alternative nature of *Zambezi News* and *The Week* is limited because it is boxed-in aesthetically; the satirists have to mimic and borrow practices from the ZBC and mainstream news agencies.

The performances in the show *Tsaona* are alternatives even to the “alternative” performances in *Zambezi News* and *The Week*. The Shona term *tsaona* translates to “accident,” and can refer to a mishap, sudden, unexpected and unfortunate events and casualties. The episodes on *Tsaona* re-imagine in which state “accidents” are highlighted and critiqued through situational comedy, including but not limited to electricity and internet blackouts, poorly coordinated abductions of political opponents, and media mishaps. The shows provide examples of a range of possibilities of what we can identify as a generative intersection between satire and journalism beyond the mimicry of news making practices, with *Tsaona* taking the performance even further out of the newsroom and mimicking figures of authority in everyday life scenarios. In summary, *Tsaona* does not necessarily take on the attributes of traditional journalistic performance onscreen but incorporates other(ed) ways to tell the news and the truth that mimic daily life, such as situational comedy, timeliness, and a closer connection to everyday experiences on the ground as news telling “for the people.”

## **2. *Zambezi News*: mimicking the news**

Since its earlier seasons, *Zambezi News* episodes have generally followed a structure recognisable to an audience as broadcast news. The descriptions of the videos on YouTube call the satirists “newscasters,” setting expectations for the viewer even before they click on an episode. At the beginning of most episodes, the words “Zambezi News” appear in the middle of the screen, and behind them is a world globe circling on its axis. This image (see Fig. 1) is accompanied by a recognisable introductory soundtrack, not unlike how many other broadcast stations mark their brand. However, unlike ZBC, the beginning of the episode includes a moment where the “I” at the end of the “Zambezi News” chips off. It is the first visual cue that this is satire, a wink to the viewer so fast that it is easy to miss.



Figure 1. Zambezi news introduction shot, Magamba TV, YouTube

The anchors follow onscreen; they assume an upright, authoritative stance, making direct eye contact with the camera. The background, especially in season four, is the cityscape of Harare, unmistakably like the one in ZBC afternoon news programmes. That stance is consistent in each season, in every episode, no matter the configuration of the team of the three anchors introducing themselves and the news for the day. The stance, like the way the *Zambezi News* anchors are generally formally dressed, in suit jackets and ties, visually signals a sense or a least a performance of professionalisation. While ZBC is unquestionably biased as a state-sponsored platform, and therefore unobjective and “unprofessional” in many ways, the anchors still adhere to certain standards of professionalised physical stance and attire. This “authoritative” stance remains steady even in an episode where the anchors are wearing overalls and hard hats brought to them by an unnamed “big oil corporate sponsor” when *Zambezi News* is supposedly in the midst of corporate capture (see Fig. 3).

It is also a stance assumed by ZBC anchors (see Fig. 2), and other anchors around the world on broadcast television. This upright stance is universalised, no matter the political leanings of the station or how captured the media is – the performance must go on.



Figure 2. ZBC anchor Lee Ann delivering news bulletin, ZBC, via Facebook



Figure 3. Zambezi news anchors in authoritative stance, Magamba TV, YouTube

The programmes follow a sequence, that on the one hand is predictable, orderly and consonant with how a broadcast station would tell the news, and on the other hand is full of unpredictable moments that run counter to performances of “respectable” broadcast journalism. For example, in the episode “How to Use the Internet Patriotically,” before the scene moves from the anchors to the street reporter, a series of questions are posed by the anchor “Jerome Weathers.” Here he is “objectively” just asking the questions: “In our first report, the internet,” he begins. “They lay the cables under water, so how does it not get wet?” In a later episode, he asks a “balanced” question: “Xenophobia: Good or Bad?”

This episode is focused on the internet and how it “works,” and draws that knowledge from different sources of information in different segments. The “person on the street” interviews in the city of Harare, where the production crew conducts these “interviews” with other performers, begins with an aerial shot of the bustling Harare streets, the city’s capitol and the voice of the reporter, “Caiphus Josephat,” before he appears (see Fig. 4). Josephat’s voice, who is introduced as a “roving reporter” by the newscasters states: “Some say the internet is a western invention. Others say it was created by Satan in order to lure unsuspecting reporters onto endless porn sites.” The reason he is “roving” takes on a double meaning. The viewer can see him moving around the city interviewing people and observing the scene; he is in a suit and “respectably” dressed, but he is also often quite inappropriate, uttering statements that would never air (on purpose) on a “family-friendly” broadcast station and dabbles in popular conspiracies about the internet. While at the same time performing the visuals of a broadcast news story, Josephat highlights the problem with false balance in conventional news making.



Figure 4. “Roving” reporter on Harare streets, Magamba TV, YouTube

The statements may initially seem outrageous, but they highlight and ridicule the way in which reporters often frame or introduce a story, and the ways in which “objective” journalistic practice insists on “balance.” Josephat proceeds to roam (or is it rove?) the streets, to catch up with one or two of the “young hip chaps and chicks who are real digital entrepreneurs ready to drive the country forwards with innovation.” He demonstrates, like many of the reporters at ZBC, that he is out of touch with what the “streets” sound like, and their demographics.

Magamba TV’s target audience is “the youth,” those aged between 18 and 35, the content is curated for a local Zimbabwean audience and diasporic viewers in touch with more nuanced and specialised references to the space and the issues being explored in the skits. Locally, this content can be viewed online on mobile phones and in local kiosks and internet hubs across the country set up by Magamba TV for those without the internet at home.

Josephat’s outfit, an oversized, stuffy suit jacket and an obnoxious striped tie, also highlights that he is quite out of touch. It is at odds with his first interviewee’s attire, a young man in a hoodie, who tells Josephat: “I love Whatsapp,” but also “I have a really terrible job. So to avoid boredom, I spend all of my time ‘apping’ my friends, and being a part of many groups, where I receive jokes, nude photos, and sometimes even misguided coup plans for West African countries.” Josephat listens intently. The performative nature of reportage and comedic practice converge *vis a vis* his deadpan face. The reporter is often caught in moments where they must be there, figuratively and literally, but maintain a disconnection, even when the source becomes a little too unruly. Comic moments appear in the news all the time, and what makes them even funnier is the reporter’s insistence to stay on script. In the “man/woman/person on the street” interviews on this episode and other seasons, the performer/journalist/comedian is constantly in situations where they must never break the deadpan visage but sometimes fail to hold the facade of objectivity.

Another performative aspect taking place during these interviews is when the journalist/comedian decides to engage with the audience by breaking the fourth wall. The second interviewee, a woman, tells Josephat that she loves Facebook because she recently fell in love with

a Nigerian Prince on the platform. Josephat here looks out to the audience; his eyebrow-raise separates this glance from other times when he does look at the camera while reporting. There is also no reason at this time for him to look away from the interviewee as she is mid-sentence, except to signal disbelief and the impossibility of maintaining neutrality. The look also assumes that the audience is familiar with the stereotypes of the Nigerian internet scammer, and the “naïve” woman looking for love in all the wrong places on the internet fosters a “familiar” connection between the journalist and the viewer often not possible in the distancing required by traditional broadcast reportage.

The reliance on stereotype, or sometimes in these cases self-stereotype in comedic performance, also come to the fore in both street interviews and other spaces where interviews are conducted outside the more controlled studio space. The interviewers not only provide caricatured versions of the journalist on the street, but they also caricature the show’s target audiences, the supposed “hip young chaps and chicks” who are the generation consuming both their news and entertainment online. In a different segment, another street journalist/comedian goes “where the story is” to ask citizens in a bar what the internet means to them (see Fig. 5). The journalist and the viewer suffer through slurred bar puns, and the journalist mostly keeps his composure, but sometimes fails as his peers play the drunkard roles a little too well. In the midst of bar chatter and bottle clinking, one bar patron explains how the internet works in a series of bar metaphors spaced with comedic timing: “we call bar snacks...mega snacks,” or better yet, “when a patron wets himself, we call it ‘WikiLeaks.’” Surprisingly, the jokes and the bar as metaphor for a space where sometimes unfiltered discourse takes place, like the internet, works well to demystify the technical aspects of the internet that a mainstream audience would struggle to fully grasp.



Figure 5. Men-in-bar interviews, Magamba TV, YouTube

Here, various registers of stereotypes are needed to land the joke. There is the stereotype of the uneducated citizen, the everyday (and often drunken) everyman, and the paradox of the “wise idiot” in the bar.



There is the trope of “three men/ (usually) a man/someone walks into a bar” jokes, which often aim to reveal some kind of clever paradox or truth. The bar as a space where “free” discourse can take place in Zimbabwe, where commentary about government can sometimes slip through under the cover of “drunken foolishness” or be censored depending on who is in the room, also illustrates the contentious nature of political and social discourse in Zimbabwe and (offline) space. The skit itself as a performance space, as well as the bar portrayed in the skit, are where the truth can be uttered under the cover of “satire” and “entertainment.”

The trope of the “wise bar banter” amongst men in Zimbabwean culture is also present in literary genres like the seminal work of Chenjerai Hove in *Shebeen Tales: Messages from Harare* (1994). This scene questions who an “expert” or a “legitimate” source can be and why. In Hove’s collection of short stories about the shebeen space, the informal bar or unlicensed establishment (especially popular under Rhodesian rule, the white minority regime before Zimbabwe’s independence and transition to Black majority rule), Hove uses humour to counter, or at least add, a different perspective of post-colonial, modern Zimbabwe outside tourist brochures and news articles by foreign correspondents. The humour also makes speaking honestly about various crises in the country, such as the AIDS pandemic at the time the book was written, possible without succumbing to total cynicism and despair. The trope of the bar extends to other scenes so the show can address difficult topics, such as the elections in Zimbabwe. In season four’s bonus clip, “Pan African Alcoholics,” owners of a shebeen launch an “Anonymous Alcoholics 2018 Election Guide” which is covered by the show as a news event.

Global political news events are also mimicked and covered by both the *Zambezi News* team and on *The Week with Comrade Fatso*. In a few minutes of the prelude before Comrade Fatso, a white Zimbabwean satirist, begins his round-up, he pivots over to the United States to check in on Trump’s refusal to give up power in November 2020. “Fux News” is clearly meant to visually poke at Fox News (see Fig. 6).

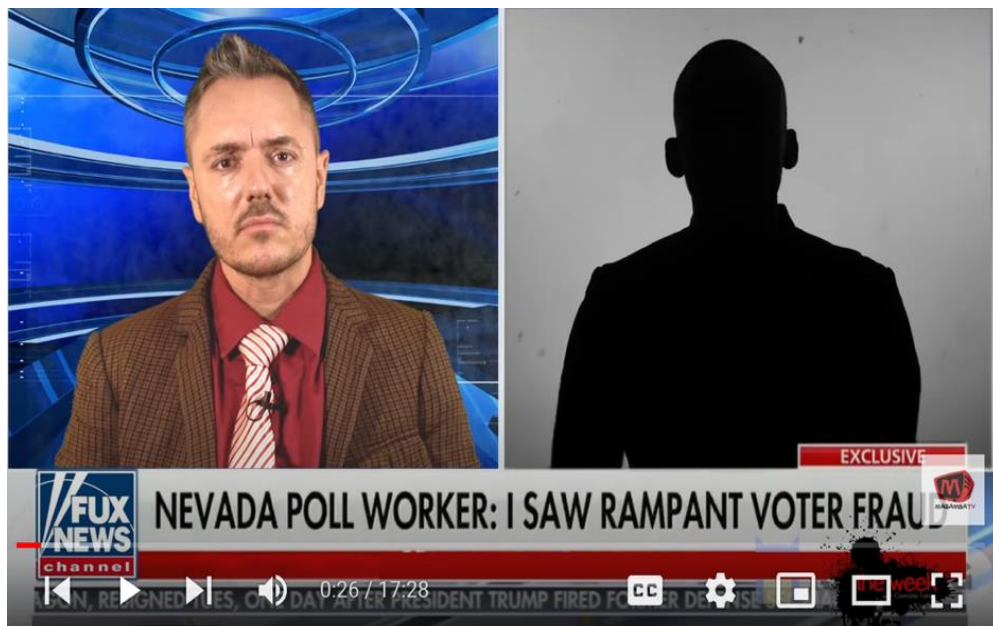


Figure 6. Comrade Fatso on “Fux News,” Magamba TV, YouTube



Figure 7. Foreign correspondent interviews “refugees.” Magamba TV, YouTube

In the episode “Making Zimbabwe Great Again,” the programme turns from addressing the continued xenophobic sentiments against Malawians in Zimbabwe to the “world stage,” to report on the refugee crisis and right-wing fascism taking over European countries. The “refugees” interviewed by the foreign correspondent (see Fig. 7), a Black Zimbabwean reporter in London, have been “through hell” and are still “suffering from the trauma.” But they appear to be two white South African men who have had to “flee” their homeland by ten-hour flights in business class and manage minor inconveniences within the UK’s “strict” immigration policy. The correspondent’s framing of the situation, like mainstream media’s blindness to biased reporting, is that the refugee crisis is more “far reaching” than anticipated.

This is not a story about inequality; it is a flattened, quick report about how white people suffer, too. The temporal demands of foreign correspondence in broadcast news do not allow for unpacking historical, cultural and colonial contexts. The irony (and the joke) of the situation is that the correspondent’s takeaway for the audience is that “some would have you believe that you have to be a certain shade of brown or darker to suffer the wrath of strict immigration policies.” The correspondent is the darkest-hued individual in the frame. The blindness imbedded in foreign news practices is so systematic that it does not know how to address systematic structures of inequality.

In the next clip, roles are exchanged. There appears to be a white correspondent and a Black interviewee, “Fastmore Ncube,” a recent migrant and “London-based transport operator” (see Fig. 8). He is actually a *hwindi*. A *hwindi* in Zimbabwe is a conductor for informalised transport systems – omnibuses. The *hwindi* is usually a young man from a high-density suburb in Zimbabwe, a “ghetto youth” trying to make ends meet. His job is to shepherd passengers swiftly into the bus and collect the fare as the driver weaves through other cars and sometimes police roadblocks. It is a job that requires resilience in the Zimbabwean economy.



Figure 8. Foreign correspondent interviews Fastmore, Magamba TV, YouTube

In London, Fastmore is wearing a “Harare” t-shirt and has a white t-shirt folded on his head, like a turban, protecting him from the sun (see Fig. 9). His lips are very dry, and he speaks in Shong-lish and urban slang. He has found a “gap in the market” on the London Tube and has decided to be a *hwindi* here, too. The correspondent asks his questions, deadpan, in “reportedly” curiosity. Here, stereotype as a joke emerges again; however, the stereotype is so extreme that it begins to have a grotesque nature. Fastmore’s demeanour and the way he is lit by the camera scurrying across the London Tube has uncomfortable racist undertones.

The performance here is a version of what Gillespie (2014) calls the “racial grotesque,” a satiric technique employed by Black artists, particularly in the United States to recontextualise material objects and representations associated with racism and slavery in America. This form of recontextualisation can be extended to Fastmore’s performance in the station, as it too leans into a grotesque stereotype. His name itself is a reference to stereotypes about his profession and Zimbabwean “humorous” naming practices. How his “Blackness” is visualised in transportation objects in London is a way in which the show highlights how broadcast journalism treats racialised subjects but also how satirists can turn stereotype and the grotesque on its head.



Figure 9. Fastmore in London train station, Magamba TV, YouTube

*Zambezi News* also ridicules how transitions from one news segment to another are often jarring and comedic moments in and of themselves. One transition between a news bit on a music group and the weather report is: “That music group is just so damn hot right now...speaking of temperature, welcome to the weather report.” The same performer goes from weatherman to “Mandape Mandape,” returning onscreen in a wig, in a different persona, for a segment titled “citizen’s advice,” where the newscasters “ask the questions, and give you the answers.”

This is a reference to various agendas set in the newsroom, and assumptions about what the citizen needs to know, and how to frame that information. On state-owned television, that framing may even come in threatening monologues, like in the not-too-distant past from this episode, when military generals took over ZBC in 2017 to announce what sounded like a coup. In this episode, the question is “how to use the internet patriotically.” The answers are: “Firstly, do not read foreign websites or dirty diaspora news blogs,” because “they will most likely be filled with absolute lies, or uncomfortable truths.” Moreover, “Who needs information about the New York stock exchange? What is that to you? Why do you want to know what's happening in China?” and, finally, “Do not joke about our beloved African presidents or you’ll be put in a real jail. Not a cyber one.” The authoritative voice is not limited to the authoritarians that Magamba TV also lampoons, it is worth constantly revisiting journalistic values about framing and news values.

### **3. *The Week with Comrade Fatso: rounding up the news***

*The Week with Comrade Fatso* is not the only news round-up show in Zimbabwe. ZBC has its own version, like *News Flash* pictured below (see Fig. 10-12), and others have had their shows, such as *State of the Nation with Zororo Makamba*.



Figure 10. Tryson Dongo on ZBC's NewsFlash, ZBC via Facebook



Figure 11. Zororo Makamba's State of the Nation, YouTube

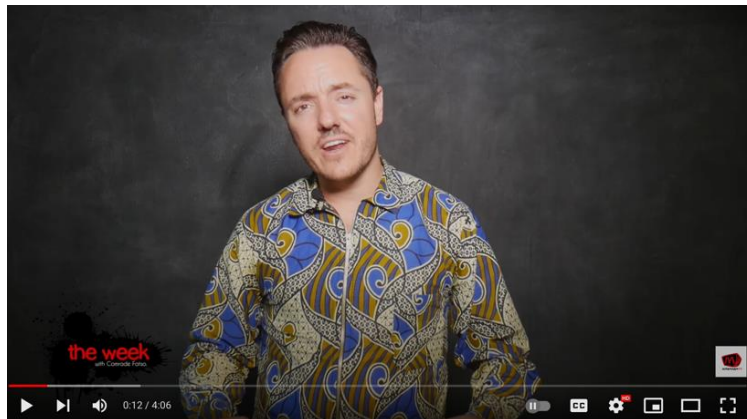


Figure 12. The Week with Comrade Fatso, Magamba TV, YouTube

At first glance, there are many similarities between these types of shows as a genre in and of themselves. They are gendered, often hosted by men, come in shorter bits than full-length broadcasts and piece together information for the audience that is meant to be both informative

and contextualised. ZBC's *News Flash* gives audiences midday snippets of what they need to know. Before his death, Makamba used to post themed YouTube videos to help audiences better understand particular issues in Zimbabwe. "Comrade Fatso" continues to remediate the news weekly for Magamba TV audiences.

Despite these similarities, Comrade Fatso's show goes a step further than the others in two ways. First, the satirist's embodiment of the "character" of Comrade Fatso raises questions about racialised performance that the other two shows do not. Secondly, the ZBC show does not include any jokes, it is supposed to be "serious" journalism. While Makamba includes dry jokes from time to time, humour is not at the centre of his show. Makamba himself is part of the elite, his show also often falls short of really holding power accountable, and his show is mimicked and ridiculed by another satirist in a prelude of *The Week with Comrade Fatso* for not really saying enough about the "state of the nation."

On *The Week*, what is "funny" chaffs against what is serious. Fatso is a white man delivering the dark jokes about the uricide, violence and tragedies that Black audiences face. The use of comrade mimics naming practices from the liberation struggle and solidarity movements in Zimbabwe, while also showing that to be a "comrade" can mean many things, which makes it a nimble title for performative genres. The comrade can be a war veteran, a radical, another man/woman/person on the street, a white Zimbabwean like Fatso, or a president. However, no matter its context, to be a "comrade" is to be in solidarity, and *The Week with Comrade Fatso* both signals solidarity and allyship with its viewers and also makes fun of what "solidarity" begins to look like when a term and concept for the marginalised are co-opted by power.

The unsettling conundrum with Comrade Fatso's performances is that he is often not only lampooning and mimicking men in power, but also infusing dark humour to describe the tragic situations that ensue for mostly Black citizens. *The Week* aspires to shame the government by covering everything it possibly can in short videos. On the episode "Of Ice Cream and Extension Cords," Comrade Fatso exclaims "Comrades, why do you make my life so easy!" as he is buried by outrageous headlines. The stories to be covered in five minutes and 38 seconds include Grace Mugabe, the former first lady, whipping her son's girlfriend with an extension cable in South Africa, and Emmerson Mnangagwa, then still vice president, getting poisoned at a political function via vanilla ice cream. Comrade Fatso still manages to sneak in some dairy puns at every opportunity (I.e. "I've always said these politicians are *cone* artists and do this *shit* on a *dairy* basis"). Actual political events in the country, where politicians are quibbling and poisoning each other onstage at rallies are so far-fetched they are themselves comedy material. But the conditions that those politicians create in these scenarios for ordinary people to clean up may not call for laughter.

Laughter can be an overt indicator of when a joke has been received well and it has "read" the room, but it is not necessary to fully define satire. In the midst of political turmoil, laughter can signify resistance, as in the case of the "forbidden laughter" Kaptan (2016) describes as a manifestation of folk humour during the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey. At the same time, unlaughter, what Billig (2005) defines as "a display of not laughing when laughter might otherwise be expected, hoped for, or demanded," can also be a response to satire (p. 192).

Hammett (2005) theorises about scenarios where humour might produce "unlaughter." A moment of unlaughter is one in which "social expectations and power relations may be questioned and challenged" (Hammett, 2005, p. 9). Hammett (2005) describes this refusal to laugh as either signalling opposition to the object or style of humour deployed, and/or an agreement with the underlying critique evoked by the image. To illustrate the point, Hammett chooses the jarring

example of cartoonist Zapiro's depiction of former South African president Jacob Zuma and other dignitaries about to "gang rape" Lady Justice.

According to Hammett, the Zapiro cartoon received unlaughter from some readers who were disgusted by Zapiro depicting the men through racist tropes of Black men raping white women, who did not view this as "punching-up." An element of this often takes place in the *The Week* videos; there are no jokes about rape in this corpus, but there are certainly racialised jokes about certain politicians, such as how uneducated, "stupid," or ineloquent they are, which tread line between incisive and offensive. These jokes return to concerns about whether punching up also makes classist and racialised jokes acceptable in this format. Often, those accents and "broken English" phrases not only mimic those in power, but they also sound like everyday Black people in Zimbabwe. A joke may also receive unlaughter from an audience sitting so deeply in the gravity of the situation that they cannot laugh.

Hammett ties consequences of "unlaughter" to anticipation of backlash towards the satirist, resulting in practices of satirical images being published either anonymously or under pseudonyms. While Comrade Fatso does not use the nickname to hide in the way that other satirists might in Zimbabwe, the nickname does do some work towards tempering some of the dark humour at the centre of the performance. His use of Shona presents him as not just another white person making jokes about Black people. It at least signals some awareness that he knows he needs a pseudonym to tell audiences he *really* is joking. The way that satirists decide to present their work is then determined by how they imagine their key audiences and their reactions. Such measures, as Hammett (2015) argues, "further reflect both the power of satire and the dominant power relations they are mobilized to critique" (p. 10).

On a week where headlines about politicians might not be so plentiful, Comrade Fatso jokes about the inevitable "slow news day" dreaded by news organisations. News can also seem slow when there is so much corruption in the country that it ceases to be news to ordinary people. Both the journalistic and satirical gaze can be violent. This is demonstrated by the way Comrade Fatso seems visibly/performatively disappointed when he has to work with the headline "Dead Capital Lying Around: Chinamasa," because the story is about a dignitary and corruption, something that is now part of everyday life, and not a more salacious story about a dignitary and dead bodies. Death is what makes stories move and the dark humour edgy. What makes "news" is tragedy, and if there is no tragedy, there is no news industry, and there is no Magamba TV to make fun of the news industry.

The comedic involves the "interpenetration of comedy as art and as life" (Berland & Ngai, 2017, p. 238). In everyday life under state violence, what is funny and later presented as art through satirical sketches is often also what is tragic.<sup>1</sup> What is funny can also quickly turn tragic. When Zimbabwean satirist Samantha Kureya, known by her stage name "Gonyeti," was critical of police surveillance and violence and expressed it by wearing a police uniform in a skit for Busstop TV, she was abducted by masked men from her home, beaten, stripped, forced to drink sewage, and went into hiding (Chaparadza, 2019). Kureya's position, specifically as a Black woman satirist in Zimbabwe put her at risk and under a gendered and raced kind of surveillance. It is also in part because of positionality that the government may choose to take some satirists more seriously than others, so much so that perhaps Fatso as the "white face" of a satirical show about the government reads differently and elicits different reactions from those in power.

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<sup>1</sup> See Carroll (1999, p. 99) on the "intimate relation affinity between horror and humor" writ large, and Laikainen (2015) on satire's "deep structural similarity" to horror, fear and disgust in certain socio-political moments.

Still, the interplay between satire and tragedy helps us consider how the conditions of postcoloniality, authoritarianism and state violence propagate certain satirical impulses. What is funny or not funny is entangled with the horrors closely tied to the body through state surveillance and builds on carnivalesque performances that laugh at death. Dark humour as the type of satire that Fatso performs here marries the horrible, the tragic and the comedic. Through mimicry, it makes light of trauma and offers a way to both bond and exclude individuals in communities.

#### 4. *Tsaona*: mimicking the president

Notably, *Tsaona* delivers the news differently from *Zambezi News* and *The Week*. More often than not, there are no appearances of “journalists” onscreen. However, two forms of mimicry ensue. President Mnangagwa himself, mimicked and embodied by different satirists, appears frequently. Coverage of the political situation appears as the mimicry of everyday scenarios, which include discourse speculating about and lampooning power.

The first episode of season three of *Tsaona* is titled: “ZANU-PF *Inoroya*” [Translation: ZANU PF bewitches/is a witch] names the political party at the centre of the jokes, but not the actual individual involved. With factions continuously plaguing the party, it is not clear who in the party is doing the bewitching that is suggested in the title. The description of the video reads: “*Haaaaa* Comrades, this year has been tough! At least it’s almost over, do you think the government still has another crisis up their sleeve?”

The year 2018 was marked by the first presidential election after Robert Mugabe’s fall, which resulted in what was widely reported as rigged and violent elections. The hope that Zimbabweans had held that things might change under a new(er) regime proved fruitless. Bad luck, often attributed to someone in the community bewitching an enemy, is the metaphor through which the skit discusses suspense, crisis, lack of agency, and a general sense of powerlessness.



Figure 13. Vendor and customer conversing, Magamba TV, YouTube

Three questions, or rather calls to responses, offer cues of who the “witch” is. A man asks a vendor selling fruits on the side of a residential street from a wheelbarrow: “Who is bewitching you?” and the vendor answers: “Zimbabwe yakaipa, unoshaya kuti ndiani akuroya ka?Iyo iri hurumende!”



[Translation: Zimbabwe is tough, it's difficult to determine who has bewitched you, meanwhile it's the government!] (see Fig. 13) Because of the political climate, and secrecy about party affiliation (especially when it is not the ruling party), it is also often difficult to determine if your own neighbours are selling you out.

The customer asks: “Gore rakatanga sei” [Translation: How did the year start?]. The vendor responds: “Open for business,” mimicking Mnangagwa’s slogan for how he would purportedly transform Zimbabwe’s economy at the beginning of his presidency. Finally, the customer leaves a rhetorical question in the air: “Ukatrusta munhu anopfeka scarf nepapisiro akurikuita?” [Translation: Would you trust someone *who wears a scarf*, the way it’s hot right now?]. Out of context (or in a court of law), this line does not hold much meaning. However, in the Zimbabwean context, that “the scarf” is political. It is largely worn by supporters of the ruling political party. The joke really comes to life as a way to critique power.

Mnangagwa is not mentioned by name but some of the things he does and says are acted out. For example, the sound *pfee*, a slogan at Mnangagwa rallies, is looped into the conversation. In the middle of their conversation, the two characters abruptly run offscreen because they suspect they have been spotted by a police officer. The fear is that the vendor has no permit to be selling produce and is now open for harassment, and his customer’s yellow vest suggests he is either one of the city workers who should have asked to see a permit, or a state worker of some kind who is supposed to be collecting licenses somewhere. Instead, he is here chatting, making snarky joke about scarves, and even buying “illegal” produce.

Complicity under surveillance is a complicated web of forbidden conversations and jokes. Even the fruit vendor leaves his cart behind – his livelihood – as it is now a matter of immediate survival. It is a false alarm, simply someone (not on screen) who is either dressed as or impersonating a police officer (see Fig. 14). But the two characters are ready to run as police violence and displacement are the norm. Here the body leads the way, as a signal of survival under surveillance. The threat is forever present, on and off screen.



Figure 14. Vendor and customer running offscreen, Magamba TV, YouTube

Calling one a witch is a social taboo, a serious accusation and questioning of moral character. Yet bewitching and being bewitched still appear several times as a theme in the skits. In episode “Unamawona MaQueue” [Translation: Can you see the queue], a scarfed character with their back

to the audience sits on the ground barefooted in a bushy area, consulting a witchdoctor (see Fig. 15). “The people you moved against are against you,” the witchdoctor exclaims. While we may not know whether Mnangagwa consults witch doctors to map out political strategy (he has denied all rumours of this), Mugabe did accuse Mnangagwa of consulting witchdoctors and plotting to succeed him. In a public speech in November 2017, shortly before the coup, Mugabe told the press that he had fired Mnangagwa as his vice president because Mnangagwa had visited a witchdoctor to plot against him (“Mugabe says fired deputy plotted witchcraft,” 2017). “We have kicked [Mnangagwa] out for the same reasons that saw us chasing away Mujuru,” Mugabe told the crowd. “He started consulting traditional healers on when I was going to die” (Maza, 2017). Joyce Mujuru was a former vice president who Mugabe also suspected of plotting to overthrow him.

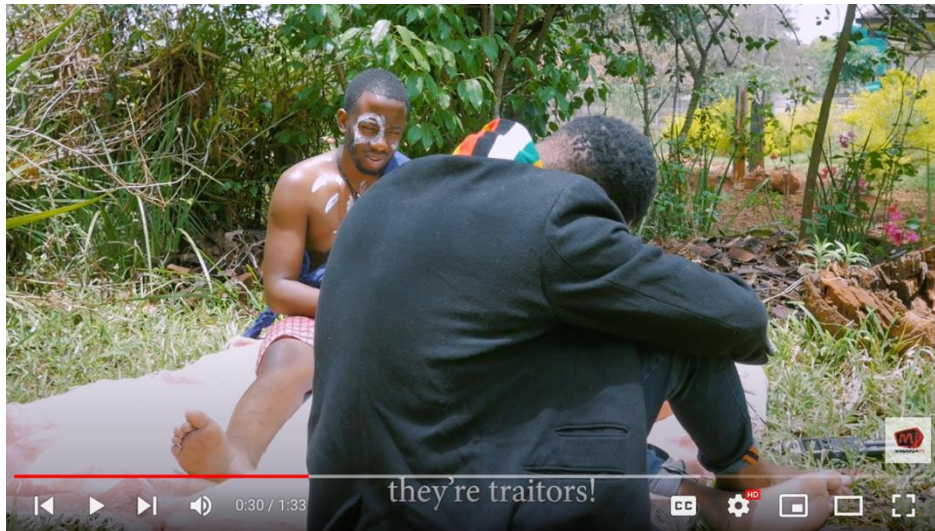


Figure 15. Mnangagwa calls a witchdoctor, Magamba TV, YouTube

This skit’s underlying message is that those in power, from Mugabe to Mnangagwa, appear to be perpetually paranoid about staying in power. They are perhaps more afraid of the people than the public might imagine. The “people” are never explicitly named, but the insinuation is that it is either a recently deposed Mugabe still under house arrest and/or the public who have become disillusioned by Mnangagwa’s performance in office. The scarfed character’s response to the witchdoctor’s revelations is the refrain “Imhandu!” [Translation: They are traitors!]. Mnangagwa is an enemy of the people and of his political adversaries, who also treats the people, protestors, journalists, and other dissidents as enemies. The very scarf he wears, in “patriotic colours,” is an appropriation of the flag and the #thisflag movement.<sup>2</sup>

The scarfed character’s voice is high-pitched, shaky and unrecognisable, but both the voice and the cowered position, head down, that the scarfed character assumes suggests a visual and sonic cowardice. “They don’t appreciate you,” the witchdoctor affirms, as he moves rocks on the ground, which supposedly represent said “enemies” in a fuel line. “Twimbos” (Twitter Zimbabweans) “are getting out of hand,” the witchdoctor adds. “The problem is you are soft as wool.”

<sup>2</sup> The #thisflag movement was anti-government protests that used the flag as a symbol to hold the government accountable for the economic crisis and the promises of the liberation struggle. The government responded by banning flag-wearing in public spaces.

Modelled after the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States in 2020, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement drew the attention of international leaders and celebrities to police and military violence under the Mnangagwa regime. The campaign gained momentum after the (first) arrest of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume, who were in remand prison, and the harassment and arrest of acclaimed novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga. Addressing the nation, Mnangagwa said of the protests: "The bad apples that have attempted to divide our people and to weaken our systems will be flushed out" (Chingono, 2020, n.p.).

The *Tsaona* episode simply titled #ZimbabweanLivesMatter released on August 5, 2020 unpacks both the excitement and the ambiguity that comes with online protest. The description reads:

It is yet another crazy week in Zimbabwe. Citizens who peacefully protested on the 31st of July have been arrested, abducted and some tortured prompting the whole world to have their eyes on us. The #ZimbabweanLivesMatter has been trending with leaders and personalities worldwide joining in, but locally we have been wondering where one of our beloved leaders has been. In this Episode of *Tsaona*, Magamba TV and Bustop TV join hands in searching for the one whose signal 2.6 million people are awaiting on.

The skit goes on not only to describe the developments of the protests, but to question the efficacy and impact of online movements to truly change the situation in Zimbabwe, even as the skit itself is a form of online commentary and potential political mobilisation. The video starts with a prayer, perhaps the best chance of any change in Zimbabwe given that a military dictatorship still prevails: "Aripo aripo, but hapana aripo." The literal translation of this line is extremely vague: "The one who is there is there, but no one is there." This is a prayer for new leadership, which is revealed when the man praying (who has been praying and fasting for 40 days) is interrupted by two other characters looking for the "hashtag leader," a "leader for the people." This leader, however, has no clue that #ZimbabweanLivesMatter has been trending for the last 40 days. After considering leading the people, the man decides that he does not in fact want to be a #hashtagleader, and refuses to leave his prayer station, to the point where he has to be pried off a tree trunk. He refuses to leave this position as adamantly as the leadership of the country refuses to step down.

The episode "Chabviswa MuOffice" [Translation: It has been removed from the office] is an example of subversive performance in plain sight which addresses both Mugabe and Mnangagwa's refusal to step down, using the scarf as a visual thread between the two men. The skit is literally about a mannequin being removed from office, the *cha* in *chabviswa* refers to an object and not a human being. Two shopworkers are "innocently" discussing a change in mannequin and merchandise (see Fig. 16-17). The mannequin just happens to be spectacled, in ZANU PF scarf, and suspiciously resembles the former president, Robert Mugabe. Although Mugabe was not a scarf wearer, the scarf on this mannequin is to suggest that the two men are from the same cloth.



Figure 16. Mugabe as scarfed mannequin, Magamba TV, YouTube



Figure 17. Mnangagwa as stuffed mannequin, Magamba TV, YouTube.

“You know this mannequin is Russian assembled,” one shopworker comments. This joke highlights the fact that Mugabe and Putin’s amicable relationship was no secret, and the relationship between the Kremlin and Zimbabwe’s military dictatorship has continued beyond Mugabe’s death. As millions of Zimbabweans protested against the government doubling the price of petrol in 2019 during #ZimbabweShutDown, which resulted in an internet shutdown, Mnangagwa continued his state visit to Moscow to gain support and foreign investments. The mannequin that replaces the bespectacled one is not too different: it has the same scarf, but it is much older looking, more rotund, and is wheeled in holding a cartoonish devil’s pitchfork.

Finally, in the episode “The Real Reason that Mnangagwa Delivered Lockdown Speech Late,” footage of Mnangagwa himself seems like he is copying, point by point, South African President

Cyril Ramaphosa’s speech on Covid-19 to his nation (see Fig. 18). Magamba TV shows real clips, one after another, of how similar the speeches are, to make a point about Mnangagwa’s lack of originality. Unlike Mugabe, who, while vapid, was a master orator, jokes abide about Mnangagwa’s lack of charisma and know-how in the spotlight.

However, the comparison clips stop the moment Ramaphosa begins to talk about money and supporting those “most affected by the Coronavirus.” The scarfed satirist begins to grumble about not having enough funds to help the poor, and the “copying” stops when Mnangagwa has to say something that would actually help citizens solve their problems. Here, the mimicry is not limited to simply “copying;” it is also a vehicle to critique the government through humour.



Figure 18. Mnangagwa satirist watching Ramaphosa video, Magamba TV, YouTube

## **5. Conclusion: telling everyday stories outside the newsroom**

In addition to mimicking Mnangagwa, *Tsaona* tells stories about what daily interactions and experiences ensue away from the newsroom, and how power is critiqued by ordinary people. It frames ordinary people as legitimate storytellers of the state of the nation. Everyday life is defined by what is, on the surface, seemingly mundane: daily face-to-face interactions (e.g. conversations with neighbours), rituals (e.g. courtship and romantic entanglements), and movements (e.g. trips to the grocery store or the bank). These activities that constitute everyday, “ordinary” life often, under a military dictatorship, become extraordinary to the point of absurdity, and that element of absurdity is highlighted in the stories acted out by *Tsaona* satirists.

What connects *Tsaona to The Week and Zambezi news* as satire journalism is the way the imagined scenarios, mimicking reality on the ground, also closely follow and re-enact the daily news covered by international and local news (sometimes the videos are released down to the date or the week the news breaks), but with a fresh and humorous take. The temporal nature of the news is invoked here in short and quick videos, so fast that they are timed like breaking news for online circulation. The videos then provide a remediation and unpacking of the news, visualising what is missing from local and mainstream coverage. In this way, all three shows not only mimic the news

for the sake of parodying it, they also provide the news, so that “mimicry” here becomes a semantic contradiction.

The show *Tsaona* explores everyday scenarios as a response to crises and mismanagement by the government, the kind of critical response absent on state media. At the same time, because of the censorial political environment, vague “rumours” about president Mnangagwa flow through alongside plenty of dark jokes about the lack of electricity and other commodities. What crises are happening, who is to blame, and what is to be done are contentious. Representations of power, at first sight, seem vague and often ambiguous, and names are not named. Unlike examples in other contexts where those in power are openly lampooned without dire consequences (e.g. *The Onion* and *The Daily Show* in the United States), great care is taken on when certain figures are explicitly mentioned. Often, there are no sources quoted, imagined or otherwise, but visual cues are given throughout the performance. Unlike examples in more censored contexts (e.g. the Russian-language satirical website *The Panorama*), there is no explicit warning that the visual text is “not real news.” The ambiguity then leaves room for subversive readings of the performances for viewers in the know, while still providing cover for satirists. Mimicry, of particular everyday scenarios, and of particular people, becomes a useful performance tool to provide context clues with enough ambiguity that the situation can either be read as harmless entertainment or incisive parody.

While parody is associated with gross exaggeration (i.e. it is a representation of reality, but an inaccurate one in order to make the point), the kind of mimicry being exercised in these performances is not necessarily an exaggeration of the absurdity of the situation on the ground. It is, even as entertainment, a more accurate representation of “real life” than state news.

For example, the episode titled “Zim Dollar Bho Here” [Translation: Is the Zimbabwean dollar ok?] was uploaded on July 1, 2019 just as the news about the “end of dollarisation” circulated on mainstream news. On July 1, 2019, Thompson Reuters reported that Zimbabwe’s central bank was introducing an interim currency, the RTGS (ironically the “Real Time Gross Settlement” dollar) in order to slowly begin printing a Zimbabwean currency for circulation (see Fig. 19).



Figure 19. Food near money bowl, Magamba TV, YouTube

The move was to begin weaning off the use of US dollars, which had been in place for a decade to stabilise the economy (Moyo, 2019, n.p.). The video's caption reads: "The Zim Dollar made a very triumphant return into people's everyday lives last week and as expected it has already started causing major havoc! This is *very real footage* of one such transaction!". This is of course not real footage in the sense that the performance is by actors, but it certainly provides context and texture to the news unavailable in the Thompson Reuters article on how this may affect ordinary Zimbabweans on the ground. The first 11 seconds of the video are completely silent, but there is a foot and a large bowl of US dollars on the floor.

The scene quickly unfolds to show that this is a familiar scenario for many Zimbabweans that involves money and anxiety – the bride price negotiation. Around the bucket, four men, presumably the bride's father, brother, potential husband and a relative, begin to argue amongst themselves over what the bride is monetarily worth. In the middle of the argument, the men glance at their phones and within seconds, the bridegroom has crawled across the floor to grab the money. "This money is now illegal," he states cheekily, "it no longer works for legal transactions." The money is about to be worth much more on the black market. "This is a local transaction, you wouldn't want your child to marry someone who breaks the law, would you?" he posits. "Give him eco-cash," he gestures to his relative – eco-cash being the way one sends local currency from phone to phone.

"Keresenzia, talk to your husband," the father screams, as a flurry of panic overcomes the relative sitting near him. The father of the bride has no choice but to call on his daughter who is off-screen, as women are not to be heard in these negotiations, nor seen as active, vocal agents in the process. The name of the bride is long and unusual, even ridiculous, perhaps to further highlight both the absurdity of the situation and a stereotype, the tendency for Zimbabweans to choose unusual names for their children. As Zimbabwean Shona writer Ignatius Mabasa (2014) notes, naming in Shona culture is often long, needs unpacking, and is clever because it describes a certain situation and its context. Names may even come as rhetorical questions or commentary of the economic or socio-political situation in which one is born. When such naming practices and logics are "Anglicised," or conversely, when English names are "Shonarised," they may result in humorous mis-readings.

Keresenzia is likely a "Shonarisation" of some other English name like Clarenzia. At the same time, any number of speculative readings are possible depending on the audience and their own references, because of the affordances of humour and performance. A familiarity with Zimbabwean literature may offer a more speculative, darker reading. For example, Nyambi's (2016) analysis of Zimbabwean post-2000 short stories of crisis include Memory Chirere's 2001 short story "Keresenzia." The main character in the story, Keresenzia, tragically murders her own grandmother Matambudziko [Translation: problems] in the midst of squalor and hunger in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The point of this example is not about whether this is the "correct" reading, but whether the encoding and decoding process at least allows for other(ed) speculative readings for audiences. The end of dollarisation, in the scene and in real time, causes confusion and unravels the "order of things." There is panic in the city as this signals the second coming of further inflation and economic instability, and this skit is part of everyday responses to economic crises, what Nyaungwa (2021) calls "economic satire." Nyaungwa argues that "unlike legacy media, which use technical economic language, satire uses the language of the ordinary people coupled with visuals they relate to, in a bid to expose economic rot in Zimbabwe" (p. 137).

Further lamentations on economic upheaval and its inconvenient timing appear in the episode “Zimbabwe Marriage Bill Confusion Causing Havoc!” That video’s description reads: “With the recent amendments made to the marriage bill, there are a lot of people who have been left unsure as to what these changes mean. The confusion has even gone so far as to cause arguments all across the country. Even in bread queues!” The scene begins with at least ten women in line for something, and statements emerging from somewhere in the line give the viewers a sense of the uncertainty of the situation:

“I’m tired,”

“Is there even bread today?”

“Maybe it’s sugar,”

“These days we stand in line for anything,”

“Ukatoona vamwe vakamira unotojoina” [Translation: “when you see others waiting you just join in”].

These sentiments echo what Jones (2019) describes as the disorientation and confusion caused by “headless queues” between 2008 and 2009 when hyperinflation hit record highs in Zimbabwe and globally. The queue may signify widespread economic collapse, but it also offers a glance into mundane actions in everyday life to confront that collapse. It is a visual and embodied reference to temporality in daily life in Zimbabwe. Porter (2017) argues that, due to the risks and social taboos of openly discussing government mismanagement and economic shortages in the Soviet period, “the queue was a highly visible feature of everyday life that remained invisible in print” (p. 490). The reportage in mainstream media, especially print media, of Zimbabweans queuing in stores, outside the stores, and overnight at banks to retrieve cash does not fully capture the daily social interactions. The skits do not only normalise waiting in some ways, but also infuse the humorous scenarios that may ensue when people have to wait, comfort each other, or find other things to fight about to forget current crises.

What the crowd is waiting for in the video becomes clearer when a man comes out of the building where the people are queuing. He sticks a piece of paper onto the brick wall for all to see the price of bread for that day: *Chingwa \$7.50* [Translation: Bread \$7.50]. Here, the women complain but they stay on the line because they have no choice. A woman calls her married lover to ask for money as others listen in – the waiting space is where heated conversation about the confusion caused by Section 40 of the Marriage Bill ensues.

In 2019, the cabinet was forced to withdraw a clause in the Marriage Amendment Bill, which had initially been drafted to protect marriages not formally registered by the state. It caused controversy and received pushback from religious and conservative groups when the “civil partnerships” described in the bill would also possibly protect “small houses”— extra-marital partnerships and potentially a step towards eventual provisions for legalised same-sex partnerships, which are currently criminalised in Zimbabwe. No money is exchanged in this scene, as the waiting process itself becomes the story central to the joke. The queue is not just a marker of economic collapse; it is also a productive space for everyday political deliberation (see Fig. 20).



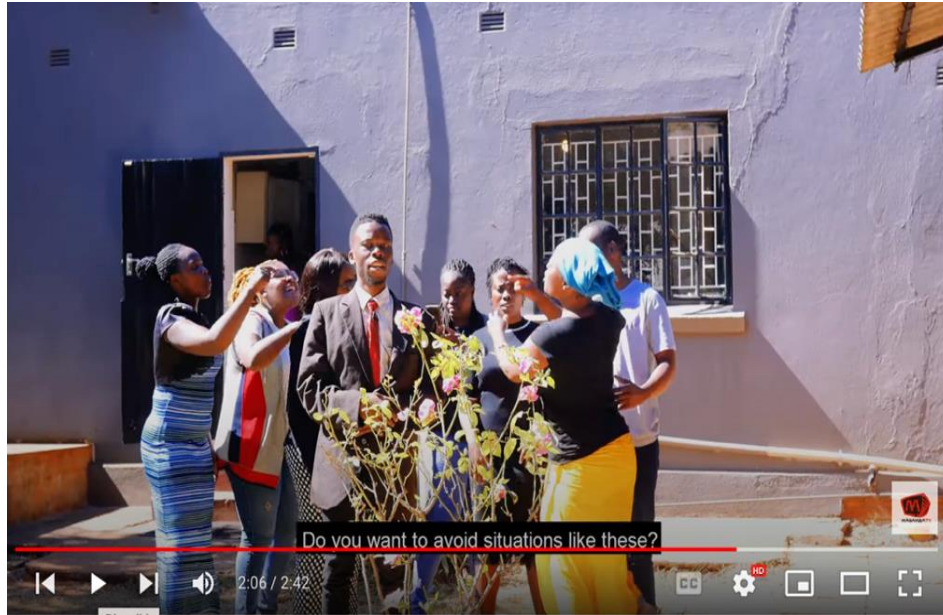


Figure 20. Women in queue, Magamba TV, YouTube

This cabinet mishap is explained by a suited narrator invisible to the rest of the characters, breaking the fourth wall, looking straight at the audience. “Do you need more information?” he inquires. “To avoid getting slapped? Or a shoe to the face? Because you don’t have all the information? To avoid *tsaona* [Translation: accidents], visit Open Parly.” Open Parly is an extension of Magamba TV – an initiative of “young citizen journalists” and digital activists that claims to be the “2<sup>nd</sup> most important Twitter handle to follow in Zimbabwe” (Open Parly, n.d.). It is unclear what the most important Twitter handle is, perhaps the Ministry of Information account or the one belonging to the president. It is better not to say for fear of “retribution,” dodge any criticism on judgments about where else one gets their news, or to simply make the joke.

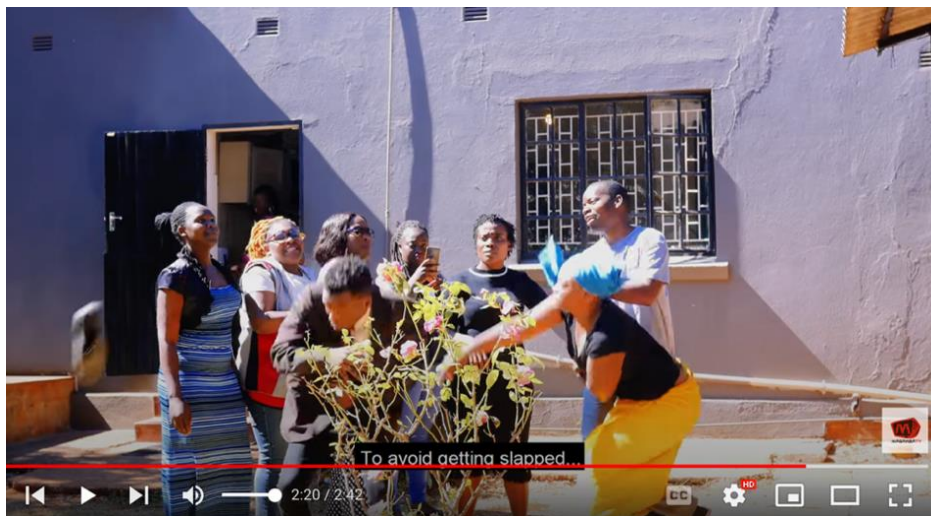


Figure 21. Narrator dodges a shoe, Magamba TV, YouTube

The narrator takes the opportunity here to both dodge a shoe thrown at him and also direct the audience to a space where they can learn further information about a policy (see Fig. 21). *Tsaona* is both separate from the journalistic platform it points to, but also connected to it, further entangling the boundaries between journalism, activism and comedy performance.

The art of swerving government censorship through mimicry as satire reveals paradoxes in the relationship between journalism and satire. Satire does in fact allow Magamba TV to slip through the cracks of legislation aimed at silencing journalists by, as demonstrated on *Zambezi TV*, acting like journalists while also being able to claim plausible deniability under the law. By mimicking (and mocking) journalism through exploring politically risky scenarios in daily life, Magamba TV performers become more legible to audiences as “truth-tellers” in a context where both the media and the state has failed its audience. Satire journalism as a genre allows for more mobility to tell stories in a military dictatorship. Satire through mimicry as close resemblance and as “mistaken identity” becomes a form of alternative journalism undertheorised in existing literature on satire and humour in non-western contexts. Visual mimicry is a strategic camouflage used by media practitioners at Magamba TV, and a generative framework through which to analyse satire in other censored socio-political contexts.

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