

FOREIGN MEDIA COVERAGE OF ZIMBABWE DEFENCE FORCES IN GOVERNANCE: THE CASE STUDY OF REMOVAL OF PRESIDENT MUGABE IN ZIMBABWE.

Kurwa Timothy¹ and Mbwirire John²

¹Faculty of Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies, Zimbabwe Open University, P.O.BOX MP 1119 MT Pleasant, Harare Zimbabwe,²Faculty Applied Social Science, Zimbabwe Open University, P.O.BOX MP 1119 MT Pleasant, Harare Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify and establish the frames employed by Al Jazeera and the BBC in the coverage of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) intervention in governance in Zimbabwe. The researcher was interested in unpacking all the meanings intended in the coverage of the ZDF intervention in governance. Framing theory informed the study. The study employed archival research, textual analysis augmented with critical discourse analysis and prescriptive thematic analysis for data presentation. The study found out that the global media coverage of the ZDF intervention perpetuated the use of the negative frames on Africa such as political instability and conflict, war and coup. Discourses of human rights, democracy and governance were used to vindicate the intervention. Al Jazeera and the BBC portrayed the coup as an intervention aimed at removing a dictator from power. The study concluded that the global media warmed up to the ZDF intervention in governance in Zimbabwe that was anti-Mugabe thus the military intervention was a necessary evil.

KEY TERMS

Media, Coverage, Military intervention, Governance and Politics

INTRODUCTION

Internationally military interventions are sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with the concurrence of the continental and regional bodies (Maeresera, 2012). According to the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) Section 213(1) only the president, who is the Commander in Chief of the Defence Forces has the mandate to deploy military forces for operations. Any other military operations outside the recognized structures is considered a coup and thus cannot be recognized by the regional and international structures. The international community detests coups in general and the 'global media' is vocal about it, worse still if coming from governments who are considered undemocratic and therefore do not share the same ideology with them. This study teases out the frames and discourses used by the global media in the coverage of the ZDF intervention in governance juxtaposing it with the United Nations Security Council dictates.

Themes such as political instability and coups; endemic violence, conflict and civil war; hunger, famine and starvation; dark continent; disease infested, helplessness, human rights abuse and lack of democracy characterize Africa in news reports by the 'global media'. News coverage of Africa is usually sensationalized as a result; audiences only get episodic information about Africa (Moeller 1999). This view is also shared by Moyo (2011) in a study of the CNN coverage of Zimbabwe in an election context, when he concluded that its news coverage of the election was episodic and lacked context. This implies that 'global media' often look for sensational and unusual news such as coups, failed states, bad governance and natural disasters (Zengeni 2010; Moyo; 2011).

'Global media' coverage of Africa has been a subject of scholarly debate for a long time with scholars, African journalists and politicians criticizing it for both its quality and quantity. Mugabe was the Commander in Chief of the ZDF and his regime was viewed as dictatorial and authoritarian by the 'global media'. The intervention was code named "*Operation Restore Legacy*." Operation Restore Legacy was intended to stabilise the worsening ruling party power struggles that were pushing the economy to the wall. As a result, Mugabe resigned the presidency after a nearly four-decade rule of the country thus ushering a new era in the Zimbabwean history of governance. The ZDF is a professional army established in 1980 through the integration of the ZANLA, ZIPRA military wings and the remnant Rhodesian forces. It is mandated to "protect Zimbabwe, its people, national security and interests, and its territorial integrity and to uphold the constitution" (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013; Part II Sections 211 & 212). The study covers the period 13 November 2017 to 24 November 2017, where a series of political events unfolded, inclusive of the start and end of Operation Restore Legacy

Drastic measures to intervene militarily in governance started from the 13th of November to the 24th November 2017. During this period, unfolding events were marked by the breaking of a standing tradition by the Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) through interfering directly in civil political affairs as a result of "instability in the ruling party". This was followed with Mugabe resigning the presidency, the inauguration of His Excellency, President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa as the Second Executive President and Commander-in-Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces since the country's independence in 1980, the appointment of a new Cabinet among other related events.

The primary role of the media is to educate inform and educate. In this instance, the local media, in particular the state media seemed to have been skeptical in reporting the events as they occurred. It is argued by (Pigou, 2017) that there was an effective news blackout from the state media, however, social media reports of army tanks heading towards the capital City of Harare attracted the attention of the 'global media'. Mixed views were being expressed, from relief and excitement that Mugabe's long reign may be finally over, to uncertainty that what follows could be even worse. *Al Jazeera* and *the BBC* reported the ZDF intervention in governance internationally thus providing perspectives through which the public made sense of the events through mediated news reports and analysis. As argued by Shemils, (2016:3) that "the media through mediating news provides frames or perspectives and discourses within which people make sense of events and experience through the contrast of inclusion and exclusion.

While, the ZDF's intervention generally seemed welcome by all and sundry, it was, however, not without controversy as the reportage was laden with contestations with regards to its legitimacy, status, and validity as a coup or not. The media is a crucial arena in which these contestations

are fought (Willems, 2005). For example, *Al Jazeera's* headlined the intervention as 'Zimbabwe's Army takes control but denies coup', (15 November 2017) while *the BBC* reported it as *Zimbabwean army takes on Mugabe – as it happened* and 'Zimbabwe media slow to cover military takeover' on the same date. The ZDF had justified it as an operation to pacify a deteriorating social, political and economic environment with Mugabe remaining the Commander-in-Chief but under house arrest. The Mugabe regime had presided over the country for 37 years, and had kept the army under control in terms of any operations outside the military sphere. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the representation of the ZDF intervention, the study will analyse the frames and discourses of the 'global media'.

The global media are institutions of elite power and dominance, with respect not only to the public at large, but also to other elite institutions (van Dijk 1993). The 'global media' is inherently political in its inclusion and exclusion of certain frames and discourses packaged as news (Ebo, 1992). As argued by (Ebo, 1992) the 'global media' often look for sensational and unusual news such as coups and natural disasters....., that when significant political events arise that relate to the international media's interest then coverage increases (p16) Thus what made the 'global media' increase coverage on Zimbabwe will be explored in order to establish the frames and the discourses presented as news.

News like other media products is subject to the internal and external forces which ultimately shape or determine what is eventually presented to the audience as authoritative and factual information. Thus news is therefore not value-free and neither is it a product of neutral parties, it is part of a more complex neo liberal capitalist machinery which seeks to reproduce and perpetuate the hegemony of white supremacy. The 'global media' reportage of the ZDF intervention in governance in Zimbabwe is not spared in this regard. Herman and McChesney (1997) contends that the 'global media' are the new missionaries of corporate capitalism who are deployed to generate a milieu of ideological meanings around events in a manner that questions their objectivity especially on the African continent and the developing world. The ideological power struggles are packaged as news in ways that appear naturalized as everyday common sense (Herman & McChesney, 1997). In news production, there is structural privileging of elite and institutional sources meaning that certain voices are heard more than others, while other voices are ignored and others are silenced (van Dijk 2007).

The 'global media' perpetuates negative pictures of the developing world so as to serve the needs and interests of the wealth nations that provides the revenues. This concurs with the argument by Esser and Stromback, (2014:1) that "the media is a considerable source of power and influence which shapes political processes and outcomes through selecting and framing issues in a way which reflects professional priorities and values that shape the news production". The ZDF's intervention in governance is explored with a view to establish the image portrayed in frames and discourses in this regard. Entman (2010) contends that the media select few aspects of a perceived reality and connect them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation. In this regard the study proposes a pro development coverage of African issues.

Since the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwe rarely made international news headlines unless on issues of negativity such as a failed state, bad governance among others. It was however, a result of the economic empowerment policies adopted by the Zimbabwean government such as the land redistribution programme and the indigenisation policy which stood as a threat to the whites' hegemony and interests (Mutsvairo, 2013). The West through the global media as a political tool,

vilified Mugabe and his acolytes - the military. Mugabe and the military were both placed under targeted sanctions for failure to uphold democracy, human rights abuse among other related issues. The negative reportage of events by the 'global media' is attributed to have contributed to the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe as argued by (Zengeni 2010). Those who own and control the 'global media' do not encourage free flow of news and analysis that are solely against the ends of their interests.

At the height of the Zimbabwe's bilateral disputes with Britain. The West in solidarity with Britain mobilised for the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe's government including vilification of Mugabe's government by the global media. However, tables turned and the 'global media' were banned from operating in the Zimbabwe with the exception of Al Jazeera. During the tenure of GNU foreign media including the CNN, BBC, Sky News CBC among others had their restrictions to operate in the country lifted. (Willems, 2005). The presence of the 'global media' in Zimbabwe has been as a result of the larger white population in the country (Willems, 2007). Thus the 'global media' then served the interest of white capitalists. While the British coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis was systematic and reported as a racial conflict between black and white. Mutsvairo (2013) highlights Mugabe's dislike for the white man, "The only white man you can trust is a dead white man" (p6). The dislike of the white man was a result of a combination of factors which includes, colonisation, failure by the British government to address the land compensation question and the sanctions. This study teases out the 'global media' coverage of the ZDF intervention in view of the change in power dynamics in governance as both Mugabe and ZDF were allies prior to the intervention.

Civil military relations have been a terrain of contestations in Zimbabwe especially after the defeat of the ZANU PF at the referendum in 2000 (Rupiya, 2011). The influence of the military over the political affairs of the country since 1980 resulted in the military attaining a defacto veto power over civilian affairs. The military were deployed in strategic government institutions thus getting involved in the economy and making their economic interests just as powerful as their fears for accountability for human rights abuses (Rupiya, 2011). While "it is unacceptable in a democracy to politicise the military as it is to militarise political and civilian affairs and institutions" (Rupiya 2011:2). The military leadership has been openly partisan over the ruling ZANU PF thus the Western governments placed Mugabe and the military under targeted sanctions for failure to uphold the rule of law, human rights abuses, among other democracy issues. My study seeks to examine how the 'global media' (*Al Jazeera* and *the BBC*) framed the Zimbabwe Defence Forces' (ZDF) intervention in governance in Zimbabwe in the context of change in power dynamics in governance.

OBJECTIVE

To identify the frames used by the *Al Jazeera* and *the BBC* in covering the ZDF's intervention in governance in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How did *Al Jazeera* and *the BBC* frame the ZDF intervention in governance in Zimbabwe?

METHODOLOGY

The study population is a total of 130 new stories from which 40 stories were from *Al Jazeera* and 90 stories were from *the BBC*. The stories were published between November 13 to November 24, 2017 the period when the ZDF announced its intention to intervene, the actual intervention through to the day Mugabe resigned the presidency, the inauguration of the next president among other series of political events. Purposive sampling was chosen as it fits the qualitative research. Purposive sampling entails hand picking the sample for the study. The study chose five articles per media organisation which focused on the military intervention in Zimbabwe during the period 13 November to 24 November 2017. *Al Jazeera* had 40 articles and *the BBC* had 90 articles during the period under review.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Zimbabwe Military in ZANU-PF Leadership Contest (Al Jazeera and BBC)

The study established that the global media coverage of the ZDF intervention in governance can be described in the language of power contestations and struggles. In their reportage of the ZDF intervention both *Al Jazeera* and *the BBC*, made use of the term “ZANU PF purge”. While both media houses acknowledged the existence of “succession battles within ZANU PF” the distinction or difference in view of the ruling party purge by both global media organisation is worth highlighting. The various frames, terms, discourses used by *Al Jazeera* and *the BBC* in explaining the ZANU PF purge in a bid to promote and construct a particular view or meaning of the ZDF intervention in governance in Zimbabwe is paramount at this stage.

In framing the Zimbabwe military in ZANU PF leadership contest, *Al Jazeera* in its stories titled “Zimbabwe army ready to step in to end ZANU PF purge” 13 November 2017; “Zimbabwe: ZANU Youth wing ‘Ready to die’ for Mugabe” 14 November 2017; ordinary Zimbabweans. The leadership contest was described using words phrases and metaphors such as a rare statement...., a ‘coup plotter’ and a ‘coward’...; protecting our revolution....; calls for stop to current purges targeting those with a liberation background.....; the army will not support someone who did not fight 1970s independence; instability causing anxiety; Mnangagwa a potential successor removed; Mnangagwa dismissal clears way for grace...; poisoning saga a cause of serious rift. The allies of Mugabe were described as ready to die for Mugabe if army threatens to step in ... army should not be allowed to choose the country’s leaders; army as the creature of the constitution and will not be allowed to subvert the constitution, treasonable conduct; the youth declared to defend the revolution and their leader....; opposition voiced on the need to defend civilian rule...; one opposition supporter heightened his support for the army on the intervention as they were fighting a common enemy...’ ordinary citizens feared the clashes between Mugabe loyalist and the army could turn bloody.

The BBC stories headlined “Zimbabwe military Chief Chiwenga in ZANU-PF purge warning” 13 November 2017 and “Mugabe allies hit out at Zimbabwe Army Chief”; 14 November 2017 and Zimbabwe Takeover seems like a coup, African Union says; 15 November 2017. In framing ‘the military in ZANU PF leadership contest, the media house used language such as “the rare intervention...; the military will not hesitate to step in...; power struggle over who might replace Mugabe; a snake which “must be hit on the head”...; the removal of people involved in the independence struggle is not tolerated...; protecting our revolution; the current treacherous

shenanigans...; squabbling between politicians; army chief to stay in barracks the military does not support of the entire defense forces...; will no fold hands for threats against a legitimately elected leader Chiwenga and Mnangagwa allies of the 1970s wars...; armoured vehicles from military barracks roaming the city streets....; Mnangagwa is highly regard within military circles”.

From the foregoing, the global media employed the conflict and political instability frame which portrayed ZANU PF as a party headed for self-implosion. As argued by *the BBC* the warning by the military chief, Chiwenga came as a result of the sacking of Mnangagwa, who was Mugabe's deputy in both government and party on allegations of showing unbridled ambition to take over the presidency from Mugabe. Worth noting is Grace Mugabe, Mnangagwa's nemesis who described him as a snake which “must be hit on the head” (*BBC, 13 November 2017*). Grace was also alleged to be the favourite in succeeding her husband by virtue of her position as wife to Mugabe and her position in the party as Women's League Secretary, a powerful politburo position. On contrast the generals wanted someone with a liberation struggle background to take over from Mugabe, hence were against the rise of Grace Mugabe in favour of Mnangagwa. On his sacking Mnangagwa rebuked Mugabe “not to take the party as a personal property for him and his wife to do as he please” (*BBC, 13 November 2017*).

A day before Mnangagwa's removal, Grace Mugabe labelled the vice president a ‘coup plotter’ and a ‘coward’ in a speech that shook ZANU PF. Mnangagwa was considered a naturally heir to the throne of ZANU PF and had the backing of the military (*Al Jazeera, 13 November 2017*). *Al Jazeera* attributed the purge to the deposing of those with a revolutionary background in favour of the younger generation known as G40. The powerful army generals wanted someone with a liberation war history to take over from Mugabe. In agreement with Rupiya, (2009:257; 2011) the military establishment pronounced repeatedly that presidential office “was a straight-jacket office whose incumbent” had to meet defined criteria. The *Al Jazeera's* coverage reflected political and conflict frame in the form of a leadership contest – a two horse race. *The BBC* in the articles highlighted Mnangagwa's war credentials in a bid portray him as the natural successor to the top post, mentioning his role during the liberation struggle, and in post-independence Zimbabwe especially related to the leadership of the Defence and intelligence portfolio particularly his role on the formation of the army in 1980. (*BBC, 15 November 2017*).

The BBC's articles revealed that the tone of the Army General's sounding of a warning about the purges reflects conflict over party matters while ignoring the bread and butter issues of the day, for instance in one of the article cited above he highlighted that the “squabbling” between politicians, had led to “no meaningful development in the country for the past five years” making references to cash shortages and rising commodity prices. (bbc.com/news/world-africa, 13 November 2017). In another article *the BBC* highlighted that the allies of Mugabe subverted Chiwenga's warning through warning him instead to stop meddling in politics and stay put in barracks. Further to that the army chief was asked to account for the alleged missing \$15 billion diamond revenue since the army was at one time in a partnership with the Chinese firm that was prospecting the rich Marange diamond fields. The ZANU PF youth leader claimed in the same article that he was ready to die defending Mugabe, “We will not sit and fold hands while threats are made against a legitimately elected government,” (*BBC, 14 November 2017*). The portrayal of issues by *the BBC* is indicative of an unaccountable government that is bend on self-enrichment, self-aggrandizement at the expense of its citizens thus perpetuating the discourses of Africa's lack of democracy.

While *Al Jazeera* assumes a well-informed position in its reportage “ZANU-PF youth wing 'ready to die' for Mugabe” (*Al Jazeera*, 14 November 2017). *Al Jazeera* contends that the youth league categorically stated that it will not allow the army to choose the country’s leaders. In his words at the press conference Chipanga the youth leader argues that “We will not fold our hands to allow a creature of the constitution to subvert the very constitution which establishes it....., defending the revolution and our leader and president is an ideal we live for and if need be it is a principle we are prepared to die for “. In essence the framing of *Al Jazeera* attributed the responsibility of the crisis to the army who were meddling in the political affairs of the country (*Al Jazeera*, 14 November 2017).

The conflict and political instability theme as mentioned by Fair, (1993) dogged the global media coverage of the ZDF intervention in governance. Africa is again portrayed as a place of conflict and political instability as compared to the global north or the west where democracy in their own terms is the order of the day. Democracy not defined from the western liberal perspective is not considered as democracy (Thussu, 2000:195). The ZDF intervention provided a window for perpetuation of the dominant paradigm in the reportage of African issues which is sensationalized and episodic. The coverage that does not traces the root of the problem to offer solutions and also does not give a full analysis but focuses on scandalizing the issues.

FINDINGS

This study revealed that media coverage in Zimbabwe focused on representation of the Zimbabwean issues in the context where the military was part of the status quo on governance matters. This showed that Mugabe and the army were allies. The uniqueness of this study is that it was done in the context of remarkable power dynamics, the army that used to support Mugabe now demanded that he leaves office. In addition, the ZDF showed a rare solidarity with the people.

The study also found out that the global media coverage of the ZDF intervention perpetuated the use of the negative frames on Africa such as political instability and conflict, war and coup. Discourses of human rights, democracy and bad governance also found space in the coverage of the ZDF intervention in governance by the global media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommended that an understanding of the role of ZDF In governance can only be understood from a ZANU PF viewpoint. At face value, variables surrounding bad governance, democracy and human rights could then be considered.

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