

## Chapter 6

# Political Cartoons in a Model African State: A Case Study of Botswana Newspapers

**Eno Akpabio**

*University of Namibia, Namibia*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Cartoonists' stock-in-trade has been to lampoon the excesses and moral foibles of political power holders. Cartoonists have been most unkind to misrule, abuse of power, and authoritarianism. The overarching aim of this study was to find out if cartoonists would be gentle and kind to Botswana political figures seeing that they preside over a state which had been held up as beacon of hope and a model of good governance. Cartoonists employed Eko's transilience to animalize African leaders for satirical purposes deterritorialization to remove them from familiar territories for ethical criticisms. This chapter examines the themes and direction of the cartoons, the study's findings indicate that Botswana newspaper cartoonists largely engage in deterritorialization more than transilience. However, the global trend of irreverence and negative portrayal of politicians persists.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cartoons are drawings that draw public attention to the object or subject of interest. Politicians are popular caricatures in newspapers and magazines for their lapses or personalities. These caricatures are the imaginations of their creators and may not reflect public opinion. However, cartoons pass across their pungent messages as satires or humour. The exaggerated drawings of the caricature attract laughter on

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4820-2.ch006

their own. Some scholars like Baylen (1996) and Preston (2006) note that being the subject matter of cartoons is a clear indication of one's political relevance.

Researchers have observed cartoonists' penchant for satirizing the abuse of power, misrule, and immoral behaviour. Tunc (2002, p. 48) notes that "the humour and hidden meanings embedded in political cartoons have largely undermined and challenged oppressive or despotic authority." The interest in caricatures of political power holders led Baker (2007, pp.19-20) to assert that the linkage between "political cartoons and the prime ministers' office both became established in the 1720s. An example was Robert Walpole (Prime Minister of England from 1721 to 1742), who was a continuous target of cartoonists because he abused power (Baker, 2007). In the lead up to the first Gulf war, American newspaper cartoons portrayed Saddam Hussein in various roles such as an aggressor; a criminal; a greedy man who tortures; a beast, and a worthy opponent (Connors, 1998). Traditional newspapers have also not spared American President Donald Trump. A Paul Noth cartoon in the *New Yorker* presents him as unreasonable and controversial (Cilliza, 2015). In England, Steve Bell's cartoons revolved around arrogant and corrupt leaders who exploited the masses and lacked vision (Plumb, 2004).

Cartoons have been used to expose the excesses of African political power holders. Moreover, cartoonists see their roles as more didactic in changing perceptions than reflecting their attitudes (Edwards, 2013). African politicians have appeared in political cartoons. Eko (2007) reports that some authoritarian African leaders have been parodied as inhuman or as animals by four newspapers from four countries: Kenya, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Cameroun. However, what seems absent from the literature on cartoons is how good leaders are portrayed. Festus Mogae was a politician and the president of Botswana between 1998 and 2008. He won the Mo Ibrahim prize for outstanding leadership. He was also awarded the Grand Cross of the Légion d'honneur by French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, for making Botswana a model of democracy and good governance (Botswana Handbook, 1999; Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2014). The cartoons which constitute the focus of the present study were published during his administration. Since the country he presided over has been dubbed a model of good governance in Africa, this paper wants to find out if Botswana newspaper cartoonists were critical, irreverent, or benevolent in their portrayal of this leader and other politicians of his time.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Some African leaders are poorly portrayed in the news media. But Botswana has been getting international accolades as a model country. This study seeks to determine

how Botswana print media cartoonists have painted Batswana politicians and people in government. Specifically, the following research questions are raised:

1. How did cartoons in Batswana newspapers portray politicians based on the indices of transcience and deterritorialization?
2. What is the dominant slant of political cartoons in Batswana's newspapers?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Press and Governance in Africa**

Botswana is a shining example (Hope, 1999) in a continent governed mostly by predatory, authoritarian, and sit-tight political leaders who are more prosperous than their countries through mindless looting of the public treasury. Their misrules have had dire consequences on Africa and Africans (Akpabio, 2004; Eko, 2007; Olukotun, 2004; Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2005; Uche, 1999) and spawned trenchant criticisms from scholars and commentators. Some African leaders have been charged with criminal neglect and abandonment (Uche, 1999); lacking in democratic culture (Imobighe, 1999); pursuing "paths to autocratic power through manipulation of elections, constitutions, proscription of opposition groups or co-optation of members of the opposition" (Alagoa, 1999, p. 276). Such leaders are ruthless and abuse human rights (Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2005). Such political leaders have been described in such unflattering terms as Frankenstein's Monsters, demigods (Phiri, 2001), and Draculas (Akpabio, 2004). Eko (2007, p. 221) further describes these leaders as military dictators, uniformed buzzards, presidents for life, and the nation's fathers.

When the African press tries to hold political leaders accountable, they are subjected to repression (Karikari, 2007), more significant than what they faced when the colonialists held sway (Faringer, 1991). Government-media relations across the continent can be described as ambivalent: at times, friendly or adversarial. In Malawi, the media that were vocal during the fight for independence fell silent and toed the government's line when self-rule was achieved (Lwanda, 2009). The government was to ban 840 publications using the 1968 Censorship Act and maintain a stranglehold on the electronic media. In Nigeria, the resilient press was able to outlast the repressive military regimes. Sankore (2007) chronicles the case of *TheNews/Tempo* magazines. Three of *The News's* founding editors were imprisoned in the first month of the publication hitting the newsstands. They were in prison at the same time with the radical musician, Fela Anikulapo Kuti. They made him the magazine's exclusive cover story. After just four months, the military banned the publication and sealed off its premises. Undaunted, the magazine was repackaged as

*Tempo* and was soon back on the newsstands. The military seized the first print run of 50,000 copies, but a reprint was issued. When the military government got tired of chasing after the elusive publications, it resorted to printing fake editions. After some initial confusion, the public was able to identify the fakes (Sankore, 2007). For its crackdown on the press, the military faced severe attacks from the Nigerian media (Akpabio, 2004). In Cameroun, Nyemb Ntoogue (Popoli) - editorial cartoonist of *Le Messager Popoli* - fled to Gabon. Armed intruders left him a message that he would be killed if he did not stop irreverent cartoons on President Paul Biya and his wife. (Eko, 2007).

## **Political Cartoons**

Political cartoons as satirical comments came into general use in the nineteenth century (Baylen, 1996). They have been located within the sub-category of political humour and satire. But Diamond (2002) disagrees. He labels them as sub-political symbols that are sometimes neither funny nor satirical. Like other symbolic constructs, political cartoons can undermine, subvert or support the powers that be. Some scholars like Baumgartner (2008) see cartoons as unflattering to political leaders and institutions because they dent their public images. Cartoons have a high readership, mobilize and influence public opinion (Long, Bunch & Llyod, 2009). But cartoons can also be used to positive ends. For instance, political cartoons in Israel were “highly productive in crystallizing the concept of statehood and citizenship with the steady appearance of politically relevant characters and content” (Katz, 2013, p. 2).

A cartoonist’s job is described in the allegations contained in an attempted lawsuit by the former Philadelphia Mayor, Frank Rizzo, against a cartoonist with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as that of “inflicting emotional harm and acting with malicious intent” (Tunc, 2002, p. 47). Cartoonists paint particular images of politicians in readers’ minds, such as the toothbrush moustache, the forelock, and goose steps of Adolf Hitler (Seymour-Ure, 1997). Another example is the association of the succeeding generation of first Ministers of the Crown with defecation, urination, and fornication (Baylen, 1996). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, political cartoons highlighted political corruption and brought up critical angles in the face of suppression of dissent (Long, Bunch & Lloyd, 2009)

Political cartoons are the first rough draft of history, providing evidence of what people looked like at the time and the cartoonist’s unfavourable views (Seymour-Ure, 1997). These cartoons share a fundamental bias with the society they critique, and they employ hyperboles, ad hominem attacks, and distortions to serve the cause of truth (Templin, 1999). Political cartoons also express opinions about the news and are easy to understand (Conners, 1998).

## **Parodying African Politicians**

Eko (2007) claims that the schemes of some authoritarian African leaders to hold on to power by using transilience and deterritorialization tactics provided cartoonists with the opportunities to lampoon them. Political cartoonists translated these political leaders' *animal names* into puns. For example, President Paul Biya of Cameroon is called Popaul (Poor Paul) the *Lion-Man*;

President Abdou Diouf of Senegal was called *Ndiol*. The *ndiol* is a giraffe whose gentle exterior hides the savagery within. President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire was called the *Predatory Leopard-Man*. President Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville is called *Sassounegger* (a play on the name of former California governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to emphasize the image of the *terminator*. The most vitriolic nickname was *Mullah Omar B*, given to President Omar Bongo of Gabon, a convert to Islam by *Le Gri international*. The name is a play on Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader who harboured Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan before the American invasion. That nickname deterritorialized Bongo and transformed him into an Islamic terrorist sympathizer. President Robert Mugabe was depicted as a *King Cobra* that is aggressive, dangerous, and hypocritical in criticizing the West while craving and revelling in their luxury goods (Hammett, 2010). Similarly, cartoonists in Madagascar decontextualized and recontextualized dominant politicians' inspired "imaginaries of community unity and solidarity "by exposing their absurdities and ambiguities" (Jackson, 2008, p. 217). Zapiro's cartoons of President Jacob Zuma of South Africa spoofed the image of a man who overcame difficult personal circumstances to reach the zenith of power. The cartoons show him as an embattled but contentious and divisive leader that rides roughshod over the justice system (Bal, Pitt, Berthon & DesAutels, 2009). In Tanzania, cartoonists tackled official corruption and elitist lifestyles copied from the West, amongst others (Levinson, 2003).

## **Methodology**

The study universe consists of the fourteen newspapers published in Botswana. However, four randomly selected newspapers – *Mmegi*, *Monitor*, *Botswana Guardian*, and *Midweek Sun* – were picked. The cartoons under study spanned eight years (2000-2007). The study method is content analysis. This method involves looking at what is already published, for example, texts. In this study, only the texts accompanying the drawings are examined.

## **The Units of Analysis**

There are three units of analysis:

1. The slant of the cartoons: The bias of the cartoon can be positive, negative, or neutral to the politicians
2. Transilience: This shows if the cartoons show the politicians *animals* for satirical purposes and;
3. Deterritorialization: This shows if the politicians have moved from their familiar territories or locations to different locations so that that the cartoonists can criticize them.

The pilot study used 10% of the political cartoons. The intercoder reliability is 87%.

## Findings

There were 278 political cartoons over the eight-year period in the four newspapers. The breakdown is as follows:

*Midweek Sun* 7 (2.5%)  
*Monitor* 40 (14.4%)  
*Botswana Guardian* 62 (22.3%)  
*Mmegi* 169 (60.8%)  
278 (100%)

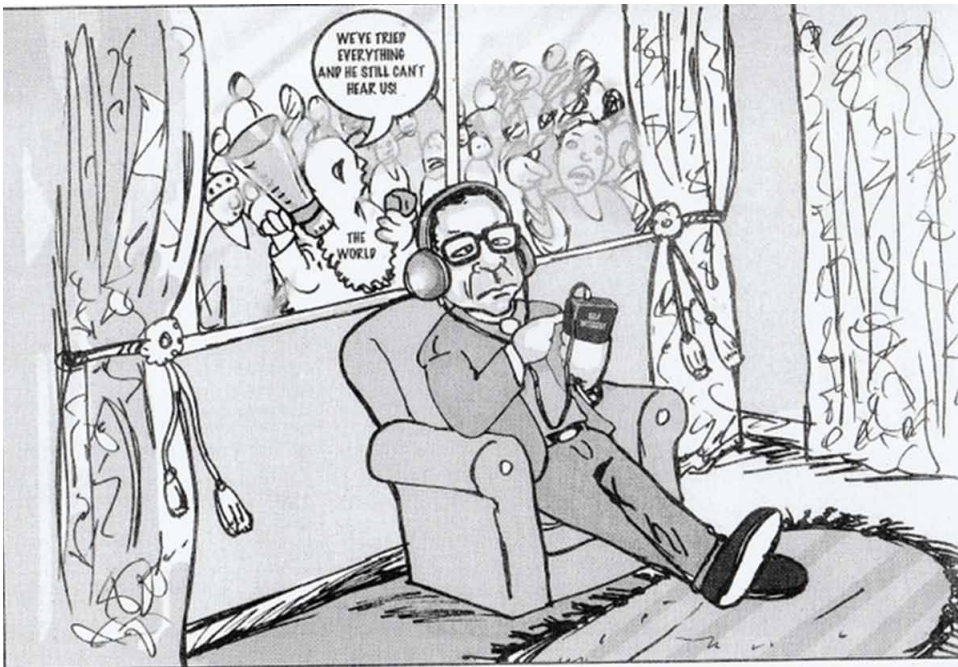
The objects of the cartoons were mostly local politicians (76.3%). One of the cartoons showed the late President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe with headphones effectively blocking his ears. This passes across the message that he is impervious to his people's cries and the global community.

In answering the first research question on how politicians are portrayed on transilience and deterritorialization indices, the data indicate that cartoonists leaned more toward deterritorialization than transilience. In other words, they removed the politicians from their familiar terrains. These politicians were not animalized for satirical purposes (see Figure 2). This suggests that the use of mascots and animal names is not widespread in Botswana. Nevertheless, this did not stop some cartoonists from portraying their leaders as animals depending on the issue at hand.

The predominant slant of the political cartoons was negative, with very minimal differences between favourable and neutral angles (see Figure 3). This means that the cartoonists were most critical of the politicians and brought them to the public courts through their pages. The slant of political cartoons published in the newspapers is in line with the path the craft has always followed: being critical of those in power and irreverent in how they are portrayed. Even though the politicians may claim that they are doing good jobs in Botswana, the cartoonists disagreed.

**Political Cartoons in a Model African State**

*Figure 1. We've tried everything and he still can't hear us*



*Figure 2. Portrayal of Politicians in Batswana Newspapers*

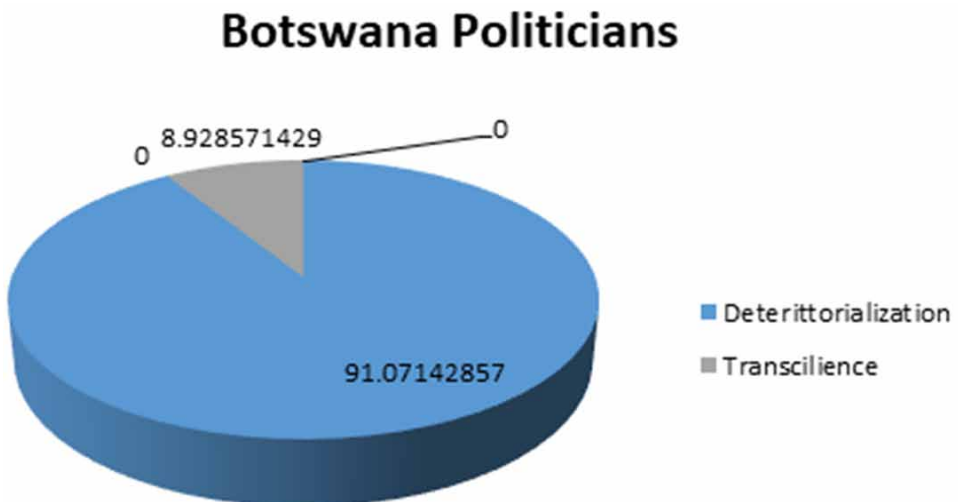
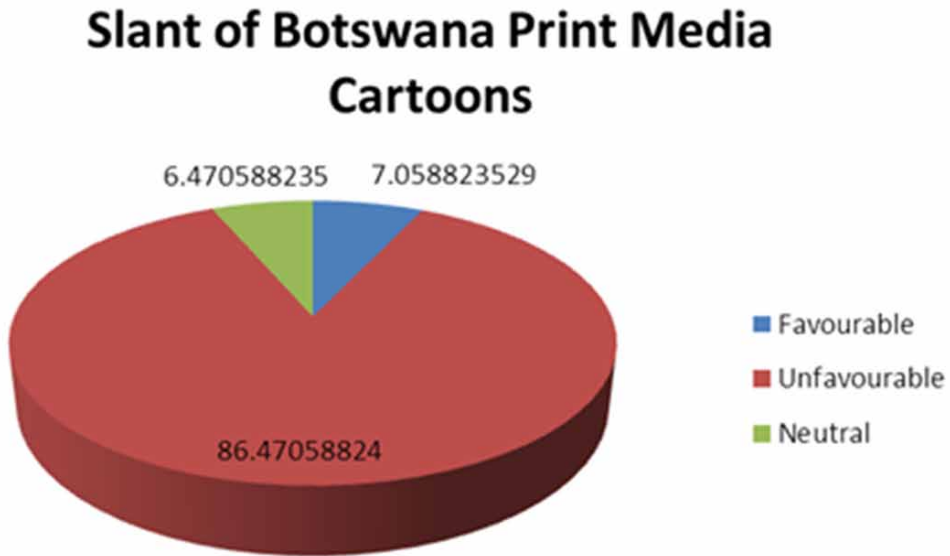


Figure 3. Slant of Political Cartoons



In terms of deterritorialization, the person with Gaborone City Council (GCC) inscribed on his suit’s back is not as calm as expected because he occupied an exalted office. Instead, he is hiding behind a podium in a packed auditorium, desperately seeking tips on how to handle the Daisy Loo saga (see Figure 4). The tale involved four GCC employees who tried to defraud the Council of P24 million through a bush clearing contract awarded to Daisy Loo. In a similar vein, President Festus Mogae is removed from his plush presidential office and shown as a diaper-wearing and a crying baby in a cartoon published by *Mmegi*. The Parliament assures that his nominee for vice president would be approved. The Parliament is the dotting mother that pats him on the back, consoles, and assures him: “Alright! Alright! Ian will be your vice president” (*Mmegi*, November 10, 2004, p.6).

Similarly, Robert Masitara, a wealthy businessman who was the candidate of the ruling BDP in the Gaborone West Constituency election, is out of sorts as he tries to figure out his next move in winning public trust. As at that time, he was facing a charge of rape. The then Principal Magistrate, Barnabas Nyamadzabo, said that “the state had satisfactorily identified the three requirements that constitute rape: existence of samples of evidence, identity of culprit, and lack of consent.” (Piet, 2007, par. 5)

Figure 4. GCC



Figure 5. Masitara and public trust



The intrigues and fighting among politicians in opposition parties also surfaced in the cartoons. The ruling party (BDP) is portrayed as clapping and urging them to continue fighting. The more they fight, the weaker they become, and the stronger the ruling party appears to become.

Botswana National Front, the main opposition party, is left out in the cold and rain as the opposition unity talks go on.

Another instance of deterritorialization is when *Mr Crime* shows up during the country's 41<sup>st</sup> Independence Celebration. He then proceeds to take a chunk of the independence cake! This cartoon tells the readers that crime has taken a prominent position in the country, and the politicians just realized this.

Figure 6. Opposition politicians fighting

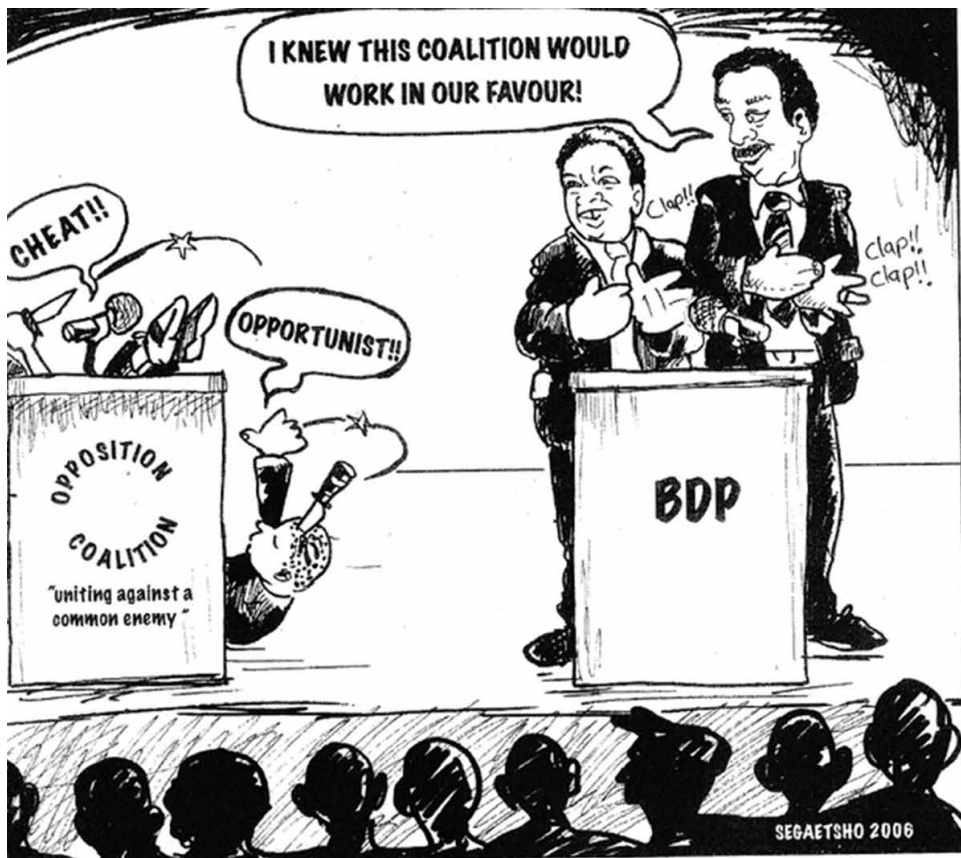
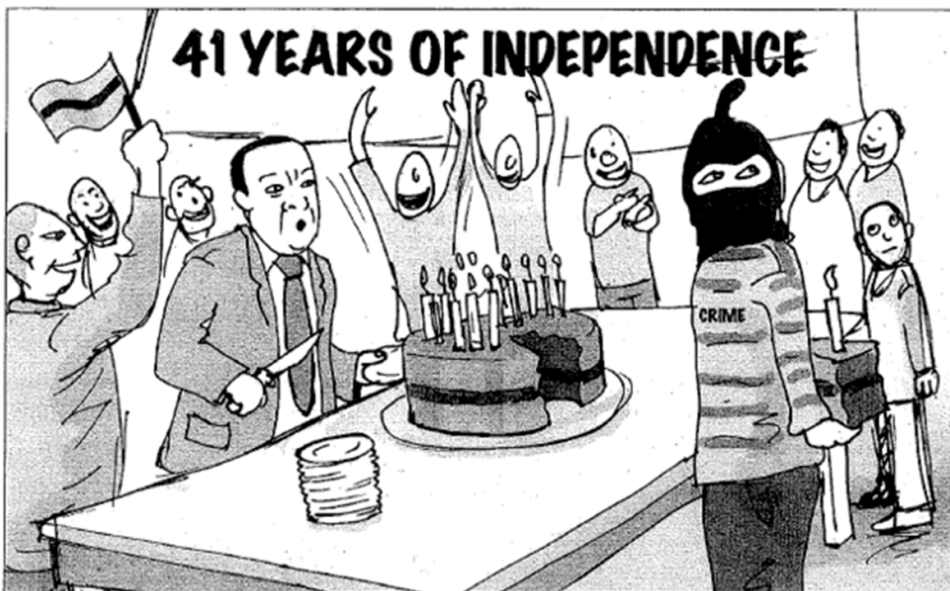


Figure 7. Opposition unity talks



Figure 8. 41 years of Independence



In terms of transilience, we see the former president portrayed as a goose who is laying the election-date egg while the public and opposition parties eagerly look on. An MP is shown as a sacrificial lamb who is being courted by the ruling party's MPs. In contrast, his party's Disciplinary Committee is portrayed as a bully who wants him back with a warning: 'You can stop patting "that pet." Tomorrow we are having it for lunch.' The main opposition party, Botswana National Front's leadership team, is portrayed as turtles marching to the grave while imagining they are on the right track.

Two evenly-matched crocodiles, apparently referring to two political heavyweights, Kgosikwena and Kwelagobe, fight it out in another cartoon. The cartoon draws public attention to the in-house fights that have come to characterize politics. Daniel Kwelagobe is said to have fallen out with Ian Khama, the second crocodile. Both are prominent members of the ruling party. The latter was bent on humiliating the first because he is intolerant of any opposition to his views and leadership.

## **Discussion**

It is also clear from this study's findings that Batswana cartoonists are like their counterparts in other climes. Batswana cartoonists live up to the expectation of inflicting emotional harm and acting with malicious intent (Tunc, 2002, p. 47). A female politician's portrayal as a castrated and bleeding bull by *Mmegi* newspaper in 2007 is a relevant example. This incensed women groups who felt that such a description would discourage female politicians from running for public offices (Akpabio, 2008).

Batswana cartoonists focus on the foibles and moral weaknesses of their politicians. Their ambitions, desire for high positions, and the struggle for supremacy are clear from the cartoons under study. The cartoonists also did not ignore their opportunistic tendencies and neglected their constituencies until it is time to renew their mandates in elections.

That the local politicians have not misruled the country or taken it down the path of destruction did not seem to cut any ice with the cartoonists. This is perhaps best explained by Michael Cummings' insightful comments to the effect that "Without Prime Ministers we'd all be redundant" (Baker 2007, p. 20). In other words, without politicians to ridicule, cartoonists everywhere will be out of jobs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The cartoons published in Batswana newspapers painted the politicians as they liked. Most of the politicians were not animalized by being called the names of animals.

## ***Political Cartoons in a Model African State***

But the cartoons deterritorialized the politicians. These cartoons were not favourable to the politicians as they showed the politicians in poor light.

## **FURTHER RESEARCH**

Other scholars may thus wish to

- Explore cartoons published in Botswana newspapers after the government of Festus Mogae left to the present day
- Compare Botswana cartoons with these of other African countries from a more theoretical lens
- Find out if there are more positive portrayals of politicians in government-owned against privately-owned newspapers' caricatures.
- Find out if political cartoons exert any influence on the political processes

## **REFERENCES**

Akpabio, E. (2004). Media image of the Nigerian military: An analysis of *Newswatch*, *Tell* and *The News* Magazines. In L. Olurode & R. Anifowose (Eds.), *Democratization and the military in Nigeria*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Akpabio, E. (2008). The Kathleen Letshabo cartoon controversy: An online audit. *Gender and Media Diversity Journal*, 5, 45–50.

Alagoa, E. J. (1999). The military versus civil society in Africa: 1956-1996. In L. Uche (Ed.), *Mass communication, democracy and civil society in Africa: International perspectives*. Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO.

Baker, K. (2007). Great politicians rise above ridicule. *British Journalism Review*, 18(4), 19–26. doi:10.1177/0956474807086952

Bal, A.S., Pitt, C., Berthon, P., & DesAutels, P.C. (2009). Caricatures, cartoons, spoofs and satire: Political brands as butts. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 9, 229-237. doi: .334 doi:10.1002/pa

Baumgartner, J. C. (2008). Editorial cartoons 2.0: The effects of political satire on presidential candidates' evaluation. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 38(4), 735–758. doi:10.1111/j.1741-5705.2008.02675.x

Baylen, J. O. (1996). Three centuries of cartoon cruelty. *British Journalism Review*, 7(1), 74–76. doi:10.1177/095647480201300114

*Botswana Handbook*. (1999). Government of the Republic of Botswana.

Cilliza, C. (2015, September 22). Donald Trump's foreign policy, explained in 1 cartoon. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/22/donald-trumps-foreign-policy-explained-by-cartoon/?utm\\_term=.518aadadb6d1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/22/donald-trumps-foreign-policy-explained-by-cartoon/?utm_term=.518aadadb6d1)

Conners, J. L. (1998). Hussein as enemy: The Persian Gulf War in political cartoons. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 3(3), 96–114. doi:10.1177/1081180X98003003007

Diamond, M. (2002). No laughing matter: Post-September 11 political cartoons in Arab/Muslim newspapers. *Political Communication*, 19(2), 251–272. doi:10.1080/10584600252907470

Edwards, L. (2013). Drawing sexual violence in wartime China: Anti-Japanese propaganda cartoons. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 72(3), 563–586. doi:10.1017/S0021911813000521

Eko, L. (2007). It's a jungle out there: How four African newspaper cartoons dehumanized and 'deterritorialized' African political leaders in the post-cold war era. *The International Communication Gazette*, 69(3), 219–238. doi:10.1177/1748048507076577

Faringer, G. (1991). *Press freedom in Africa*. Praeger.

Gallup. (2007). *Stability, Good governance boost confidence in Botswana: Combating AIDS, unemployment, poverty are population's top development concerns*. Retrieved from <https://www.gallup.com/poll/28228/Stability-Good-Governance-Boost-Confidence-Botswana.aspx>

Hammett, D. (2010). Resistance, power and geopolitics in Zimbabwe. *Area*, 1–9.

Hope, K. R. (1999). Seeking development in Africa: The global coalition for Africa and the challenge of policy. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 8(2), 52–72.

doi:10.1177/0956474806064768

Imobighe, T. A. (1999). Democracy, media pluralism, wars and crises in Africa: Towards conflict resolution in an emergent civil society. In L. Uche (Ed.), *Mass communication, democracy and civil society in Africa: International perspectives*. Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO.

***Political Cartoons in a Model African State***

- Jackson, J. L. (2008). Building publics, shaping public opinion: Interanimating registers in Malagasy *Kabary* oratory and political cartooning. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 18(2), 214–235. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1395.2008.00020.x
- Karikari, K. (2007). African media since Ghana's independence. In E. Barratt & G. Berger (Eds.), *50 years of journalism since Ghana's independence*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Paarl Print.
- Katz, M. B. (2013). The De-politicization of Israeli political cartoons. *Israel Studies*, 18(1), 1–30. doi:10.2979/israelstudies.18.1.1
- Levinson, A. (2003). Imagining the metropolis, globalizing the nation: Dares Salaam and national cultures in Tanzanian cities. *City & Society*, 15(1), 9–30.
- Long, M., Bunch, R. L., & Lloyd, R. E. (2009). Measuring anti-Americanism in editorial cartoons. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(3), 652–673.
- Lwanda, J. (2009). Music advocacy, the media and the Malawi political public sphere, 1958–2007. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 1(1), 135–154.
- Mmegi. (2004, November 10). *Alright! Alright! Ian will be your vice president*. Academic Press.
- Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2014). *Botswana*. Retrieved from: <http://www.moibrahimfoundation.org/country/botswana>
- Olukotun, A. (2002). *State repression, crisis of democratization and media resistance in Nigeria*. College Press Limited.
- Phiri, J. B. (2001). Colonial legacy and the role of society in the creation and demise of autocracy in Zambia, 1964-1991. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 10(2), 224–244.
- Plumb, S. (2004). Politicians as superheroes: The subversion of political authority using a pop cultural icon in the cartoons of Steve Bell. *Media Culture & Society*, 26(3), 432–439.
- Preston, O. (2006). Cartoons ... at last a big draw. *British Journalism Review*, 17(1), 59–64.
- Sankore, R. (2007). Media resistance in Nigeria: The News and Tempo. In E. Barratt & G. Berger (Eds.), *50 years of journalism since Ghana's independence*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Paarl Print.
- Seymour-Ure, C. (1997). The afterlife of political cartoons. *British Journalism Review*, 8(1), 17–22.

Tanbulasi, R., & Kayuni, H. (2005). Can African feet divorce Western shoes? The case of “Ubuntu” and democratic good governance in Malawi. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(2), 147–161.

Templin, C. (1999). Hilary Clinton as threat to gender norms: Cartoons image of the first lady. *The Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 23(1), 20–36.

Tunç, A. (2002). Pushing the limits of tolerance: Functions of political cartoonists in the democratization process: The case of Turkey. *Gazette: The International Journal for Communication Studies*, 64(1), 47–62.

Uche, L. U. (1999). Communication and democratic empowerment in the development of rural Africa: Corruption and perverted priorities in the development agenda. In L. Uche (Ed.), *Mass communication, democracy and civil society in Africa: International perspectives*. Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO.