

## Chapter 6

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

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### **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

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