

Review of: "Animation and YouTube as Alternative and Counterhegemonic Digital Public Sphere in Zimbabwe"

Tavengwa Gwekwerere¹

¹ California State University, Los Angeles

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This article is, in my view, a ground-breaking contribution to scholarship on art, media and politics in post-2000 Zimbabwe. There could be some, but I'm not aware of Zimbabwean scholarship that deals with animation and politics and I think the authors broke new ground by just training their focus on animation. Beyond this article, I encourage the authors to continue to deploy animation as their primary focus in researching Zimbabwean politics, and of course to diversify into other art genres in order to create an ever-expansive array of possibilities of understanding Zimbabwean issues from the perspective of various art forms.

In terms of the article itself, I think it makes interesting and instructive reading on art, media and politics in post-2000 Zimbabwe. However, the authors can improve the article by being more specific with regards to:

1. **Periodization:** We do know the article focuses on animation and YouTube in Zimbabwe during the 'crisis period' as indicated in the Abstract. In the first sentence of the Introduction, the authors also refer to "the turn of the new millennium". This is all good as overall contextualization but 'crisis period' is an amorphous term especially for someone who may be encountering Zimbabwean issues for the first time. I think that while it is easier to think of Zimbabwe's crisis as chronic, there could also be a possibility of thinking of the same as episodic such that it becomes important at the level of conceptualization for the authors to be clear as to which period(s) of the 'crisis period' that they select their primary texts from. Alternatively, the authors could consider unpacking the term 'crisis period' and periodizing it appropriately giving the whys and hows of its emergence and development so that readers can be clear as to what exactly they will be dealing with.
2. **Title:** In the last paragraph of the Introduction, the authors indicate that the animation series aired prior to the 2013 general elections. They may want to consider adjusting the title in keeping with this, considering that focusing on the art form as an alternative and counterhegemonic digital sphere in Zimbabwe is too broad. In fact, "Alternative and Counterhegemonic Digital Public Sphere in Zimbabwe" is broad enough for the authors to write or co-edit a whole book.
3. **Related Media and Accompanying Scholarship:** The authors do well in situating animation and YouTube in the context of other social media platforms and the role they have played in filling the gap created by the fact that Zimbabwe operates one television station since the advent of independence in 1980. However, I think that the authors were needlessly frugal when it came to linking us to the scholars who have explored the place of social media platforms in the first paragraph of the Introduction. For each of these social media platforms, for instance, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram,

WhatsApp, the authors could cite at least 4 (or more scholars) – just the name and year of publication after each of the platforms is mentioned so that it's clear that the poverty of scholarship on animation and YouTube in the construction of counterhegemonic discourse on which the article is hinged is clear because as they list a couple of scholars on each of the other social media platforms and genres, they will be able to demonstrate how those other social media platforms have received more critical attention than the one that they are discussing.

4. Rationale: The authors justified this article partly on the fact that there is not much scholarship on animation, YouTube and the emergence of counterhegemonic discourse in Zimbabwe. I'd love for them to think again why the focus on animation and YouTube is important beyond the fact that there is a dearth of scholarship on them. It could be Animation as a form of art...what are its aspects that render it instructive in the study of counterhegemonic discourse in contemporary Zimbabwe. It could be YouTube...why YouTube...is it the viewership or other aspects of it? The authors may not include these considerations in the current article but it looks to me that they are on to something in this terrain and may want to continue researching in it so I think it's important for them to think through these questions and the possibilities they create for them as they endeavor to master this terrain. With specific regards to this article, I would still love to understand why the authors chose the Nyoka and Kunyepa animations. I acknowledge the authors' argument that "these texts have been deliberately selected, as they are amenable to an analysis of digital counterhegemonic propaganda" but this is an assertion that needs to be supported. What is it about these texts that makes them suitable for this article? Are they the only ones using animation to articulate alternative and/or counterhegemonic discourse in Zimbabwe? If they are not the only ones, what makes them stand apart to deserve critical attention ahead of the rest?

5. Textual Focus: The authors have it that the article uses seven episodes of Nyoka and Kunyepa to analyze animation as a purveyor of counterhegemonic propaganda and a form of digital counter public sphere. I'm not quite sure that I encountered 7 episodes of Nyoka and Kunyepa in the article. I would say they made use of 3 or 4 episodes. I may be wrong on this, but the authors can verify and adjust their assertions accordingly if they didn't use 7 episodes as per their assertion.

6. Overall Argument: In the Abstract, the authors assert that "While the Subaltern counter publics have used alternative digital public spaces to question the official consensus, they have instead emerged as undemocratic platforms promoting and perpetuating the same hate and binary narratives that it accuses the state of proliferating." Under Background and Synopsis, the authors further contend that "The paper demonstrates the implications of a binary counter public sphere that the animation ushers in" and that "On another level, the animation not only represents a discursive form of legitimating the MDC but a situation is created where preferential meanings about democracy, militarization of the state and election rigging can emerge." These assertions articulate the argument of the paper before the investigation has been carried out. I would encourage the authors to have these assertions in the Conclusion where they will be justified by the preceding analysis. The second problem with these views is that they are articulated in the article without adequate framing of the very idea of democracy whose muzzling by ZANU-PF is the reason for the emergence of the counter-hegemonic spaces and narratives. If the paper is going to categorize the counterhegemonic discourse as undemocratic and hateful, the authors need to enlighten the readers on their conception of democracy from the onset. Is being undemocratic a question of power to ensure repression or just a mindset or a persuasion? Which of these (or other) conceptions of democracy are

the authors deploying? Lastly, the authors can be more circumspect with their conclusions on counterhegemonic digital public sphere in Zimbabwe. While there is no denying that there is a host of problematics surrounding counterhegemonic discourses, equating the opposition party's counterhegemonic discourses with ZANU-PF's may be a problematic equivalence.