

Between citizen and vigilante journalism: *ZimDaily's* Fair Deal Campaign and the Zimbabwe crisis

ABSTRACT

New forms of online citizen journalism have refreshed political communication in Africa. New information technologies are providing readers with previously unavailable opportunities to comment and produce their own news and information that is able to influence political processes. However, all is not rosy about Africa's new citizen journalism. While it has produced reliable and quality information that African democracies require, it has also produced vigilante journalism - a vindictive and revengeful form of gathering and disseminating news and information. Vigilante journalism is similar to the necklacing that was common in South African in the 1980s. The article discusses how, at the height of the Zimbabwe crisis (2007-2008), the news website, *ZimDaily*, led a vigilante campaign to publicly name and have perceived relatives and children of Zimbabwean ruling party officials deported from 'Western' countries. The idea was to help resolve the political and economic crises in Zimbabwe. The editors refused to question the ethics and morality of the exercise. Thus, encouraged by the website's editors, Zimbabwean users of the website took the law in their own hands and published addresses, telephone numbers and other personal information about anyone thought to be related to those in government in Zimbabwe. This blurred the boundaries between citizen and vigilante journalism. The resultant vigilante journalism by groups seeking instant justice was in a way similar to the necklacing, even though this was in a virtual sense. It is clear that the emerging new media spaces in Africa function like double-edged swords able to either build or destroy democracy.

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INTRODUCTION

Journalism, the activity of timely reporting of events in the mass media, has for a long time been monopolised by institutions that employ qualified professional journalists, especially those trained at formal journalism schools. It is professional journalists who have so far led the process of gathering and reporting events in most societies. Journalism has however hitherto mainly relied on forms of mass media that have limited feedback. The advent of new technologies, especially Internet and mobile phones, has created new possibilities in the field, of expanding, undermining and enhancing existing journalism. Citizen journalism has emerged as a new form that allows more ordinary people “an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information” (Bowman & Willis, 2003:9). The citizen journalists are supposed to help produce reliable and quality information that a democracy requires. In theory, citizen journalism limits the need for gatekeepers and, therefore, empowers the powerless. However, as will be seen in this study, citizen journalism does not necessarily result in a fairer or open democratic communication. In fact depending on the context, it can result in ‘vigilante journalism’ – which I describe as a vindictive form of journalism driven by a mob-justice philosophy that is inimical to democracy. This is not to deny that journalism, especially in Africa has, from the beginning not existed sided by side with other potent forms of storytelling supported by the continent’s well-established oral cultures (Moyo, 2009).

This article is based on qualitative research of the opportunities and threats arising from increased participation by political groups in online citizen journalism. It is particularly focused on how Zimbabwean news readers/users, writing and reading stories on a site devoted to Zimbabwean issues, take the law into their own hands in their quest to achieve social justice in Zimbabwe. In so doing, they blur the boundaries between citizen journalism and ‘vigilante journalism’. The resultant vigilante journalism – a form of vendetta journalism by groups seeking instant justice - is meant to achieve some kind of ‘people justice’ and in this regard functions in the same way as the ‘necklacing’ that was commonly practised in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. Vigilante journalism involves online editors explicitly inviting readers/Internet users to openly participate in ‘naming and shaming’ or humiliating those thought to be responsible or related to perpetrators of injustice, in this case family, students and anyone thought to be connected to those guilty of abusing power in Zimbabwe. Both the outing and naming of officials, relatives and children was however imprecise. Similarly, when necklacing started in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa on 23 March 1985, it was an unmeasured response to an injustice felt after police in Uitenhage had shot and killed 21 people¹. The angry residents retaliated by placing burning tyres on the neck of a community councillor and his three sons who were believed to be police informers. The tyres were doused with fuel and set alight, condemning the victim to slow death by fire while, in most cases, the mob looked on, cheered and derived satisfaction from the

¹ “The burning of a body was a sign of contempt for the victim and his/her deeds and no act could convey a deeper sense of hatred and disrespect. It was also used to make an example of the victim and deter others from similar behaviour”, from ‘Necklacing’ at <http://www.studiogeorgette.com/images/necklacing.htm> (retrieved November 1, 2009).

victims' suffering. In the Uitenhage incident, every known home of an informer or policeman was attacked and burned, and the term 'necklacing' entered the South African vocabulary. Rumours and allegations were enough to get one 'necklaced' by mobs in a system that was designed to bypass the apartheid judicial system. Similarly, Zimbabweans, in using the Internet to name and shame, have been practising this virtual necklacing in an attempt to change the political situation in Zimbabwe. Through textual analysis, the current article discusses how a Zimbabwean news website launched a weblog, titled Fair Deal, in an attempt to make users of the website participate in naming and shaming children and relatives of Zimbabwe's rulers whom they accused of ruining the country. Allen (2003:7) points out that textual analysis is a way for researchers to make sense of how readers generate meanings even though "people living in different sense-making systems can literally see the world differently". Therefore, while it is true that the Internet has opened new possibilities for challenging power, it is argued in this paper that vigilante journalism on the Internet, as practised by Zimbabwean 'netizens' in 2007 and 2008, has also emerged as a double-edged sword that can both promote and undermine democracy.

1. THE INTERNET

The Internet reaches only a minute proportion of African urban dwellers and virtually none outside the elite of the larger cities (Njogu & Middleton, 2009). It is nevertheless increasingly being accepted that the Internet is opening up new possibilities that have allowed both citizens and journalists in Africa to engage creatively with mainstream politics (Jensen, 2000; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Spitulnik 2002). As with other parts of the world, despite the slow growth in the numbers of Internet users, "a rather small minority of these users has the capability to use the Internet in ways that are creative and that augment their ability to participate effectively in today's knowledge societies" (Mansell, 2004:179). This is linked to the point that what is most essential to understanding the technical, organisational and cultural characteristics of the Internet is the way other communication networks have converged on the Internet (Castells, 1996:351). Digital technology has enabled people to package multimedia messages, including sound, images, and data "without using control centres" (ibid). In Africa, this has especially been the case after 2000, since when there has been a relative increase in Internet media. The new and diverse types of media are allowing new voices and are exerting pressure on political processes in Africa (Tettey, 2009). The establishment of more media from below has encouraged ordinary Africans to begin to theorise in new ways about both new and old media. For example, the notion of 'victimhood', which often presents Africans as powerless victims of officialdom is now being reconsidered in the context that however powerful and repressive some African governments or global conditions are, "there is always room - sometimes through radical or alternate media - for initiative and agency to challenge domination, exploitation and the globalisation of poverty" (Nyamnjoh, 2005:204).

The above developments in Africa are reflective of broader debates about e-democracy, in which the Internet is celebrated as a medium that enables those subject to censorship to evade regimes of control. For example, De Sola Pool (1983:5) argues that "[f]reedom is fostered when the means of communication are dispersed, decentralized, and easily available, as are printing presses or microcomputers. Central control is more likely when the means of communication are

concentrated, monopolized, and scarce, as are great networks". The Internet has been described as making possible a new form of cyberdemocracy or as enabling a more inclusive public sphere (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Gimmler, 2001; Liberty, 1999; Papacharissi, 2002; Poster, 1997; Tsagarousianou et al., 1998). Others have discussed the way in which the Internet can threaten the power of authoritarian regimes (Kalathil & Boas, 2003; Kedzie, 1997).

However, such positive celebrations of the liberating potential of the Internet are not without problems. More sceptical observers have highlighted the way in which the Internet can also give voice to extremely reactionary perspectives - such as those of the extreme right and neo-Nazi white supremacists (Adams & Roscigno, 2005; Atton, 2006; Brophy et al., 1999; Roversi & Smith, 2008). There is "a considerable and growing body of evidence pointing to a substantial gap between the great expectations held out for the Internet and the present realities of people's experiences" (Livingstone, 2009:3-4). The perceived positive aspects of the Internet and the euphoria associated with it have "tended to marginalise debate on the ethical implications, particularly the ethical dilemmas and challenges which the Internet portends" (Chari, 2009:1). It is arguable whether the emerging new spaces for political communication on the Internet do indeed offer opportunities and threats to democracy.

In the context of Zimbabwe, Clayton Peel (2008) has proposed that Zimbabwean Internet forums constitute "a microcosm of Zimbabwean diversity which deconstructs the authoritarian nationalism that has been a signature of Mugabe's 28-year rule". Clapperton Mavhunga has similarly pointed out that by 2008 it was clear that Zimbabwe was already in its fifth year of cyber-guerrilla warfare in which online newspapers and Internet radios were using the Internet "to attack the Mugabe dictatorship" whereby, "Government and anti-Mugabe hackers had been trading long-range artillery fire for three decades" (Mavhunga, 2008:1).

However, Dumisani Moyo (2009:12) makes an important point about the performance of digital public spheres involving Africans. He argues that on the Internet:

The non-professional journalists are not accountable to anyone but themselves, and their 'journalism' is not guided or constrained by any ethical norms or principles but rather by gut feeling and commonsense. In a crisis situation such as the one obtaining in Zimbabwe after the 2008 election, citizen journalism could worsen things by spreading untruths and half truths which could lead to panic and disorder.

The introduction, by *ZimDaily.com* editors, of Fair Deal coincided with Australian, American and European 'targeted' travel and business restrictions that were placed on such top Zimbabwean government officials and business people as were seen to be undermining the rule of law in that country. In reality, the so-called smart sanctions also however led to widespread suffering in Zimbabwe and virtually placed the country under economic and political sanctions. This vigilante-/mob-justice journalism was in many ways a response to the narrowed democratic space in Zimbabwe, especially after the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change, a worker-backed and Western-allied political party, which from 1999 effectively began to challenge the dominance of Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU PF).

2. ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL THE INTERNET IN ZIMBABWE

The attacks on democracy recorded above were accompanied by overt government attempts to stop Zimbabweans from circulating what it perceived to be subversive emails that could incite the Zimbabwean public to oust President Mugabe from office (see a more comprehensive discussion in Mavhunga, 2008). In 2003, fourteen people were arrested for such an 'offense'. The stringent measures included drafting new regulations requiring all Internet service providers (ISPs) to censor and report all anti-Mugabe communications. Even though the Supreme Court described the measures as unconstitutional, this did not stop the Mugabe government from seeking to control the Internet by introducing other judicial and extra-judicial instruments. The Interception of Communications Bill, first introduced in 2000 as an amendment to the Postal and Telecommunications Act, was modified in February 2001 and re-tabled to legalise the presidential powers designed to authorise snooping on the Internet. This superseded an earlier Supreme Court decision outlawed the blocking of emails by "some ISPs like Telconet, Mango, MWeb and Zimbabwe Online" (Mavhunga, 2008). By September 2007, the country's ISPs and mobile phone providers had started installing surveillance equipment to comply with the snooping law. The main point here is that, after 2000, the Zimbabwe government was keen to "fight its enemies" online. However, such controls were not always effective because the targeted groups fought back. A good example is the 2005 hacking incident, whereby an unknown hacker gained unauthorised access to the Zimbabwe government website, www.gta.gov.zw. "The hacker found it ironic that the regime had coughed up public funds to install cyber-offensive weaponry, yet its databases were virtually defenseless against counter-attack" (Mavhunga, 2008:1). Similarly, on Saturday 10 May 2008, another hacker invaded a state-owned online newspaper and replaced all headlines with the word 'Gukurahundi' - the name of the military campaign that left 20,000 supposed supporters of Joshua Nkomo dead in Matabeleland. Clearly there is a history of Zimbabwean citizens fighting back even though their resources are nowhere near those used by the state. Moyo observes that in Zimbabwe, new technologies of communication can help restore a "critical element of citizenship, which is the ability to communicate and express oneself without political or formal institutional constraints" (2009:4). To some extent, this has indeed occurred. Yet, as discussed below, *ZimDaily's* forums involve pitfalls that show that the process is not as straightforward as it seems.

3. THE ZIMDAILY WEBSITE

From 2000 onwards, the growing Zimbabwean diaspora produced media to cater for their interests and to help lobby for political change in Zimbabwe. Prominent examples include former journalists of the state broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), who, in December 2001 set up a radio station, SW Radio Africa, which operates from a studio in North-West London and broadcasts on shortwave in Zimbabwe and also on the Internet. In February 2005, a weekly newspaper, *The Zimbabwean*, was established. It was initially produced and disseminated in the United Kingdom, but eventually it was also distributed in Zimbabwe and other neighbouring countries. Apart from these 'old' media, Zimbabweans increasingly began to profile themselves through a range of websites mostly set up by former journalists (Moyo, 2007). Examples include:

The Zimbabwe Situation (<http://www1.zimbabwesituation.com>), *ZimDaily* (<http://zimdaily.com>), *NewZimbabwe* (<http://www.newzimbabwe.com>), *ZWNews* (<http://www.zwnews.com/>) and *ZimOnline* (<http://www.zimonline.co.za>). These sites sought to keep Zimbabweans informed on developments back in their country. Most of these emerging media provided news, information, entertainment and advertisements, and offered discussion forums both on current affairs and the challenges that were part of living in a foreign country. They covered topics of relevance to Zimbabweans in the diaspora, e.g. legal issues regarding asylum applications, and the carried political activism aimed at exposing the injustices perpetrated by the Zimbabwean government. They also aimed to provide critical perspectives on the crisis to Zimbabweans 'back home' in the context of the increasing repression of private media and the monopolisation of public debate by government. These newly emergent media therefore aimed to connect 'the homeland' and 'the diaspora' in multiple and imaginative ways.

Like the other websites listed above, *ZimDaily* provides its readers with news and information about Zimbabwe. Leading Zimbabwean activists, politicians and journalists have contributed their own weekly columns on the website. Notable names include exiled businessman Mutumwa Mawere, young academics, intellectuals and prominent novelists, such as Chenjerai Hove. The *ZimDaily* website is similar to other Zimbabwean websites, especially *New Zimbabwe* (Mano & Willems, 2008 & 2010) in that it is supported by a large number of advertisements and banners on the front page targeting diasporic Zimbabweans, mainly those based in the United States, Canada and Britain. Money transfer companies, for instance advertise services to transfer money to Zimbabwe at rates more attractive than the official bank transfer systems. HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral medicines, groceries and fuel can be bought online for relatives in Zimbabwe. Phone companies advertise cheap calling rates to friends and relatives in Zimbabwe, while travel companies advertise affordable flights to Zimbabwe. As well as announcements of events featuring Zimbabwean musicians or DJs, there are notices of social gatherings in Luton - one of the English small towns with a large concentration of Zimbabweans. One of the main attractions at such meetings is 'braai' or 'gochi gochi', i.e. outdoor meat barbecue. The pictures on the website at times cover political, religious and social events that occur in the diaspora. Apart from news articles and advertisements, visitors are strongly encouraged to join 'the debate' on the discussion-forum section of the website and also to post comments on the news stories published on the site. Unlike the case with most other sites, readers are here not required to sign in. Discussions are mostly held in English and chiShona, or 'Shonglish', which refers to the mixture of chiShona and English that is common among Zimbabweans, and sometimes isiNdebele is also used. *ZimDaily* is linked to other online ventures (for instance, online newspapers and *Zimface*, a social networking site for Zimbabweans).

4. THE LAUNCH OF FAIR DEAL 1 AND 2

On 23 April 2007, five days after Zimbabwe celebrated 28 years of independence from Britain, the editor of *ZimDaily* set up a weblog asking the site's readers to "feel free to add any names" of children of ruling party officials who were "either studying or living" in Western countries. Under the heading, "Children of ZANU PF-Thugs in the Diaspora", the editor noted the irony of

Zimbabwe government officials sending their children to study abroad by reminding his readers that, “Robert Mugabe has continuously castigated the west (*sic*) as imperialists and has always been quoted implying that he does not want anything to do with the west and white people”. The *ZimDaily* editor further pointed out that if reality were anything to go by, “Mugabe and his crooks in government favour western (*sic*) standards of ‘everything’ compared to Zimbabwe, a country they have reduced to a basket case”. Robert Mugabe and his colleagues in ZANU PF reportedly had over 300 children studying in either US, UK and Australian universities and “they are fears (*sic*) that these kids are being funded by tax payers in Zimbabwe”. Other information included a summary of initiatives to recall all honorary titles and university degrees bestowed on Mugabe in the past, including the knighthood awarded by the British queen in 1994. The above marked the beginning of *ZimDaily*'s much-publicised and most controversial campaign called Fair Deal, which had been officially launched on 10 September 2007. On the back of the perceived success of the 2007 initiative, Fair Deal was relaunched on 15 July 2008, as “Operation Mwana We Nyoka I Nyoka, Umntwana We Nyoka yi Nyoka, A Baby Snake is a Snake” [Shona and Ndebele and then translated in English]. The use of three languages was obviously meant to maximise the impact and reach of the message. It was the website's way of applying “targeted political pressure” on the government of Robert Mugabe in the face of contested 2008 political elections in Zimbabwe. It is clear from the above that *ZimDaily* framed the topics in a way that was meant to produce certain responses from the newssite's readers. Robert Entman (1993:52) reminds us that to “frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.”² As will be seen below, on the one hand, *ZimDaily* editors often frame their stories to elicit responses that are disapproving of Robert Mugabe, the ruling party and members of his government in Zimbabwe; on the other, the overall import of their stories is supportive of the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and his Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

5. PRE-FAIR DEAL PART 1: FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Fair Deal began in April 2007 when *ZimDaily* published a story about Reason Wafawarova, an Australian-based Zimbabwean writer and alleged supporter of the Mugabe government. The title of the story was, “THAT “REASON WAFAWAROVA” STUDYING IN AUSTRALIA! Zimbabwe: Mugabe's ‘taliban’ chief studies in Australia (*sic*)” and it was published on the site at 12:01:00 on Wednesday, 11 April 2007.

The *ZimDaily* journalist who wrote the story claimed that efforts to get comments from Wafawarova were “fruitless”. The capital letters in the heading are characteristic of the way the *ZimDaily* frames their stories to draw the attention of readers. The use of the term ‘taliban’ is informed by frames used by US and its allies in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Wafawarova was described in the news story as the “chief architect of the controversial national youth service, which was

² Entman, R.M. (1993). Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43, (4), 51–58.

introduced four years ago by the [Zimbabwe] government to terrorize opposition activists". *ZimDaily* ensured that Wafawarova's reputation was therefore framed in terms of someone to be despised: a diseased political writer and a former official of the dictatorial government of Robert Mugabe. The *ZimDaily* story further linked his situation to the "growing calls recently by Zimbabweans that Australia must extend the sanctions to hit relatives of those directly benefiting from the crackdown in Zimbabwe". It was further claimed that at a demonstration outside the Zimbabwean Embassy in Canberra, protest organiser, Peter Murphy, told the gathering that, "it was time for the targeted sanctions on Zimbabwean officials to get even smarter" by also targeting the dozen or so children of top regime officials studying at Australian universities. At the end of the story, the news site invited comments, and subsequently received about 65 comments, mostly in favour of sanctions against Wafawarova and all the children of ZANU PF officials in Australia and other Western countries (especially, Canada, USA, Britain and Germany). However, others, although in the minority, voiced disapproval of the campaign. For instance, one contributor wrote:

Problem yemaZimbabweans ndeyekuti hamudi kunzwa vanhu vane maopinion akasiyana neenyu [Shona for: The Problem with Zimbabweans is that you do not tolerate different opinions], which explains why MDC has split up. As far as I am concerned, Reason writes his opinions in *The Herald*; others, including Jonathan Moyo, write to *The Independent* etc. The guy is free to write whatever he wants, from wherever he is. Any one who does not understand this simple fact is either mentally unstable or does not think, or both (Posted By Iqbal Sharif, Cambridge, UK: Apr 11 2007, 01:48 PM).

However, the above comment sparked a deluge of comments from readers who were supportive of *ZimDaily's* stance in the news story, with some demanding that Wafawarova be "tortured under his feet" so that he could experience what victims of political torture under Mugabe were going through in Zimbabwe. Such comments were partly influenced by *ZimDaily's* publication of a picture of the tortured feet of an MDC activist on their website on 10 April 2007:

Uyu anonzi Reason ngaagochwe gumbo kuti amboonawo kuipa kwazvo. Manheru husiku whemunhu hamunzwi zita racho. Regai arare achawana tambo muhuro akarara sezita rake. Reason ngaanodzidza pa UZ. Posted By Mutongigava , Harare, Zimbabwe: Apr 11 2007, 02:00 PM. Translation from Shona: This person called Reason should be burnt under his feet so that he can see how bad torture is. Manheru [a weekly columnist in *The Herald*] is ignorant just like his name [which means darkness]. Let him relax but he will soon find a cord around their neck while asleep. Reason should go and complete his studies at UZ (University of Zimbabwe): Posted By Mutongigava, Harare, Zimbabwe: Apr 11 2007, 02:00PM.

Mutongigava, whose pseudonym ironically means a 'fair judge', sarcastically suggested that Wafawarova should be deported to Zimbabwe so that he could continue his studies at the poorly resourced University of Zimbabwe. Wafawarova was also cited as a good example of how ZANU says one thing, while, in fact, doing another. More "necklacing" comments were written in "Shonglish" and called for Reason Wafawarova to be hunted down in Australia and that, if

found, his feet should be “barbequed”. The above clearly indicated that a number of Zimbabwean readers of the site, using pseudonyms, were prepared to support *ZimDaily’s* campaign.

6. FAIR DEAL PART 2: “SEND MUGABE’S CROOKS (SIC) KIDS BACK TO THEIR EVIL FATHERS”

The follow-up Fair Deal Campaign was officially launched on 17 September 2007 by *ZimDaily* when it published a story titled: FAIR DEAL PART TWO: CHILDREN OF ZANU-PF THUGS IN THE DIASPORA!!! Written by the editor, the story claimed to be buoyed by the “success” of Fair Deal Part 1:

ZimDaily this week takes the ‘Fair Deal’ campaign on ministers’ kids in the lands of the ‘Imperialists’ to a new level. Buoyed by the successes we have scored in Australia and the numerous enquiries we are receiving from the EU, UK, Canada, USA and Scotland we officially launch the ‘FAIR DEAL’ Campaign, under the banner “Send Mugabe’s crooks (sic) kids back to their evil fathers” (*ZimDaily* editor, 17 September 2007).

ZimDaily found it ironical that relatives and children of ruling party officials were sent to countries often described by Zimbabwe as ‘imperialists’. It also updated the readers on the “success of the previous campaign” given that “disenfranchised” Zimbabweans in the diaspora have limited options of tackling the regime. The editor reported that the Fair Deal Campaign in Australia had resulted in the deportation of eight children of top officials in the Zimbabwe government. The move left the Zimbabwe government, as he claimed, “rattled and shell shocked at the prospect of further deportations of their children from the diaspora”, adding that:

“If 8 deportations could cause the panic and pandemonium displayed by the government in arresting and charging MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and the reported urgency to resolve the Constitutional impasse in SADC mediated talks, imagine how much impact it would have if the estimated 300 Zanu-PF officials’ kids are all sent back” (*ZimDaily* editor, 17 September 2007).

Here there is a clear attempt to link developments in Zimbabwe with pressure from the website. Readers were further told that the campaign could only succeed with their support. The stated aim of the campaign was to collect primary data to be used by the host governments (especially USA, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) of the ZANU PF chiefs’ children. The editors ended by making an impassioned plea to the readers to furnish data on Mugabe’s children:

We appeal to anyone with information on these kids to either contact the editor, editor(at) zimdaily.com or post the details anonymously below. Western governments are eager to extend the sanctions to these kids. Our leaders should be accountable to us by knowing the extent of our power over them. HELP US TRACK ALL THE KIDS WHEREVER THEY ARE ENSCONSED (*ZimDaily* editor, 17 September 2007).

ZimDaily stated that power lay with it and its readers but for legal reasons had to deny ownership of all comments posted by its readers by indicating that they belonged to “whoever posted them”. Within 12 hours of publishing the editorial, the site generated 139 comments, mainly from readers who submitted names, institutions, (in certain cases) actual addresses and phone numbers thought to belong to all those related to top Zimbabwean ruling party officials. There were however others casting doubt on the names disclosed. For instance, a posting entitled “No Fairdeal”, posted from the UK, accused the readers of being MDC supporters who had run out of ideas. S/he reminded them that the Zimbabwean elections were due in March 2008 and that the supporters needed to have a more meaningful discussion to attract voters. “Tuvanhu tweMDC twukashaya point yekutaura twunongotukirira, nezvinonyadzisa mubepa rinoveregwa nevanhu vese”. Translation from Shona: “These MDC twats have run out of ideas and now they are resorting to abusing others with obscenities on this news site which is read by everybody” (Posted by Tembo, Leicester UK: Sep 17 2007, 03:36 AM). Names of journalists who used to work for national media but were now in the diaspora were also submitted to the website by readers demanding that they, too, be deported. On the whole, the posting attracted more responses than those for Part 1.

7. FAIR DEAL PART 3: THE RELAUNCH

Encouraged by the ‘success’ of the first campaign and wanting to put more pressure on the ruling party in Zimbabwe, in 2008 *ZimDaily* decided to relaunch the initiative. The moment came on 15 July 2008, with a story by Tamuka Ngwenya being headlined “FAIR DEAL: The Re-Launch”. It stated that Zimbabwe continued to be high on the agenda at “the UN, EU, AU and SADC” and that “the time for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to play their part in applying pressure to the thugs masquerading as Heads of State in Zimbabwe is now”. It was also claimed that the UK was “taking our plight to the EU in the coming days and it is only when we are seen to be in the fore-front of helping find a solution can the battle against tyranny be won”. Some words from the previous campaigns were reproduced and the aim was to use familiar terminology (that had worked in the past) to attract both old and new readers to the campaign. The reporter also added new information that altogether framed the story in such a way that readers would again submit names in response to what looked like a call to duty of Zimbabweans who cared:

We appeal to anyone with information on these kids/family members to either contact the editor, editor(at)zimdaily.com or post the details anonymously below. Western governments are eager to extend the sanctions to these Kids/Family Members.

The addition of ‘family’ to ‘kids of Zanu PF officials’ meant the net was cast wider than before. The new campaign received 336 postings, mainly in support of *ZimDaily* and even with names of ZANU officials’ children in the diaspora. For example, Jongwe from South Africa wrote: “LETS TIGHTEN THE SCREWS AROUND ZANU PF: THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS, BUSINESS INTERESTS AND KING (MATIBILI HIMSELF). THESE POISONED HUMAN BEINGS.” Matibili is a nickname given to Robert Mugabe by those who allege that he is a Malawian. Others asked for the pages to be open for about a week so that many people could have a chance to send more names of Zanu PF murderers.

However, not all comments were approving of Fair Deal (Part 3). In a posting entitled 'Unfair Deal', the son of a former finance minister stated: "This is not a fair deal it is a very unfair deal I am a Zimbabwean former minister's son and i (*sic*) want to know what I should do. Can i choose parents can i force him to resign, from his former employment? how?" (Posted By K Chidzero, Usa: Jul 16 2008, 01:10 PM). Other forumites replied, urging him to change his 'ways' to show that he is a sincere person. The messages implicitly suggested that he join the MDC to show that he was not a supporter of Mugabe and his government. Two postings from the UK were critical of the Fair Deal Campaign. In a posting called '*ZimDaily* out of step', a UK-based writer calling him/herself Conway indicated that the main political parties were busy negotiating a temporary government and yet *ZimDaily* and its readers were going backwards. It was suggested that the website should instead focus on economic matters that would solve Zimbabwe's problems. It was also pointed out that children of the opposition leaders were in Australia getting education better than that of ordinary Zimbabwean children in state schools:

Stop being fooled by these guys when they gain votes by talking about hunger in Zim, its not for them. When Tsvangirai says "vana vedu havachadzidza nekuti maticha hatambire mari svinu" [Shona: Our children are not schooling because teachers are no longer earning a living salary] he is not talking about his kids. When will we get leaders who lead by example? Just stop this nonsense. GNU [Government of National Unity] is by the corner. Zimdaily knows that when GNU forms[,] your online paper will be useless. Stop using people to safeguard your agendas. Write articles that wiil (*sic*) build Zimbabwe not destroy. You are already out of step (Posted By Conway, Uk : Jul 17 2008, 01:50 AM).

The overall tone was meant to discourage those who were posting messages on the page and to ask readers to focus on economic recovery. Other responses were sent to correct the information supplied on the site. Conway's message made other readers bolder in their criticism of Fair Deal. Some accused *ZimDaily* of faking the results of the campaign and argued that no one had been deported ever since the campaign had started. The *ZimDaily* forum was clearly motivated by feelings of revenge and here the editors had stirred up feelings of hate that could result in the unnecessary murder of anyone perceived to be aligned to the ruling party in Zimbabwe.

8. CONCLUSION

The Fair Deal Campaign is a response to serious problems in the Zimbabwe public sphere. Migration and new technologies have enabled Zimbabweans to create a new space that gives all those connected a chance to debate relevant topics regardless of their location or status. The official media in Zimbabwe have, by comparison, been restricted, with readers lacking opportunities to interact with news producers. However, the behaviour of Zimbabweans on the *ZimDaily* website displayed tendencies of moving from citizen journalism to vigilante journalism. The 'necklacing' mentality was evident in how they sniffed out "enemies" to "kill" and "barbeque". There is so much blind fury and anger in the online discussions to the extent that it partly explains the political violence in Zimbabwe. The behaviour of Zimbabweans on *ZimDaily* can also be understood in terms of what Georgey Ayittey calls the difference between "the cheetah generation" and the

“hippo generation” in modern Africa. While the latter tends to blame everything on colonialism, as for the cheetah generation - Africa’s new hope - they “brook no nonsense about corruption, inefficiency, ineptitude, incompetence, or buffoonery. They understand and stress transparency, accountability, human rights, and good governance...they can analyse issues with remarkable clarity and objectivity” (2005:xviii-xx). How Fair Deal editors and journalists teamed up with the readers to exert pressure on the government in Zimbabwe during the crisis can be seen as one way in which the ‘cheetah generation’ in Zimbabwe is choosing to use its own power to bring about change in Zimbabwe.

The campaign had many problems, including the morality of publishing names without first checking the facts. Many, it turned out, were not related to the politicians in Zimbabwe. It was open to abuse by the readers. However, they chose to treat the Zimbabwe crisis as a war where morality was suspended. The cheetahs behave differently from many “African leaders, intellectuals, or elites, who ...see a Western imperialist in every African adversity” (Ayittey, 2005:xx). They are unlike the ‘hippo generation’, which is “intellectually astigmatised and stuck in their colonialist pedagogical patch”.

The exact extent to which the Fair Deal Campaign affected the political situation in Zimbabwe may never be known for sure. It does however give a clear indication that Internet is beginning to make its mark on Zimbabwean and African politics. Leslie (2006) notes: “Whenever there is a political crisis, it is likely to spur political communication on the Internet, but when circumstances are normal, exchanges of information with different objectives prevail.” Fair Deal is both a product and a response to the Zimbabwe crisis of 2000 to 2008. It is illustrative of how the Internet has the potential to empower ordinary Africans by providing them with other avenues along which to fight back. Yet it must be noted that the Internet can create a dangerous form of journalism during such moments of political crisis where vigilantism results in the virtual necklacing, humiliation and tarnishing of reputations by groups convinced that they are fighting for a good cause. The people’s court can make serious mistakes that can potentially violate other citizens’ rights. Further, these are times when the majority opinion is not always right.

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