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# Peripheral actors in Zimbabwe: The case of Magamba TV, Bus stop TV, Mai Titi and Madam boss

**Mungwari Teddy and Shupikai Kembo**

### Abstract

Drama and theatre have their origins in cultural settings of the past and changes of the present. Theatre has been part of the ritual and social life of people embracing the totality of their way of life, habits, attitudes and propensities. Though viewed as a form of entertainment, theatrical activities and performance are regarded as informal ways by which the quality of lives of people are enriched. Comedy skits can be attributed to the advent of social media platforms. Many new voices have created their own spaces on social media and building business around it. Effective satire can shake power and can speak truth to power, and in some countries, humour is one of the remaining avenues through which those things are possible. Satire and humour offer the last resort in many ways, and can become incredibly high stakes when the work ends up offending those in power. Comedy is an outlet to vent out frustrations and concerns against social, economic and political ills. The primary function of comedy is to induce laughter by amusing and entertaining the audience whilst portraying targeted institutions and persons as corrupt; ridiculing them through satirising, parodying and poking fun at their vices such as moral bankruptcy, human rights abuses, ill-treatment of house maids, dishonesty and cheating in relationships among others. In the Zimbabwean context, ordinary people or subalterns have resorted to comedy to raise awareness on the Socio-economic and political challenges that they face. This study explores the use of comedy and satire for both entertaining and ridiculing vices in society. The article analyses online video skits by Magamba TV, Bus Stop TV, Mai Titi and Madam Boss. This article will focus on purposively selected videos and skits.

**Keywords:** Social media, political satire, comedy, video skits. Humour, entertainment

### Introduction

In Zimbabwe, art and comedy take center stage in the country's political commentary. Despite facing threats of being arrested by law enforcing agents, comedians still attract and amuse people in towns and villages, saying serious issues in a lighter way. Subtle satire makes it possible for comedians to speak out against bad government policies by sometimes mimicking politicians known to be oppressing citizens. With comedy becoming popular, the government is sometimes brutal, insensitive, intolerant and callous with comic actors who constantly criticise the political regime. Satirical comedians' role is to ensure ordinary people have a voice – they amplify voices speaking the truth, that is, speaking truth to the power through satire. They challenge the government, institutions and other people using humour. Comedians fight for democracy and rule of law. Comedians are pro-democracy and pro-accountability activists using comedy as an alternative platform to convey messages on sensitive matters.

Restrictions on press freedom has given the comedians an opportunity to fill the gap. By comedy, the artists and the whole society are hitting back at the ruling elite. It is a way of socially isolating and laughing at the oppressors. So, society is essentially looking down upon them by creating all sorts of jokes and comic lines that lampoon the ruling elite. People resort to satire to express their frustrations and concerns in a way that makes it difficult for authorities to target them. It should be noted that Zimbabwe's Second Republic under President Mnangagwa is arguably more tolerant and accommodating to comedians unlike former Mugabe regime. For example, there are many comedians such as Victor Mpofu, known as Doctor Vickela, who is famed for mimicking President Mnangagwa.

Government spokesperson, Nick Mangwana says there is nothing wrong with comedy as it triggers fun and laughter, without hurting others.

From online television to stand-up comedy shows, female comedians in Zimbabwe have gained notoriety and critical acclaim. From television comedians to street theatre and skits for social media platforms, female comedians are gaining new prominence in a field once dominated by men. Resultantly, comedy is adding new income streams to once peripheral actors who are fast being recognized internationally. This article attempts to showcase some of Zimbabwe comedians through few of their selected skits; many more of their skits can be accessed on Facebook, YouTube and other social media platforms.

### Brief Literature Review

In the following section, the study outlines literature on political satire and the theoretical framework applied. The purpose of this section is to provide background on comedy, humour and satire so that the reader and audience appreciate Zimbabwean comedians and their performance. Zimbabwean comedy is transitioning at remarkable progress with once considered peripheral actors becoming international comedians and celebrities. This article argues that comedy is an ever evolving art and discipline which is constantly shaped by events occurring in society.

Comedy and satire are leading journalism revolution by capitalising on the expansion of journalistic styles and genres (Harrington 2011) <sup>[7]</sup>. It is within this context that Magamba TV comes in to challenge the authoritarian order established by the Zimbabwean government and partly maintained through propaganda via ZBCTV (Zirugo 2021) <sup>[33]</sup>. Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has had one television broadcasting station, 100 percent government owned ZBCTV, until the Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) (1980), another government controlled entity got a licence for its Zimbabwe Television Network (ZTN) in 2018. Joy TV, a private station that arose earlier, was banned in the early 2000. Through laws like the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), the government maintained control of ZBC (Chuma 2004; Moyo 2003, 2004; Mukasa 2003) <sup>[3, 17, 18, 19]</sup> as a tool to legitimate its policy agenda (Ronning and Kupe 2000) <sup>[25]</sup>. Although there are some new television stations which were recently licensed between 2020 and 2021 by the Second Republic, analysts argue that recipients are government officials or those closely connected to the regime elites. Only time will tell if these television stations are going to provide the much needed diversity, pluralism and change from state owned ZBCTV.

This monopoly allowed the government to broadcast its propaganda within the country until digital media emerged to challenge the landscape. It can be argued that even the Second Republic government under Mnangagwa is not prepared to genuinely open the airwaves to private players, except empty rhetoric pasturing through the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting and Broadcasting Act of Zimbabwe (BAZ). ZANU PF declares to maintain its hegemonic stance through propaganda by monopolizing 'public' broadcasting. The major challenge in Zimbabwe is that there has always been conflation between ZANU PF and government, therefore, there is nothing like public broadcasting in reality except on paper.

Political satire mocks and criticises citizens in a bid to

motivate them to engage in civic participation (Kilby 2018) <sup>[10]</sup>. Research has also shown the power of political satire in changing people's attitudes. There is comedy in political theatre and film as a tool for social change (Ravengai 2010) <sup>[24]</sup>; some focus on newspaper political cartoons and comic strips (Willems 2011) <sup>[30, 31]</sup>; while others focus on comedy as a form of popular culture (Willems 2011) <sup>[30, 31]</sup> and on political jokes speaking truth to power, (Willems 2010; Mbembe 2001) <sup>[28, 29, 14]</sup>.

Political theatre and film have been used as a tool for social change in both developed and developing countries (Ravengai 2010; Hassan 2017; Goldman 2013) <sup>[24, 8, 5]</sup>. Hassan (2017) <sup>[8]</sup> argues that ordinary people through arts and performances have the ability to impart their feelings and ideas on the social, political and economic issues so as to change lives in society. Nguluvhe (2018) <sup>[21]</sup> posits that theatre and film give a voice to the silenced as it helps on raising awareness about realities of injustices and oppression while helping the oppressed to express their sense of self. Political theatre ventures on political issues and provokes thinking and participation by audience in the controversies and forms of action emergent from the theatre works, (Lavrinienko 2010) <sup>[11]</sup>. Ravengai (2010) <sup>[24]</sup> posits that theatre thrives at telling stories about society through images.

Comedy as a performance can be used as social corrective used to reframe situations and intriguing social injustice, dealing with taboo and controversial topics and broadening the social perspectives, (Goldman 2013) <sup>[5]</sup>.

Some studies examine how parody and disparagement influence perception in politics (Peifer 2015; Seguel *et al.* 2017) <sup>[23, 26]</sup>. Parody is believed to serve a double role presented in two competing voices, of the presenter and the represented. Disparagement humour refers to remarks that provoke amusement through denigrating, derogating and belittling a target which belongs to the dominant class in society; be it a person, social group or political ideologies, (Zillmann 1983, Ferguson and Ford 1983) <sup>[32, 4]</sup>.

In parody and disparagement humour, the oppressed feel powerful when they point out the shortcomings, mistakes and flaws of the politically powerful thereby feeling victorious and superior, (Gruner 1978) <sup>[6]</sup>. Superiority to the target manifests through enjoyment of the parody by the performers and the audience and the laughter derogates the target. Nguluvhe (2018) <sup>[21]</sup> argues that the one imitating should copy aspects of the imitated, the powerful are disarmed and the subaltern wields the power to mock the elite. Comedians are powerful on stage as their voices command a following in a performance through their ability to provoke an audience and induce laughter though sensitive and sometimes emotional issues as is the Bus Stop TV and Magamba TV productions. In this regard, Bus Stop TV and Magamba TV crew and the audience cease to be the weak, they assume the position of authority and the once powerful (political elite and ZANU PF) are left at the mercy of the former weak (the comedians and the suffering masses) (Nguluvhe 2018) <sup>[21]</sup>.

Bus Stop TV, Magamba TV and the suffering majority of Zimbabweans assume the role of the authority as they ridicule the architects of their suffering thus exchange of roles in the sites of social power.

Nguluvhe (2018) <sup>[21]</sup> argues that the targeted audience of parody and disparagement humour belong in the "inferior" social class thus they join the comedians in enjoying the

power to mock or ridicule authority. By laughing at the jokes, the masses assume their power, they own and control the narrative and understand the socio-economic and political crisis through their own understanding and not as dictated by the dominant social class. Online comedy provides an opportunity for the suppressed voices to be heard and to challenge the oppressor; as this article will demonstrate.

Willems (2010) <sup>[28, 29]</sup> argues that the absence of physical protest should not translate to absence of resistance. Popular culture is adopted which becomes everyday form of resistance in challenging the state in Zimbabwe. Humour creates a disrespectful public sphere especially where all conventional avenues of sociability have been closed. Where urgency is denied, humour becomes a vehicle to obtaining political, social or economic participation and challenging official meaning. Ordinary people use humour to critique the state and to cope with the rigors of everyday life (Obadare 2009: 245) <sup>[22]</sup>. Some critics argue that humour has become a simple preserve for the subalterns. Mbembe posits that humour and ridicule do not violate the commandment's material base although it may demystify or try to erode its supposed legitimacy (Mbembe 2001) <sup>[14]</sup>. Obadare (2009: 244) <sup>[22]</sup> regards humour as a means to get back at and resist the power elite and dominant power class. Cartoons and comic strips have also been used effectively as hidden scripts, referring to subtle, implicit forms of critique against those in power (see Willems 2011; Mungwari 2017) <sup>[30, 31]</sup>. Laughter helps the subjects reflect, mocking their own powerlessness and lack of urgency in the face of an immutable system. Political satire has provided comic relief to many Zimbabweans and it is through innovativeness or creativity that common man has a vehicle of speaking truth to power, poking fun at the powerful and mocking the politicians and their vices. Willems (2011) <sup>[30, 31]</sup> argues that laughter does not only target the powerful but provides an avenue for those subjected to enable them cope with the events unfolding around them. Popular music, videos and comics have been used as alternative media where citizens either receive information on political affairs or contest political elites as forms of resistance against those in power (Willems 2011: 147) <sup>[30, 31]</sup>. Mkundu (2015) <sup>[15]</sup> asserts that the advent of the internet bypassed censorship, allowing the production and distribution of content without censorship by the government. Social media has democratized the flow of information which previously was controlled by government through newspapers, magazines, radio and television.

Belanger (2017) <sup>[11]</sup> argues that with comedy, we make much more serious points than we do with anything serious. Comedians utilise humour to inform and persuade. Humour is a way the speaker can undermine his opposition, revealing his opposition's weakness while concealing his own.

Explicitly highlighted will be voices of the comedians themselves, both in the form of their stand-up performances and their first-hand reflections on their own roles and agency. Treatment of humour demonstrates that comedians considered it to be a valuable, serious tool with powerful possibilities.

Three major theories of humour that have received the most attention, out of over one hundred documented theories include:

1. The relief theory, which posits that the purpose of humour is to relieve tension and anxiety;

2. The incongruity theory, which suggests that we laugh when we recognize a shift in perspective from what we expected, and
3. The superiority theory, which maintains that the misfortunes of others are humorous because they cause us to feel superior (Belanger 2017) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Humour is useful in interpreting the incongruity in such a way as to provide pleasure rather than discomfort... gives the persuasive speaker an advantage in that his message maybe received warmly when it could otherwise have triggered negative feelings or resistance.

Belanger (2017) <sup>[11]</sup> posits that a recent conceptual theory of humour uses an evolutionary approach to help us understand why we may experience that pleasure rather than discomfort, explaining that humans have developed a sense of humour as a reward for recognising errors in our systematic thinking. They locate humour in the moments when an active committed belief clashes with a latent committed belief brought into the same active mental space (p.15).

While humour can serve to unify, divide, persuade, disparage, we should learn more about how it can serve as an error correction mechanism to reward reframing and revising beliefs with pleasure. It is important to point out that comedians function as public intellectuals by publicly mocking, educating, shaming and praising. Comedians move past their role as entertainers to offer critical insights to the public and they are able to instigate us to think critically. Comics have an access to both the public space and the rhetorical tools (not only in their ability to do so in the language of the people) that can make us think critically without the same resistance.

Researchers and public policy analysts have explored the power of comedy to influence public opinion and concluded that entertainment may be the best way to deliver messages to audiences who are less likely to be critically analysing messages when they are laughing. One interpretation of this finding could be that comedians are manipulating audiences by disguising persuasion as entertainment and take advantage of viewers' guards being down when they approach comic material without the critical lenses they might use with information or advocacy.

Comedy is an effective way to introduce the public to new ideas and values. Comedy is actually more useful than many other genres in encouraging us to learn, feel, share information and normalize our feelings about other people and ideas (Belanger 2017: 103) <sup>[11]</sup>.

### Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature as it explores comedy and satire. It is descriptive and analyses the contemporary phenomenon paying particular attention to Magamba TV, Bus Stop TV, Mai Titi and Madam Boss. This study purposively selected skits and videos to serve as case studies for the research. This article covers different videos made by the above selected target population highlighting how they have used different props, settings, parody, sound, images and citizen journalism to explore a plethora of themes. The video skits have been broadcast on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. The researcher also conducted in-depth interviews with Magamba TV productions founder Samm Farai Manro, Bus Stop TV founder Luckie Aaron and two crew cast members



Samantha Kureya (Gonyeti) and Sharon Chideu (Maggie), Felistas Maruta (Mai Titi) and Tyra Chikochi (Madam Boss). The study also performed discursive textual analysis of the selected skits by gathering videos as core data. The skits were done in “Shona”, one of the main national languages. These skits were then transcribed into English. However, some of the skits titles were left in Shona. Critical discourse analysis is utilised where texts, images and videos are analysed to explain and interpret a variety of themes from specific contexts. Existing literature is critical in locating the arguments in the article.

## Background of Comedians

### Magamba TV

Magamba TV is a creative private organisation founded by two young Zimbabwean comedians, Farai Manro “Cde Fatso” and Tongai Makawa (Matsilele 2017)<sup>[13]</sup>. According to the website, the organisation aims to see a just and democratic Zimbabwe as well as opening up democratic space through youth activism. By virtue of being privately owned by ordinary comedians who perceive themselves as activists for democratic and just Zimbabwe, Magamba TV challenges the government by countering its propaganda on ZBCTV (Zirugo 2021)<sup>[33]</sup>. The effect financial grants that Magamba TV receives from UK-based Sigrid Rausing Trust and US-based Luminate, supporting activities promoting citizens’ democratic participation as well as holding those in power accountable, cannot be ruled out (Luminate 2021; Sigrid Rausing Trust 2020)<sup>[12, 27]</sup>.

Samm Farai Manro also known as Cde Fatso is the founding director of Magamba Network which produces satirical political shows. Cde Fatso is a comedian, satirist, media activist and an actor. He started comedy in mid-2000 with spoken word; poetry, performances and performing with his band. In 2011 he embarked on regular stand-up show. In 2011 Cde Fatso and colleagues started a program Zambezi News where they had bungling newscasters who parodied ZBC, issuing hilarious propaganda. It was founded as a parody of ZBC making fun about challenges of the relentless propaganda- this was at a time when social media and internet were not big in Zimbabwe.

However, Magamba Network started in 2007 with Cde Fatso and his friend Tongai Makawa also known as “Outspoken” (whom he referred to as a ‘partner in crime’). It was created as an organization to use creative activism to inspire young people to be part of the change needed in Zimbabwe- by inspiring a new political satire movement. When they started in 2011, political satire was not exactly a thing because of political repression and intolerance in freedom of expression by the First Republic under Robert Mugabe.

Magamba Network uses everything from creative arts, digital innovation and activism-they form festivals and fellowships producing political satirical shows. With the advent of internet and social media which have become much more widespread, they run a creative hub using many different urban cultural tools to be able to reach out young people to expand the democratic space in the country. Nevertheless, their shows appeal across generation (age) divide.

Magamba Network has produced many satirical and comedy shows. Zambezi News has done very well featuring in CNN, BBC, and the Guardian and has reached over 2.2 million households in Southern Africa through satellite television

(DSTV). Another example of the project which has done well is ‘The Week’. That new episode called “This is not a coup” has become one of the most popular to date. This is an all-women satire project with a female producer, a female director, a female scriptwriter, and female voiceovers. Cde Fatso reckons that we come from a patriarchal society in which the lack of women’s representation is structural. As satirists and media activists it is about taking conscious effort within your organization to make sure you are giving space to women’s voices.

Cde Fatso lamented that they faced lots of repression over the years because of political satire and comedy. They were disappointed in 2017 when Magamba TV producer, Martha O’ Donovary, who was in charge of all political satire, was arrested. They accused her of trying to overthrow government. They locked her up in Chikurubi Maximum Prison, and soon after that they raided their offices and confiscated their laptops.

Samm Farai Manro said they have not seen much change between Mugabe and Mnangagwa administrations in stifling of free expression in the country. However, it should be pointed out that there is relative tolerance and accommodation of free expression and comedians are enjoying practicing during the Second Republic as compared to First Republic. Nonetheless, security forces such as Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) should not harass, intimidate nor arrest artists as they did to Gonyeti.

Cde Fatso revealed that they work with many political satirical groups in Zimbabwe such as Bus Stop TV, Simuka Comedy, Madorofia Republic as well as media organizations, civil society groups and social movements. He expressed that the future of comedy is bright arguing that before 2011 there was no political satire truly to speak of but there is now inspiring new generation of young comedians and satirists out there to speak truth to power to hold government to account. There is a proliferation of young brave satirists out there for example Maggie and Gonyeti of Bus Stop TV, Madorofia Republic, Simuka Comedy and many others (Interview with Cde Fatso 31 January 2021).

### Bus Stop TV

The group was founded and directed by Luckie Aaron who says he is an aspiring filmmaker, freelance journalist and photojournalist.

In an interview with the researcher, Aaron said he started having interest in telling stories and television industry and entertaining audiences in 2003 using camera to get stories. He said comedy and humour are part of Zimbabwe culture, for example, in Zezuru culture there is “sahwira” for each family- a friend who makes fun on serious issues on occasions such as harvesting festivals or funerals. Aaron underscored the need for documenting Zimbabwe stories online using a combination of humour and satire.

Luckie was emphatic that they control their content without anyone gatekeeping unlike ZBCTV restrictions. When doing content for social media, it is purely free expression without any rules except setting one’s own rules. Comedy is an acceptable and easy way of communication. However, they get in trouble here and there because most of the time they get lots of issues that is why humour and satire are powerful tools of communication to promote free expression, democracy and human rights to fight corruption, to open spaces of democracy and human rights they use

humour and satire.

Aaron said they get grants from different developmental partners who have been supporting and promoting their work, such as Magamba TV. He said they get commissioned work for corporates and other organisations but rely more on creative work where they have full control of their content in satirical and comical shows. Sponsors control their content and how they express themselves for organisations and corporate public relations. Instead, they apply for specific grants which focus on human rights, democracy and other aspects so that they focus on those issues without control to sustain their production. Sponsorship is very tricky especially for them who use satire and humour to speak truth to power and corporates become skeptical to take the risk, for example if satire and humour are targeting, the presidium or government officials. Magamba TV assists Bus Stop TV with finance, support on structure, with grants, management and administration work since the latter is still small and growing. Other partners include Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe chapter, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, Steward Bank, and National Roads among others (Manro 2015).

Luckie Aaron was optimistic by saying that the future was bright for comedy in Zimbabwe, stating that when they started in 2014 there were very few comedies satirising critical issues in society. Comedians who produced before contemporary satirists only focused on entertaining without any social, economic and political critical messages. Contemporary comics and satirists such as Magamba Network, Simuka Comedy, Madorofia Republic, and Bus Stop TV among others use humour and satire to speak truth to power as shall be demonstrated in the next section of this article.

The concept of Bus Stop TV was first to have female comedians as leading actors. Most women were just supporting actors in comedy shows, particularly during Mukadota, Paraffin, Mutirowafanza, Gringo, Studio 263 and other 80s and 90s local dramas. Women were used or depicted as merely supporting men to tell stories. But Bus Stop TV women are leading television shows such as Maggie and Gonyeti. Many women are now using humour to speak to issues of society by using their smart phones and post their creative content to social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

It is important to point out that Bus Stop TV was formerly PO Box Reloaded. The former actors Rolland Lunga (Boss Kheda) and Admire Kuzhangaira (Bhutisi) left the show and were replaced by Sharon Chideu (Maggie), Samantha Kureya (Gonyeti) and Prosper Ngomashi (Comic Pastor) and Comic Pastor later left to start his own group.

“We chose Bus Stop TV among many other names because a bus stop is that one place in our communities that brings people from all walks of life together, affording them a chance to interact and talk about topical issues. As such we will continue creating content that will spark reasonable debate among our audience” (Luckie Aaron, interview 29 January 2021).

### **Sharon ‘Maggie’ Chideu**

Her real name is Sharon Shamiso and she is the first born child. She was born in Harare and briefly stayed in Marondera before she came back to Harare where she did her Primary and Secondary education. She finished her

secondary education in 2009 at Girls High and afterwards she went to Zimbabwe Film and Television School of Southern Africa (ZIFTESSA) where she majored in script writing and editing. After the completion of her program, she went to South Africa where she worked as a waitress before she came back to join Bus Stop TV which was mainly comprised of her former schoolmates. She is known by her fans as Maggie, she says few are aware that her stage name is short for Magirazi, the Shona word for glasses, or spectacles. The name, Chideu says, was bestowed upon her by a ‘rank marshal,’ the term for the leader of touts, (who collects money on public taxi buses), who was catcalling her one day as she walked around a bus terminal.

I heard someone shouting, Maggi, Maggi, and I was wondering why isn’t this Maggi responding. I happened to turn around and he shouted ‘Yes, you! Maggi, Magirazi’ and the name stuck, (Interview with Sharon Chideu).

### **Gonyeti**

Her real name is Samantha Kureya. She is 34 years old and the first born in a family of four. She was born and bred in Mufakose, Harare. She did her primary and secondary education at Ruzivo Primary School and Mufakose High respectively. Started acting in 2008 when she was doing TV dramas. In 2015, she joined Bus Stop then PO BOX. That is when she ventured into comedy. The decision to create satirical content according to Gonyeti is to tell as many stories as possible since people are afraid to speak their minds and voice their concerns. Therefore, they used humour and satire to deal with issues that are affecting people.

To achieve political and social change mobilization, Gonyeti and Maggie have used a repertoire of comedy, hard hitting parody, satire and community journalism, and they have managed to change the narrative of political and social action and largely dominated by the educated and powerful class. Gonyeti and Maggie have effectively utilised digital platforms as spaces for social and political action and, in the process, they have generated important debates and public interaction, effectively deepened civil space for democratic political participation and enhanced the defense of human rights in a country known for state authoritarianism (Chimedza 2020:53)<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **Challenges**

They are facing challenges when it comes to working with other companies because of their content. A lot of companies they used to work with no longer want to work with them and also others believe their content is too political and they do not want to associate with Bus Stop to save their brands and avoid being labelled enemies of the state. They are being accused of supporting certain political parties. This is affecting them in terms of income because much of their money is generated from advertisements. They were arrested several times and Samantha at one point was abducted. They have been receiving threats but they soldiered on because to them comedy and satire is not a hobby but serious work. That is what they do for a living. They are still facing a lot of challenges. They are being labelled enemies of the state. They were at one time banned from attending national events. They have had their press cards taken from them by state security agents. They have for several times been called for questioning by the

Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and ended up being fined for wearing clothes that resembled police uniform in one of their skits, and were charged for 'criminal nuisance' for shaming the way the police react with violence when citizens protest and then deny the existence of such brutality.

Every generation has its own women who, against the odds, and in the face of patriarchy, contest the spaces that restrict them, limits their opportunities, and marginalises and excludes them, but still they rise and are able to defend the values they believe in... These are women who fight against oppressive governments that continue to persecute them through the misuse of the police and legal systems (Kaunda 2020:14) <sup>[9]</sup>.

For every individual to be successful in this digital era, they have to maintain online presence and make sure their content is marketable. Everybody needs the media. Without media people will not be able to tell their story. Whether it is for entertainment or anything informative, media remains a vital cog. As entertainers, we need people to keep watching us, seeing our content but the challenge is that data is now expensive (Interview with Maggie and Gonyeti, 24 January 2021).

#### **Skit analyses**

It should be pointed out that all skits are performed in local indigenous languages, particularly Shona which the researcher transcribed into English.

**Bus Stop TV Skits:** The actors are mainly Maggie and Gonyeti

**Panofa Mambo Panofarwa** (When a repressive King dies, the nation celebrates).

This clearly reflects how angry and divided the nation is amid human rights abuses and poverty orchestrated by the Mnangagwa led regime. This is a reflection of the political situation in the country, a country that is torn by hatred and intolerance. People have tried everything to fight dictatorship to no avail. The only hope to remove dictatorship is death. The government has literally become a threat to its own citizens and the general feeling is it must be removed by whatever means necessary.

**Nzara paLockdown (Hunger during lockdown)**

The challenges being faced by Zimbabweans due to Covid-19 and the carelessness of the government evidenced by massive looting of Covid-19 PPEs as well as its reluctance to cushion the generality of the people is depicted.

**Kubatana maoko pa Covid (Mourning during lockdown)**

The way people used to attend funerals has changed since the outbreak of the pandemic. People now follow laid down WHO guidelines to curb the spread of the disease. This video serves as an awareness campaign to educate people to be extra cautious especially at funerals. People should adhere to stipulated lockdown regulations.

**Someone will pay**

Patronage in the rolling out of Covid vaccine. Those who are 'politically correct' are given first preference in all government programs. This explicitly shows how deeply polarised the country has become. Donations and drugs meant for poor Zimbabweans have been looted and/or only

benefitted the oligarchy as demonstrated by the bizarre establishment of a hospital for the elite.

**Kupwanya imba yaSauro (Demolition of Soul's house)**

Paying tribute to the late Zim dancehall musician, Soul Jah Love who succumbed to diabetes recently. How he worked hard to build his house which was unfortunately demolished by the city council as it was deemed to be one of the illegal structures mushrooming across the capital. They are touching on the bourgeoning of land barons who are fleecing people of their hard-earned cash. Lack of accountability on the part of the government and poor service delivery is depicted.

**Kuchekeresa mwana (Sacrificing a child for ritual purposes)**

The rituals have become a cause for concern. Some parents are even offering their children for rituals in exchange for money. This shows how devilish some parents have become in society just for the sake of money as a nation. A nation full of heartless people who no longer value the sanctity of life. People now value money more than life. The rights of children are trampled upon by their own parents, in this case, the right to life. This skit is a microcosm of children being murdered across the country such as the Mrehwa brutal, gruesome and callous murder of a little boy Tapiwa Makore; the family is yet to have closure because burial of partial remains was done and perpetrators are yet to be convicted.

**Exam class pa Lockdown**

In this video, a hapless girl in form 4 is raped after visiting a tenant of their house to look for some help. This is happening in the absence of her parents who had gone somewhere and left their child at the mercy of their tenant. A number of young girls are raped in silence. Parents are not carefully monitoring the girl child and sometimes leave them in the hands of dishonest and unsuspecting rapists. Girls are encouraged to report rape cases whenever they are abused and perpetrators should be given deterrent sentences.

**Exploitation of single mothers at work**

Two women are in the office with their boss, one is married and the other one is not. The boss prefers to work with the unmarried one because they usually engage in sex. The married one is failing to get favours from the boss because she refuses to engage in sex with him to protect her marriage. This is a true reflection of how women are being sexually exploited and abused in offices in exchange for favours. Marriages have been wrecked by these office romances and women who stand their ground and challenge the abuse are never promoted. Women are being encouraged to report the abuse.

Chimedza (2019) argues that one of the most glaring aspects of Zimbabwe's gender relations is the pervasive presence of gender-based violence, discrimination against women, economic inequality whereby women suffer disproportionately. Gonyeti and Maggie have continuously used their comic skits to challenge gender-based violence, workplace sexual harassment, and gender stereotypes. The comedy skits often go viral on other digital platforms, and ordinary citizens share these videos on platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram. The videos are also shared by other community platforms like Kubatana.



**Magamba TV Skits****Zanu inoroya (Zanu is a witch)**

Two men are chatting trying to figure out what might be the major cause of poverty eating into the sinews of the society. They have very little money between them which cannot buy more than two bananas. They agree election rigging is the major factor contributing to economic collapse. They are equating the rigging of elections by ZANU PF to witchcraft. They reflect on how the government is running down the country and disrespecting the will of the people and blatant human rights abuses.

**Why Mnangagwa's ZANU sent back South African envoys**

The skit talks about how ZANU PF blocked SA delegation from meeting other stakeholders in an effort to establish the facts about the political crisis in Zimbabwe. The delegation requested to see other political players but was told to work on ZANU's instruction and the delegation was forced to return with information it got from ZANU PF. ZANU PF is concealing something.

**Chabviswa mu Office (Dismissed from work)**

The resignation of VP Kembo Mohadi following his scandalous conduct drew wide condemnation, scorn and derision. The womanizer, according to the video, (Mohadi) will be missed by many women he used to engage in office romance with. This skit depicts stereotypes of women as sex objects; already missing a sex pervert.

**Demloot**

This song which went viral on Twitter and Facebook was composed by award winning journalist Hopewell Chin'ono who was incarcerated for exposing corruption involving the first family. His song was widely received by concerned Zimbabweans and is sung wherever corrupt activity happens. It touches on how the PPEs were looted, drugs and tenders which were awarded to companies linked to the first family.

**Zimbabwean Lives Matter**

In this video, a prayer warrior is praying for freedom. The hash tag came into being following gross human rights and the alleged killings of innocent Zimbabweans by the ruling party. The campaign drew international community attention and the human rights violations received worldwide condemnation.

**Minister Why are you here?**

The minister of finance is traveling overseas at a time the country is grappling with Cyclone Idai. The minister's priorities are being questioned and also the president's sincerity is under scrutiny following his visit to Chimanimani where he sat on an expensive sofa in the midst of mourning people. The President appears to celebrate a crisis when he publicly boasted of receiving 'real money' USD donated by Western countries; giving insight on how the money was going to be looted.

**Dhumbani – Zumbani home remedies**

A 'ghetto youth' is selling mango tree leaves as Covid-19 medication. Awareness campaign on COVID-19, encouraging people to adhere to WHO guidelines and take only what is prescribed by doctors and discouraging people

from taking medication which is not medically or scientifically proven resulting in disastrous side effects.

**ZIM Dollar bho here-Tsaona (Valueless Zimbabwe currency)**

In-laws are paying lobola/roora bride price and they receive a message to the effect that United States dollars are banned for local transactions. The banning of foreign currency for local transactions caused a lot of confusion among the transacting public. This shows government's policy inconsistencies.

**Varsity sex-Dhepoti rembinga (University - site for the rich to sexually exploit students)**

Two female students are discussing how dire economic situation has become and what they can do to survive at the college. One is telling the other that the only solution is to love people with money as is the norm at the college. Young University female students are at risk of contracting STIs and HIV AIDS as they are being sexually exploited by people with money. Some are into this illicit activity due to desperation, others enjoy it.

**Munda Mukadzi (Women are more responsible on land use)**

Wife and husband sleeping on bed in their bedroom discussing property ownership. Wives need recognition and entitlement to properties. Wives believe husbands die first hence the need to get title deeds to avoid conflicts with their husbands' relatives. Women believe they are the most important cogs in marriages and families. Women want their husbands to love them and pamper them for them to reciprocate.

**Who is Mai Titi?**

Mai Titi, real name, Felistas Murata, said her life experiences, pain and suffering motivated her to venture into comedy. She said she realised that she could not sit around and complain forever, but converted the pain into comedy to entertain and inspire people. "Comedy to me comes naturally as I grew up with it but the painful experiences cemented my passion" (*Daily News*, November 10, 2019).

Mai Titi is a Harare girl – she was born on 2 July, 1985 and went to Mufakose and Glenview High 1. She got married and had two children, but the marriage broke down amid allegations of infidelity. She is popular on Facebook, and YouTube. Her main Facebook page – Mai T's Dairies has thousands of followers. She started blogging in 2016, and uploaded her first skit in December of that year, using a cellphone camera. Soon, she became so popular that she simply became one of the most followed female comedian. She was one of the YouTube pioneers of skits (*Daily News*, *ibid*).

Mai Titi's journey to success was not all rosy. She is truly a hero and her success after divorce is a great example of rebuilding life. After divorce she sold her property and renting a one roomed house in Glen View. She remembers one day being humiliated by her landlord for not paying \$30 rent. "My bed was thrown out and I did not have anywhere to go. I remember asking my friend, Vila, for shelter just for my kids to have a roof on top of them. I did not want to bother my parents because I felt I had disappointed them in my marriage". She used to beg for food and piece jobs and

worked for one woman called Zodwa, in South Africa, as a cleaner at one time. However, Mai Titi had a dream and kept hoping and praying.

Online platforms allowed her to share her comedy consciousness in early 2017 after a video she posted on Facebook in December 2016 titled “Ndiise paprofile picture”, Shona for “Put my photo as your display picture.” The comedic skit depicted a wife chiding her husband about why she never appeared in his social media profile photos and why he did not portray himself as a family man online. Bringing comedy to real life situations is her forte. The video hit a nerve and received wide reaction on Facebook. In 2017, it was viewed more than 12, 000 times on YouTube and even more on Facebook. In that video, she says her career was born. Mai Titi says she is more popular with women audiences because of the subjects she tackles, which have made her unpopular with some men.

Mai Titi uploads videos on everything from sex, beauty, style, fashion, do-it-yourself, cyberbullying, Her heartache after splitting from her husband, whom she accused of infecting with HIV AIDs, but withdrew the case later. She has featured as a video vixen in musical videos, including on Jah Signal’s smash hit “Sweetie” (Shinga Muroora) – be strong daughter in law.

A well-known and much-loved social media personality, Mai Titi has also made great waves as an actress, musician and fashion star. She has a unique sense of humour and said her future is bright with more invitations to attend functions in foreign lands. She has travelled globally in countries such as United Kingdom and United States of America. Mai Titi is now known globally for her video content, her eccentric pronouncements, and her inspiring -yet-hilarious skits. What makes her journey stand out is the fact that this woman never aspired to be a social media celebrity – her famous pages began by accident. No wonder her fans and viewers relate to her sense of humour and do not spare a second thought before hitting the ‘Subscribe’ button. Mai Titi said comedy is tough but she said she is a believer in hard work and it is now paying off.

In March 2018, Mai Titi was recognized as the Top Female Entertainment and Social Media Enterprise Business Leader of the Year by the Women’s Business and Leadership Awards. The award was in recognition for championing leadership roles and the advancement of girls and women in business and leadership. Mai Titi said as a performer she has to step into a space on the margin, observing the incongruities of society’s behavior and attitudes and envisioning alternative interpretations of those behaviours. She said comics serve as social interpreters, saying things that people are too afraid to say or do not know how to say. Speaking on competition, Mai Titi said she does not rate herself as the best entertainer but strives to make people happy in her own way. She said women should not compete but complement each other for them to grow in the entertainment industry. She has been compared to Madam Boss, with whom she has some cat fights. Mai Titi has since kissed and made up with Madam Boss, who she has accused of gaining fame by bedding successful men. She now says Madam Boss is her source of inspiration, and the two have featured in Freeman and Alick Macheso’s music video for the smash hit ‘Ngaibake’ (let it burn). There are many video dances on social media where the two are juxtaposed dancing but they also collaborate in some skits.

In 2021, Mai Titi got married to her United States based

lover, Tinashe Maphosa in an intimate ceremony. She left social media buzzing with her wedding photos and videos as the development surprised many. The couple had been together for long and their wedding ceremony came barely a month after they got engaged. Her relationship with Tinashe has not been rosy. She revealed that her ex-boyfriend, Shepherd, had been blackmailing her over USA visa. She also said that he threatened to leak her nudes on social media but this did not affect their marriage. Such is typical of the life of celebrities.

### **Mai Titi Skits**

#### **Maid**

A maid kneeling speaking obsequiously to her somewhat abusive employer. Maids are being abused in most cases by their female employers. Maids are not being fully appreciated even if they work diligently. Maids are perceived to be husband snatchers by their employers. If a maid dresses immaculately, their employers feel they are competing with them for their husbands. Wives do not trust their husbands.

#### **Muroora (Daughter in law missing beer hall)**

A daughter-in-law is doing house chores as her mother-in-law looks on. She is showing a cultured behaviour in the presence of her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law leaves for church and deliberately forgets her hymn book. She comes back and finds her daughter-in-law making sexually suggestive dances and gyrations which are common in beer halls. Realising that she has been discovered she pretends singing a church hymn. There is dress code expected of daughters-in-law. There are chores that are supposed to be done by daughters-in-law. There is universal behaviour, deportment and etiquette expected of daughters-in-law.

#### **Mai Titi and Kapfupi**

In the streets, both drunken, the lady (Mai Titi) is telling the man (Kapfupi) about how abusive her husband is and that her only security is a marriage certificate as a result we see Kapfupi as hired to settle scores. She hired the man to settle their disputes thereby endangering her husband’s life. She believes conflicts are settled when drunk and is boasting about having marriage certificates as security for their marriages.

#### **Brief background of Madam Boss**

Comedienne and socialite Tyra Chikocho-Munetsiwa popularly known as “Madam Boss” has come a long way to be where she is now as a successful celebrity. She is a popular comedienne who rose to prominence with her comedy skits on social media that attracted a lot of audiences. She worked as a house maid before she started venturing into the film industry. Madam Boss is a former musician, she has staged shows alongside Shingisai Suluma and Kudzi Nyakudya. Tyra Chikocho was born in 1985 at Harare Hospital. She is a beauty therapist by profession. She was married to Ngonidzashe Munetsiwa on May 5, 2013.

When I started, I was doing maid skits, so I posted a video and one fan said I should be called “Madam Boss”. I don’t even recall who it was. I changed even the name of my page on Facebook and other social media platforms. Some of my skits are written by Ngoni, my husband. It was interesting to come up with



the role as I associated well with it through my experience as a maid.

She won the African Social Star of 2021 at Ei People's Choice Awards. She was grateful to her fans to win the prestigious award. Madam boss also won another award under the "Best Actress" category at the African Social Entertainment Awards (ASEA). This was barely a couple days after she won the African Social Star Award mentioned earlier. She got Brand Ambassador deal with Mimishac International, and again she was grateful to her fans for supporting her. Mimishac International is an Immigration and Relocation company providing holistic moving solutions to corporates and individuals around the world.

Madam Boss is the brand ambassador to many top companies in Zimbabwe. She recently ventured into acting in Nollywood and in South Africa. Madam Boss appointed brand ambassador of Diaspora Medicals, Madam Boss' Daughter brand ambassador Ntwuna Kids Sneakers appointed Rwanda Air brand ambassador. Madam Boss is expanding her brand as she has assumed acting roles in Nigeria and South African films. She will feature in the Nigerian series called The Offsprings with some popular Nigeria actors such as Prince Jide Kosoko and Adesanya. This will be shown in African Magic. She is expected to be in one of short films in South Africa to be screened on SABC1. Madam Boss' husband and manager, Ngoni Munetsiwa was excited with the developments since it was their dream to go beyond borders as Madam Boss Entertainment brand.

Madam Boss is being recognized as a brand internationally. It is building her confidence as an individual as she can now believe that everyone can be everybody and reach any level despite the level of education, or how you grew up or where come from. The lesson she is giving us is that if you are focused you can achieve anything that you want. Madam Boss is an inspiration to a lot of people, especially women. Some of Madam Boss' endorsements include Nash Paints, NetOne, Primeket, Travel and Tours, Skylake Boreholes, Elaine Solar, Senditoo, Nyaradzo, Ingwebu Breweries among others. Besides being a brand ambassador for these renowned companies, Madam Boss who has her own makeup and fragrance range called Red, has also been introduced to the world of acting where she is acting roles in South Africa and Nigeria as mentioned earlier. She travels widely internationally thereby raising Zimbabwean flag high.

### **Madam Boss Skits**

#### **Stay safe, Corona Virus is real**

Madam Boss is making awareness campaigns against Covid 19 encouraging people to be always hygienic as well as showing people how they should wash their hands. She exaggerates the demonstration which brings the humour. She is demonstrating all this as a medical doctor. This shows how responsible comedians have become in the wake of Covid-19.

#### **Dudzai- Valentine Day**

Madam Boss is acting as Dudzai, a house maid. It is on the Valentine's Day and a certain man has brought Madam Boss's boss some gifts. The gifts are received by Dudzai outside the gate and instead of presenting them to her boss, she starts fitting some of the clothes including lingerie as if

they are hers. Her employer finds her fitting some of the clothes. Dudzai runs away with the gifts with her employer in hot pursuit but gives up the chase. Dudzai finally comes back home drunk after taking all the alcohol bought for her employer. She is taken inside the house while resisting and venting out her bottled up emotions as an ill-treated maid; for disciplinary measures. This shows how sometimes maids mete out revenge to their employers when they are persistently denied freedom and privileges.

#### **Nhai Sei Vakomana Muchinyima Vasikana Mari: Why boys are not giving their girlfriends money**

The setting is a car where the driver (boyfriend) and girlfriend can be seen. The driver is seen calling someone and the girl pretends crying and calling her mother. She gives the impression that she has just received a text message informing her that her father is seriously ill and needs money. Meanwhile, boyfriend shows concerned and asks how much is needed. She asks her mother how much is needed and in what currency. The mother says in United States (US) dollars. The cunning girl is entreating her boyfriend to give her money under the guise of her sick father. The boyfriend feels compassion and doles out huge sums of money in US dollars, USD 1500 to be precise. He unfortunately falls into a trap. The girl has used the sickness of her father, which never was, to extort her boyfriend some money; the nonverbal communication in the skit shows how she is feigning her father's illness but the boyfriend does not see this. This depicts that many girlfriends are after money not real relationships, and boys should always give them money to cement relationships. This further indicates that relationships nowadays are concretised by money, and failure by men to pamper their girlfriends will result in relationship breakdown.

#### **Mudzimba Umu (What happens in people's houses)**

An agent of Senditoo, (Madam Boss), has brought money to their client at his home. A man, the real recipient, comes to receive the money and leaves his wife inside the house attending to their aunt who has visited them. On receiving the money from the agent, he asks her to turn her back on him purportedly to see what was written on the T-Shirt. Instead of looking at the inscription, the man gets glued on her buttocks and eventually requests the agent's mobile number. The man finds it difficult to drag his gaze away from the agent even when she is finally going away. The man is given USD 1000 by the agent but takes half of the amount and conceals it inside his socks under the foot inside the shoes. He goes back and gives his wife half of the amount and tells her that it is the amount that he has received from the Senditoo agent. The suspecting wife discovered the concealed money and takes it away without the husband's awareness. He later realises that his deception has been discovered and is embarrassed. This depicts how dishonest men are when it comes to money. In modern times you have to be careful about advertisements that seem to promote sexual stereotypes against women.

#### **Washeni yemabhurugwa (Washing of pants)**

In this video Madam Boss is the boss (employer) and she is giving the maid her underwear to wash. In the video we see the maid washing more than fifty underwear in the laundry tub. This shows how maids are sometimes dehumanised and ill-treated by their employers. Undergarments in our Shona

culture are not supposed to be washed by another person. Some of the pants the maid is washing have blood stains and other vaginal discharges, a clear sign her employer has been in her menstrual period. The maid is seen frowning her face complaining about the treatment she is getting from her employer. In the skit, the employer constantly supervises the maid how to properly wash the pants much to the disgust of the maid. Interestingly, Madam Boss worked as a maid before venturing into comedy. She has practical experience of how maids are belittled, despised, looked down upon and ill-treated. As a result of her experience as a maid, Madam Boss has done many skits raising awareness on how landlords ought to treat maids. There is a plethora of skits on social media platforms, especially Facebook and YouTube, on comedians analysed in this article. Audiences are encouraged to view many more comedies and skits on social media platforms.

### Madam Boss and Mai Titi reunite

The Comedy Queens posted pictures and videos of their reunion out of the blue. They finally decided to rekindle their friendship and bury their hatchet. In July 2021, Madam Boss declared her love for Mai Titi. They took to social media to post their photos together showing how happy they were. They both got Mercedes Benz from businessman Passion Java for their reunion. It is important that comedians support each other rather than hating one another.

### Conclusion

'Zimbabwe is a democracy, a functioning democracy and artistic creativity ought to be encouraged and not stifled as its leading lights are harassed' (*News Day* editorial, 28 February 2019). Government should promote an open society through providing a platform for artistic voices. Through skits we discover and rediscover who we are, what drives us, our aspirations and ultimately, how we can express ourselves differently. The creative works in this article evoke different emotions. Comedians and satirical artists in Zimbabwe are rising from periphery to prominence. It is recommended that future research focus on other comedians not discussed in this study. There are so many upcoming and emerging comedians throughout the country.

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