

Comic Strips and ‘The Crisis’: Postcolonial Laughter and Coping with Everyday Life in Zimbabwe

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In African Studies, political cartoons and comic strips have frequently been analysed in relation to concepts of power and resistance (cf. Mbembe 2001, Mason 2002, Nyamnjoh 2009). To a certain extent, these studies have reflected the wider debate on the role of humour in the relation between rulers and ruled in the postcolony. In media and cultural studies, on the other hand, scholars have analysed comics primarily as ideological texts which offer a particular construction or framing of reality. Drawing on the Zimbabwean comic strip Chikwama, which was published in the privately-owned newspaper *The Daily News* in the early 2000s, this paper argues that postcolonial laughter does not always address those in power but humour may also point fingers at those subject to power in an attempt to make readers cope with the tragic events unfolding around them. Laughter frequently adopts a self-reflexive mode through which those subject to power mock their own powerlessness and lack of agency in the face of a system that they perceive as immutable. Furthermore, the strip Chikwama also highlights how media discourse came to reflect the way in which politics slowly invaded the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, hereby reinforcing the importance of treating media texts as embedded in broader social discourses. The comic strip Chikwama did not only replicate the particular institutional ideology of *The Daily News* but also mirrored the way in which ordinary Zimbabweans negotiated the social and economic impact of the crisis. An analysis of popular culture might then be able to tell us more about how ‘ordinary’ Zimbabweans experienced the state and the ‘crisis’ of the 2000s on an everyday basis, hereby potentially contributing to Chabal’s (2009) recent call for an examination of African politics from below.

