



The role of bloggers in the construction of Zimbabwean national identities: A case study of three Zimbabwean blogs during the 2008 Presidential elections.

By

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## DECLARATION

I, Nothando Ndhlovu, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and any use of content from the work of other authors has been acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted simultaneously or at any other time for another degree.

Signed :.....

Date:.....

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## **ABSTRACT**

Blogging continues to get attention in the field of communication studies for reasons such as its differences with traditional media and its various effects in societies. The first part of this dissertation provides the reader with a background of the use of the Internet in Zimbabwe highlighting how it has offered individuals a platform to publish their own content, thus increasing the documentation of the 2008 Zimbabwean elections. This research analyses how national identity and the construction thereof emerges from online personal narratives. The research also investigates the discourses shaping the country's identities such as humanitarian, anti-Mugabe and democratic discourses that emerge from the blogs and how these blogs communicate events that occurred during the polls. This dissertation is primarily concerned with how citizens have arguably become recognized as sources of information and how Zimbabwe is perceived. Finally, the blogs are critically examined for how they create spaces of resistance. I argue that the blogs challenged and destabilized the older patterns of identity creation within Zimbabwe. Whereas national identity constructions have been largely a result of the majority or ruling class, the production of counter discourses in the blogs suggests that at an individual level, citizens use the Internet as a platform to express their dissent and do not automatically internalize these projected national identities.

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## ACRONYMS

<b>AIPPA</b>	Access to Information, Protection of Privacy Act
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Net Work
<b>CMC</b>	Computer Mediated Communication
<b>GNU</b>	Government of National Unity
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>ICA</b>	Interception of Communication Act
<b>MISA-Zimbabwe</b>	Media Institute of Southern Africa - Zimbabwe
<b>MMPZ</b>	Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe
<b>MDC</b>	Movement for Democratic Change
<b>MDC- T</b>	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai
<b>NEPAD</b>	New Partnership for Africa's Development
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>ZANU-PF</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
<b>ZAPU</b>	Zimbabwe African People's Union
<b>ZEC</b>	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
<b>ZTV</b>	Zimbabwe Television
<b>ZTA</b>	Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to Zimbabwe's use of new media

Since the emergence of Internet in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe, a battle for total media control ensued between the country's government and a number of the country's individuals using the technology to disseminate information. The battle became more prominent around the time of the country's presidential elections in 2000 when "opposing parties and other citizens took advantage of the Internet and email to promote and disseminate information" on Zimbabwe's pre-election period (Burrell, 2000), and continued quite strongly following the two most recent presidential elections, first held on the 29<sup>th</sup> March and rerun on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2008.

The 2008 Zimbabwean presidential election coverage remains a historical event as it heightened the role of the Internet and news provision in the political arena. New media provided a platform where Zimbabwean citizens were able to diversely cover the bitterly contested event involving Robert Mugabe of Zanu-PF and MDC-T's<sup>1</sup>Morgan Tsvangirai. While many scholars such as Chigora and Guzura (2011) have studied the event to expose how the Internet ushered in diversity of opinions and therefore democracy, the research seeks to analyze the citizens' construction of Zimbabwean national identities in their personal narratives.

In 2008, the Media Institute of Southern Africa<sup>2</sup> mourned Zimbabwe's "archaic and repressive media environment" and also pointed out that in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe received 57 of the 181 alerts it had issued. The 2011*Press Freedom Index*<sup>3</sup> statistics reported an improvement as the country's commission licensed two daily newspapers and fewer physical attacks were reported compared to previous years. Despite the improvement, the 2008 elections remain a highlight in the construction of Zimbabwe's national identities as Internet based news sources such as blogs were actively posting narratives on the event. The research has identified the period between February and June in that year as the first and crucial part that led to a series of historical events such as the government of national unity (GNU), which later resulted in Morgan

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<sup>1</sup>Since the MDC split into two formations, where necessary, the research distinguishes between MDC-T(Tsvangirai) and MDC-M (Mutambara).

<sup>2</sup>For the full MISA statement, see [http://www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/MISA\\_080503\\_statement.pdf](http://www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/MISA_080503_statement.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Press Freedom Index 2010 document, see, [www.en.rsf.org/report-zimbabwe,49.html](http://www.en.rsf.org/report-zimbabwe,49.html).

Tsvangirai being a Prime minister, and as a result, the proposed changes to the Constitution of Zimbabwe among others.

On numerous occasions, the Zanu-PF led government would describe the bloggers as “sell-outs”, a term commonly used during Zimbabwe’s struggle for independence, to refer to those who when bribed, revealed secrets to the enemy. The government in essence, had monopolized the media. To date, the use of new technologies such as the Internet remains not entirely welcome. It affords bloggers the opportunity to send out information on politically related events in Zimbabwe. Their accounts of events are usually of a controversial nature and, unlike those working for the press; the bloggers cannot be easily censored. Eppel (2004:50) states that at that time “voices of independent and international journalists have been eliminated in the past five years so that increasingly the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF)’s version of events is once more the dominant and almost only one in the nation”. Elimination of the blogger in Zimbabwe using the same methods as those applied to traditional media proved to be impossible. Using Zimbabwe’s presidential election as a case study, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of blogs in constructing national identities.

The pervasive nature of the Internet has resulted in the Zimbabwean government exercising less control over new media technologies than it does on traditional media. Eppel (2004:48) argues that access to Internet in Zimbabwe meant that “information couldnot be controlled in the way it was during the 1980s, where a few roadblocks were enough to prevent most news from reaching the towns”. The Internet has affected the control of news flow and at the same time made news on Zimbabwe more available than before. The Zimbabwean situation raises many questions pertaining to national identity drawing us back to the much debated theories of identity as a fixed or fluid phenomenon. The aim of the study is to analyze if the Internet supports forms of public discourses which are active in the construction of Zimbabwe’s identity.

## 1.2 Sample frame

The blogs under study appear on the following websites:

1. <http://www.cathybuckle.com>
2. <http://www.eddiecross@africanherd.com>
3. <http://www.voicesfromzimbabwe.com>

These sites are individually run by persons who are living in the country and who are constant in their postings. Furthermore, the three bloggers have no background in journalism as a profession and regulate their own content. They use the personal narrative format to narrate the way they witness the political and economic events unfolding towards the 2008 presidential elections. In addition to straightforward narration, they also express and provide comments on the same events. A personal narrative “presents information as a connected sequence of events” and most narrators tend to “structure their sequences causally: each event logically follows on from the previous one; each event causes the next one” (Lacey, 2000:13). The narrative is similar to an online diary, as the narrators share their life experiences and discuss topical issues with the public on the World Wide Web.

The first, Cathy Buckle, is a farmer and author of a number of books; Eddie Cross, the second, runs a family business and is a member of the MDC-T. In 2008, he won a parliamentary seat for the Bulawayo South constituency and later became the party’s policy director-general. Cont Mhlanga, the third, is an artist and in 2008, was an independently elected councillor of Lupane, his rural home. The research acknowledges the complexity of the fact that Eddie Cross and Cont Mhlanga were at that time proactive in the field of politics and contesting for parliamentary seats with Zanu-PF candidates. One could argue that their narratives were likely to be resisting Zanu-PF ideologies their websites have content narrated and interpreted from a personal point of view, and Eddie Cross’s posts continue to stir debate within his party because some of his posts are said to be not aligned with MDC’s policies. David Coltart, another MDC Member of Parliament, also found Eddie Cross’ articles to cause tensions among its members.

All three blogs diarize events once or twice monthly and write out their opinions in a letter abstract addressed to friends and family. It is important to note that new media technologies are not accessible to every Zimbabwean. Not everyone is able to access and respond to the blog posts. The bloggers' posts also do not represent the views of the entire country on subject matters they discuss but of those who are into blogging. The bloggers' views did not represent the entire nation as Zimbabwe is one of the countries where the issue of digital divide remains prevalent despite an improvement recorded in 2010. According to the *International Telecommunication Union* 2011DataReport<sup>4</sup>, compared to 2010, the country had low computer and Internet access levels in the year 2008. Power cuts remain a disadvantage to the few with access to computers as computers are dependent on electricity.

This study takes a qualitative research approach using content and discourse analyses of the blogs to assess the role that new media plays as a potential and alternative public sphere for the construction of national identities. There are many problems surrounding the electronic public sphere with scholars such as Dahlberg (2001:06), asking if there is a public sphere on the Internet in the first place and, if so, how contributions from alternative media operating outside conventional media can effectively be recognized and streamlined into the public sphere. Such questions will be discussed in depth later in the dissertation. The narratives are informative pieces which the research will investigate to ascertain how Zimbabwe as a nation is represented. The types of discourses employed by the website owners are to be studied in relation to issues of representation using a discourse analysis. O'Leary (2009:270) states that discourse analysis involves the interpretation of language in a socio-historic context tied to power and knowledge.

The three websites have postings that date back to 2002 to date but the study will analyze postings for discourses relating to national identity from March to July 2008, Zimbabwe's presidential election period, thus situating the use of language used at that time in context. Fairclough (1995:76) defines discourse as a particular way of constructing a particular (domain of) social practice. In this study, national identity would be identified as the domain. Discourse on identity construction looks at the claims and expressions that people have produced about themselves or their country.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on Zimbabwe's ICT's Development Index, visit [www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/factsfigures2010.pdf](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/material/factsfigures2010.pdf)

Fairclough (1995:76) states that “to view a text as multifunctional” and “simultaneously representing the world (ideational function) and enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function); seeing texts as built out of choices from within available systems of options in vocabulary, grammar, and so forth” is critical in discourse analysis. Using this as a guideline, content from the three websites is to be studied not only as simple texts but as ones embedded with various meanings aimed at producing certain perceptions on Zimbabwean identity.

## **1.2 Theoretical frame**

Identity construction, new media and personal narratives become central to the research literature framework to investigate how the Internet poses as forum for people with common interests to debate issues relating to Zimbabwe with the intention of changing constructions of the country’s national identity. The researcher’s interest to analyze the discourses of national identity created by the texts was aroused because contradicting reports on Zimbabwe at the time were common in the media and the government tried by all means to downplay reports from online media by stating that the reports were blowing issues out of proportion. In 2006, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, a government sponsored parastatal, launched the Perception Management Programme to shift negative perceptions of Zimbabwe. Under the programme, a number of celebrities like Joe Thomas, an American Rhythm and Blues singer, were paid to hold shows while foreign journalists were taken on government sponsored tours of Zimbabwe so that they would report positively about the country.

Bloggers are therefore perceived to be involved in raising awareness and have influence in the perceptions people build about Zimbabwe. This, by implication, makes them influential in constructing Zimbabwe’s national identities. The research has undertaken the use of the term identities as there are different accounts and a number of ways Zimbabwe is identified. The bloggers’ influence in shaping Zimbabwean identities cannot be ignored. Online personal narratives continue getting exposure and catch the attention of consumers across the globe. *The*

*Standard*<sup>5</sup> reported on Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Sten Rylander's, address at the 2008 World Press Freedom Day commemorations in Masvingo. He acknowledged the role of new media in distributing information and making it more accessible and more diverse. He added that "mainstream media reporting is being supplemented by 'participatory media such as blogs' (2008:03).

Zimbabwe has only one television channel, Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) and four radio stations which were all run by the government, Zanu-PF. The largest newspaper group in the country, Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers) which has more than eight publications was and remains accused of being tools of propaganda. The government is the major shareholder at Zimpapers with a total of 51%. The government's selective international media ban and tight control of local media operating in Zimbabwe left an information gap, where consumers got very little information from the official sources. Locally produced blogs filled in the information gap. According to Docter (2010:589), while usually not affiliated with press organizations, blogs are often able to bring issues ignored by the mainstream press to the forefront of the public sphere.

In summary, the Internet adds a new element to traditional media flows in Zimbabwe resulting in a high public documentation of events. The research looks at the material and how it has changed how people now understand national identity and the identity discourses that have come with using the Internet.

According to Marshall (2005:04) cultural studies have in the past been concerned with what he terms the "critical reading of the media" but new media has since widened the study to include the "process of production and the way in which the populace is engaged in that process of cultural production." The cultural studies approach has since broadened its argument because in new media there is no clear difference between a consumer and producer; it has arguably transformed "the traditional media category of the audience to the new media persona of the user" (Marshall, 2005:06). Blogs are a good example of how new technologies continue to engage people more directly with media consumption and production.

Quite a number of bloggers actively posted content on the 2008 elections, however the research has identified these three because a content analysis and discourse analysis of all eleven blogs

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.thestandard.co.zw/.../18091-conditions-not-ideal-for-run-off-envoy-.pdf](http://www.thestandard.co.zw/.../18091-conditions-not-ideal-for-run-off-envoy-.pdf)

focusing on the election would disregard the time frame in which this research is expected to be complete. Studying only these three blogs also gives the research manageable sample size. Therefore the researcher has had to choose a sample. Sampling is the process of selecting a few units from a larger population to become the basis for estimating or predicting a fact, a situation or outcome regarding the larger population (O’Leary, 2010:163).

The research is focusing on websites run by citizens turned producers in charge of their own content in particular thus eliminating the population of bloggers that are not running personal sites. The use of the Internet by individuals in Zimbabwe ushers in new dimensions on national identity and its constructions. Different people produced dissimilar content as an alternative to the dominant source of Zimbabwe’s identity constructions. Hoffman (2010:110) observed that bloggers “can speak their minds about almost anything with anyone, anytime”. Bloggers continue in the business of constantly posting stories based on their everyday life and, through these, several different identities are constructed and therefore do not remain fixed. Therefore, the research problem and key questions for this project are:

#### **1.4 Central research question**

- In what ways do new media offer opportunities for understanding national identity?

##### **1.4.1 Subquestions**

- How do the three blogs under study offer public platforms for interpretations of Zimbabwean national identities?
- What are the discourses of national identity employed by the bloggers?
- What descriptions in these three personal accounts are influential in constructing the discourses of Zimbabwean national identities?

The persistence of the three bloggers evident in the opinions and values in their articles expressed a need to effect change in the Zimbabwean regime thus highlighting additional concepts such as media activism and blog credibility that are secondary to the research but will nevertheless be briefly discussed.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The dissertation consists of five chapters, with the second chapter briefly focusing on Zimbabwe and its uses of the Internet and a literature review of new media, its characteristics and the nature of blogging. Theories such as the public sphere and the viability of an online public sphere are discussed at length. The third chapter is a discussion of the research methodology, content and discourse analysis are used to ascertain discourses to emerge from the election period while the fourth chapter is an analysis of the selected blogs and how they compare to the theoretical framework. Chapter five concludes the research by discussing whether blogs offer a platform for resistance and have a profound effect in the construction of national identity.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the advancement of Internet use in Zimbabwe as an alternative media and what exactly it has been an alternative to. With major reference to the country's political background, the chapter also examines how blogging has added more perspectives to Zimbabwe's political events and has instigated discussions and debates that contribute to people's perceptions of the country.

### **2.2 Zimbabwean media in the second millennium**

In the year 2000, ahead of its presidential elections, Zimbabwe became the centre of attention when Zanu-PF spearheaded the land occupation exercise where most white farmers were displaced from the land they occupied. Campbell (2003:79) states that Zanu-PF considered the occupations a "continuation of the liberation struggle and therefore justified." In support of the land reform programme the government dubbed it the *Third Chimurenga*, a Shona language phrase meaning political struggle and often associated with the country's 1980 national liberation.

The exercise drew a lot of international attention causing a media frenzy that had many media organisations coming to Zimbabwe to witness the events first hand and cover it. Many people branded it negatively. In an effort to defend its stance, the media is one tool Zanu-PF used to counter the negative coverage it was receiving from the local private press and the international world. The ruling party became engaged in an information struggle as they felt the land occupations were being covered unfairly. Scholars such as Chuma (2003) and Hill (2005) have argued that it is then that Zimbabwean media took a turn for the worst and was characterised by government censorship, violence and a string of newspaper bans.

In that same period, the ministry of information was reshuffled and placed into the office of the president where it enacted a number of laws and was enforcing restrictions on the media players

in the country. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) was passed and the now defunct Media Information Commission<sup>6</sup> (MIC) came into being. Among other duties, the commission was tasked with the accreditation of journalists. Chuma (2004:134) argues that the Act is limiting to the public sphere and is “designed to silence the critical media and increase the influence of the Minister of Information on mediated communication in the country” and even those initially accredited can eventually have their certificates “cancelled at any time should the minister and the commission deem it necessary.”

The manner in which the now defunct MIC selected certain media organizations over others to cover events in the country was another way of trying to control the flow of information. Media organizations such as Cable News Network (CNN) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) remain barred from covering any event from inside Zimbabwe. In the conclusion of its Article 19 paper, Media Institute of Southern Africa-Zimbabwe (MISA-Zimbabwe) stated that the laws were “undermining freedom of expression in Zimbabwe, promoting government control over even the independent media and giving repressive elements tools of intimidation.” The same article also lists the number of arrests, detentions; raids and charges journalists and media organizations went through because of the laws enacted at that time. Scholars such as Gruenbam(2010) argue that the accreditation of private newspapers such as *Newsday* and the previously banned *Daily News* by the Zimbabwe Media Commission in 2010 has reinforced the idea that the defunct MIC was a Zanu-PF censorship tool.

A struggle for information dissemination was actively raging on between the state and other media. Chuma (2004:134) states that the June 2000 elections surpassed the issue of land occupations as “it extended to stumping out the opposition, punishing the private press for not being patriotic and allegedly working in cahoots with western powers to effect regime change in Harare, purging the public press of disloyal journalists and editors”. For example, the *Daily News*, the only independent daily in the country then, was bombed in April of 2000 and again in 2001 then later banned in 2004. According to Hill (2005:92) *Daily News* is largely accredited with the MDCs success in the 2002 elections. A string of other papers such as the *Weekly Times* were also banned in 2005.

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<sup>6</sup> Following the Government of National Unity, the MIC has since been replaced by Zimbabwe Media Commission.

Campbell (2003:25) states that at that stage, the government – press relationship was at a critical point and “intimidation of the press was a clear indication that the government had lost the battle in relation to information warfare because the opposition had been able to successfully establish websites to counter government information.” The department was able to deal with those working in the print industry because they could be easily located. However, locating those posting stories on the Internet proved a daunting task. Many blogs emerged and continue to do so to the government’s dismay because the information circulated challenged that which it disseminates.

### **2.3 Alternative media**

While mainstream media experienced its setbacks, a vibrant debate was raging on through the Internet. So active were the debates on the Zimbabwe’s political issues that Hill (2003:93) commented “if newspapers had it tough the electronic media fared even worse”. New media technologies, particularly the Internet, presented new possibilities for groups and individuals to critique and express their own opinions. The Internet was used as an alternative media outlet by bloggers among others because, according to Castells (2007:184), the technological vulnerability of the Internet offers the opportunity for individual or collective expressions of protest. The Internet is argued to be vulnerable as it does not screen its users and as a result any individual may use or abuse the platform to disseminate information.

In his introduction of *An Alternative Internet*, Atton (2004:IX) states that alternative media are a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected and broadly accepted ways of doing media. Couldry and Curran (2003:16) define it as media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentration of media power whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations. As a result of its open access, new media offers a platform for such people to communicate their views.

There seems to be a thin line between media activism and alternative media as they both seem to reach for the same goals. Hackett and Carroll (2006:10) argue that those that turn to media

activism or alternative media usually allege a media democratic deficit within their societies. Media homogenization, centralization of power and restrictive policies are among the problematic issues pointing to the idea that media itself is becoming a significant threat to sustainable democracy. They identify “frustration as a long term catalyst” that makes people resort to alternative media. On the other hand, Atton (2004: IX) points out that the history of alternative media is replete with marginality. From these definitions, it seems both individuals or groups take to media activism and alternative media after feeling sidelined by dominant forces or ideologies in the state as well as being sidelined by the mainstream media.

It can therefore be argued that the bloggers are to a certain extent engaging in media activism. Besides, in some instances, being confrontational when voicing their concerns; these bloggers identify their cause as the responsibility to feed audiences correct and unlimited information. Couldry and Curran (2003:07) stress that such media are not simply alternative media because they are non-mainstream but because they position themselves in opposition to the mainstream media challenging both structural media concentration and the dominant discourse that it produces. Their observation is valid in assessing the blogs under study as one reads the mottos and stated objectives of the bloggers. The Cont Mhlanga blog is intended to inspire positive change while Eddie Cross, in his, states that he is joining the fight for justice as he hopes for a government that will respect the Zimbabweans’ right to basic freedoms that other countries take for granted. “Here is the truth about Zimbabwe” is the phrase that is on Cathy Buckle’s homepage, while a letter from the webmaster states that her letters bear witness and testimony to the exact nature of what is happening on the ground. According to Burns(2009:50), truth remains subjective and is generally expressed as the ‘market place of ideas’ where it can only be tested by sifting the truth from false. The bloggers’ aims affirm Couldry and Curran’s (2003:07) observations that bloggers sometimes seem to imply that their governments and mainstream media are in the habit of intentionally misinforming the nation.

Hackett and Carroll (2006:10) state that media activism is a struggle that is not only defensive but is an attempt to ‘fix’ the democratic media deficit and force the media to function as they are supposed to in Liberal theory. They reiterate that media activism implies a redefinition of the very idea of democracy to include new rights, such as the right to communicate, to participate and to social equality.

While the government was censoring information and controlling traditional media, an alternative to traditional media emerged in the form of blogging. This explanation may be used to explain the link between complex political situations and the popularity of blogs during this period in Zimbabwe. As a result of the blogs, Zimbabwe's latest elections have been discussed and perceptions of the country's identities have been formed to the government's ire. This election media coverage has set precedent for the manner in which Zimbabwe is talked about. In response to the blogs, the Interception of Communication Act (ICA) signed in August 2007 was effectively used in the latest presidential elections.

ICA stipulates that operators of telecommunications services will be compelled to install software and hardware to enable them to intercept and store information as directed by state. In spite of these seemingly harsh laws, the media in Zimbabwe has to a certain extent become diverse, as the flow of information out of the country, when not government-sanctioned, is made easy by what Castells (2004:117) describes as the "flexibility and pervasiveness of technology." The Internet is self-governed and as a result, a number of Zimbabwean citizens independently use it as a means of communication. Therefore the research looks at how new media allows bloggers to evade the law to craft their own versions of national Zimbabwean identity. The Internet continues to offer a platform for alternative expression, popular with audiences in the international community because of the Internet's ability to send messages in real time. As a result, the researcher finds it intriguing that with a law such as that of the ICA in place, personal narrators posted stories knowing they could have been convicted.

The Internet is argued to be carrying democratic potential for the citizen as it allows room for many people to converge and be involved in heated debate on day to day issues. With mainstream media failing to operate at its maximum in an eventful period such as the Zimbabwe elections, blogs have proved themselves to be the most ideal for sharing information in complex political scenarios. In support of his observation, Banda (2006:02) quotes Trigona (2004) who states that "alternative media tend to emerge during spectacular happenings." Just like the 2002 land occupations, the 2008 elections fall under the category of spectacular as they were characterized by violence, a month's delay in the announcement of results and later a declaration from the ruling and the leading opposition parties that they had both won the elections, and

finally a re-election as ZEC, citing the Zimbabwean Electoral Act, announced that there had been no winner.

Atton (2004:43) points out that alternative media emphasize the organization of media to enable a wider social participation in their creation, production and dissemination than is possible in the mass media. While state media was not actively engaged in keeping its public updated on events, bloggers were at the forefront initiating heated debates on why the results were delayed and Zimbabwe's future. Zimbabwe was now being seen through the eyes of the blogger. Local people such as the three bloggers under study were supplying information about Zimbabwe.

Docter (2010:589) states that many blogs function as do the traditional media in producing citizens with the information they need, and in providing a check on the powerful. Blogging presents a departure from the conventional news practice of awaiting official comments from politicians because bloggers regularly posted their own counter information, opposing domination. Zanu-PF maintains its standpoint that bloggers are not patriotic persons. However, bloggers enthusiastically took on certain roles usually played by the media such as surveillance and were responsible for the many perspectives to events taking place in that country. The Internet as a platform for alternative media expanded people's access to information and opened up public debate in a free manner that traditional media had failed to do because of government interference. Another characteristic of media activism is, according to Meikle (2002:61), the activists' dissonant perspectives that articulate positions too extreme or even repellent for the mainstream media to touch. The three bloggers had a tendency to highlight issues marginalized by the government and mainstream media, and to be explicit about them. For instance, presidential succession was a burning issue among Zimbabweans as people were eager to know if Robert Mugabe would relinquish the presidency. Mainstream media however evaded the issue. Bloggers continue to tackle the issue and go as far as analyzing possible candidates that they think would do better than Mugabe.

In conclusion, the use of alternative media in Zimbabwe, particularly during the presidential elections is a result of a government enforced passive mainstream media. The Internet made information available and easily accessible for people to form their own opinions about Zimbabwe.

## 2.4 National identity

National identity has shifted from being a fixed and stable notion in the premodern era to being a fluid and flexible one. Its fluidity has been associated with industrialization and argued to be a product of modernity. Wasserman (2003:244) says the changes to identity construction theories are testimony to the fact that identity construction does not take place in isolation but in relation to forces of an economic or political nature. Seeing as how vast the discussions on national identity are, this research will focus on its various definitions, its formation, modernist notions of identity and the role of the individual/subject in its constructions.

Anderson (1983:15) proposes that the nation is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. He argues that it should be thought of as imagined because subjects residing in the nation do not know each other nor have they met. Yet in each subjects' mind, they are part of a unit, making up the nation. Despite not having that direct/close relationship with one another the nation's subjects are bound together. Miller (2000:32) shares the same idea with Anderson as he also states that in a scenario where the population of a state is large and anonymous such that citizens cannot simply enjoy the kind of community that relies on kinship or face to face interaction, nationality answers one of the most pressing needs of modernity as it maintains solidarity among citizens. Based on Miller's argument, one can conclude that one objective of the concept of the nation is to bring together atomized subjects into a molecular lattice.

The nation as an imagined concept also gives the impression that it is not real but has been modeled in such a way that one imagines it to exist. Thomas (1997:01) says national identity primarily refers to ideas that exist in thought form, abstractions. He says it consists of a body of ideas that form the basis of shared loyalties to the nation state. While Anderson (1983:17) calls it an imagination, he and other scholars such as Cox (2007:3148) and Castells (1997:140) acknowledge arguments from scholars such as Ernest Gellner (1983) who state that the nation is an invention, more of a fabrication or falsity. However, these scholars argue that what should distinguish each community is the style in which it is imagined because to call the nation a fabrication or falsity implies that there is a genuine or true one out there.

Smith (2011:258) also argues that increasing attention has been paid to cultural heritage chronicles, histories, epics so as to give the nation a solidity and richness and contour. In the same line, Anderson (1983:106) also says nations should be considered as part of cultural artifacts. By this assertion he positions the nation as both a product of history and a myth since artifacts are the result of human design. French philosopher, Roland Barthes (1957) says the nation is a myth. According to Fourie (2007:255) Barthes defines a myth, as a story by which we live our lives although it is not necessarily true. Anderson and Barthes give the understanding that nations are communicatively constructed. Anderson(1983:107)goes on to say the history of a nation is idolized/prioritized in an effort to build it into an existence and unite the different social actors into believing they are a unit.

Miller (2000:32) states that nationality is an identity that embodies historical continuity. Nations, he says, are part of cultural artifacts of a particular kind and that is why a nation's history dominates its present being. The *1<sup>st</sup> Chimurenga* holds an important place in the history of Zimbabwe as it refers to the period of political struggle between Rhodesia and its colonizer, Britain. Zimbabwe has holidays such as Independence Day and Heroes Day that are recognized at a national level as days to commemorate those that died in the *1<sup>st</sup> Chimurenga*. Heroes Acre is a shrine that has been erected in their honor and to date a number of people given the heroes status are laid to rest there. A number of streets and buildings are also named after liberation war heroes such as *Kaguvi* and *MbuyaNehanda, MasotshaNdlovu*. Ranger (2010:02) states that Zimbabwe's version of the country's past, now generally described as "patriotic history", is often broadcast and enacted on various national events.

Geographic issues have also been cited as a feature in the formation of the nation. Andersons' proposed definition of the nation refers to it as inherently limited(1983:15). He explains limited to mean that even the largest of nations has finite boundaries beyond which lie other nations (1983:16). For instance, the land Zimbabwe lays claim to is demarcated and has immediate neighbors in Botswana, Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique. Miller (2000:30) when such territory has been marked, it is for the state to control and it is that territorial element that makes nations uniquely suited to serve as the basis of the state, since a state by definition must exercise its authority over a geographical area. He concludes that being connected to a particular geographical place is one of the features of the nation.

According to Anderson (1983:14) the nation is a socio-cultural concept and in the modern world, everyone can, should and will have a nationality just as he or she has a gender. One's nationality, in this case, would be a form of recognition used to differentiate certain groups of people of one nation from another. If it's a socio cultural concept, subjects determine who they are from the way they live together, their behavioral patterns and their manner of interaction by themselves or with others. According to Miller (2000:32) nationality answers one of the most pressing needs of the modern world namely how to maintain solidarity among the populations of states that are large and anonymous such that their citizens cannot simply enjoy the kind of community that relies on kinship or face to face interaction.

According to Castells (1997:06) identity is people's source of meaning and experience. This would mean the nation's authorities or dominant institutions come up with an identity for the nation and then actors make sense of themselves from that given identity. They gain knowledge or draw out who they are by internalizing that identity and construct meaning around this internalization. According to Fourie (2007:242) meaning construction theories argue that a nation's subjects act and understand something or that their behavior is based on and defined in terms of what they know or what they believe in. He states that subjects adopt meanings which they derive from the media as a social source even though it is often the case that the meanings the media attach to concepts and phenomena are oversimplified and one-sided. Castells defines meaning as the symbolic identification by the social actor of the purpose of her/his action (1997:06). On the other hand, Fourie (2007:244) states that identity construction does not take place on a textualised and symbolic level removed from everyday experiences of people but takes place within the lived experience of people.

Hetherrington (1998:15) says identity is concerned with similarities and differences, it is about how subjects see themselves in representation and about how they construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others. Therefore to be unique, is one feature of the nation, according to Hetherrington's explanation although he states that not all characteristics of the nation are exclusive to it. According to Giddens (1991:16) every culture has some form of standardized spatial markers which designate a special awareness of place. A nation may have certain practices or particular behavioral patterns that can only be identified with them. A nation may therefore focus more on its differences with others than the similarities

it shares thus instilling a sense of pride in its subjects which develops, into an emotional attachment.

Earlier discussions in this research identified that dominant institutions in a society are usually responsible for the national representations that a nation's subjects would embrace. The research also discussed how the identities themselves are formed. Castells (1997:07) states that the real issues to be explored however are how, from what, by whom and for what purposes identities are often created. The questions he puts out for exploration are to be the foundation for this particular discussion on national identity.

Louw (2005:110) states that in each nation there are the politically astute elites who strategically pick and choose which attributes suit their national projects. He explains that the politically astute are the ruling class and therefore national identity is a process which is wholly dependent on political expediency. According to Louw, the ruling class is responsible for each nation's image as they are decision makers in that country. By selecting certain attributes over others, they are deciding on how they, together with the nation's subjects would prefer to be portrayed by the rest of the world. Mitchell and Todd (2007:637) state that national identity is negotiated and developed by situated rational individuals in light of their perceptions of real opportunities and their own specific resources. Since national identities come into being through struggles, the opportunities in question take into account the position in which the nation wants to find itself stable economically, globally or politically. In other words, nations would deliberately take on attributes that positively portray them. Amid racial and tribal reports, Zimbabwe has maintained that it is a multicultural peace loving country because its economy gets a major boost from its tourism industry. Based on Louw's arguments, one can conclude that the politically astute are consciously involved in national identity construction. The Zimbabwean government strategically chose and highlighted only attributes that would attract foreign investment and tourists instead of those that repel them. The government and the blogs disseminated contrasting information on Zimbabwe. The blogs challenged these seemingly over simplified Zimbabwean images of a prospering and peaceful country by questioning the political violent acts they were witnessing, the weakening Zimbabwean dollar and the scores of people affected by drought. Such information opened up public debate and influenced a shift in the identity construction of Zimbabwe.

Thomas (1997:02) states that the term national identity is a supra-consciousness in that it stands above all affinities and identities ascribed to birth, place, gender and ethnicity among others. Here, Thomas is suggesting that national identity is collective and ignores the intricate details of one's background for an umbrella identity that describes the country as a whole. However, he argues that such an umbrella identity would only exist in principle as all too often national identity is based on dominant community identities and its very exclusivity is the cause for conflict. Taking Thomas' lead, one would understand that national identity is created at the expense of others, (the minority to be precise) and thus it would be impossible to find an entire nation's subjects that are in agreement with their national representation. The introduction of conflict in national identity construction affirms Castells' observation that the social construction of identity always takes place in a context marked by power relationships. He proposes a hypothesis that in general terms, he who constructs identity, largely determines its symbolic content and its meaning for those who intend to identify with it (Castells, 1997:07).

#### **2.4.1 Resources in the construction of national identity**

Now that it is clear that dominant communities or the political elites in each country are often largely responsible for the perceptions that people have about it, it would also be essential to discuss how they achieve this. This section looks at what resources are at their disposal and how they effectively use them to construct their identities.

One scholar known to discuss the issue of modernity at length is Giddens (1991); hence a brief discussion on modernity itself would throw light on why scholars such as Anderson (1983) and Miller (2000) discuss the nation as a product of modernity. He states that modernity, in its general sense refers to the institutions and modes of behavior established in post feudal Europe. He also argues that it is equivalent to a number of institutional axes such as industrialization and capitalism to name a few, (1991:15). Murdock in Boyd-Barret (2006:72) states that according to Marxist theory, capitalism is centered around the avalanche of goods manufactured for sale in the market place while industrialization describes change that occurred in society as it adopted an economy that allowed for massive scale production and manufacturing of goods for the masses. Anderson argues that those in political power have a powerful resource in the form of print media to use in the construction of the nation. He particularly cites print capitalism as one of the

basic requirements for the existence of an articulated, mass scale nationalist ideology. Giddens shares the same assertion with Anderson as he states that the modern state is tied to the spread of printing and mass literacy but whatever information is spread is used by authoritative sources to coordinate the activities of subject populations through surveillance (1991:154).

He explains the link between industrialization, capitalism and surveillance by arguing that the first two can be distinguished analytically from the institutions of surveillance, which is the basis of the massive increase in organizational power associated with the emergence of modern social life. He states that surveillance involves the direct supervision of the activities of some individuals or groups by others. Those holding administrative positions make sure that information accumulated and distributed will influence the subject populations' behavior in line with the national image they are aiming for. Organization, according to Giddens (1991:15) is a feature of modernity therefore making the nation a modern product as it is always a reflexively monitored system that follows coordinated policies and plans on a geopolitical scale. Organization, he says, is the regularized control of social relations across indefinite time-space distances.

The study of the control of social relations in a society is vast and has been discussed at length in the Marxist school of thought. Castells (1997:06) argues that the construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography and biology and from religious revelations and power apparatuses, among others. The power apparatus of the nation would include any system or organization used to forge national identities. The Marxist approach divides the power apparatus into two; the repressive and the ideological state apparatuses. According to Oosthuizen (2007:135), in this approach, economic classes determine the structure of society or events in that particular society. For instance, the capitalist class, by virtue of owning property, is in a dominant position that also exercises control over income and is therefore able to dictate history. He also argues that the control capitalists have over production enables them to also dominate every other section of society by spreading their ruling class ideologies to subordinate classes.

The role played by the elite in identity construction is major and cannot be compared to that of the nations' subjects who only subconsciously internalize the identities and do not play any major role in their construction. In this way, according to Wasserman (2003:244), identities

cannot be shifted and are seen as natural. He discusses the reason why identity has been viewed as fixed in relation to colonial issues with particular reference to South Africa during apartheid; however, his research is broad and can be applied to countries that had colonial encounters such as Zimbabwe. Certain identities or labels used during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle continue to dominate discourses in the construction of its national identity. Its colonial encounter with the British has shaped the way it wants to be identified as an anti-British colony.

In addition to the use of history, Bhabha (1994:140) identified narratives as ideological state apparatus used in national identity construction. He states that as an apparatus of symbolic power, narratives produce a continual slippage of categories like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia or cultural difference in the act of writing the nation. On the other hand Leersen (2011:258) also believes print media in particular is a powerful medium for the broadcast of ideas beyond their place and moment of origin. In a country such as Zimbabwe, this means print media can be used to disseminate national ideals beyond it to other countries. Similarly, Bhabha strongly believes that narrative has the power to change or affect how a nation's subjects think of the nation (1994:140). His belief may be used to explain why political entities want to control the narratives that its citizens are exposed to. Fourie (2007:05) states that the government is mostly responsible for communication policy because it holds itself responsible for what the public consumes. That is why Bhabha argues that the cultural construction of the nation has its roots in narrative.

In line with Bhabha's argument, Cox (2007:3148) also quotes Calhoun (1997) who states that recent writings, conceive nations as symbolic frames or discursive formations defined not so much by any identifiable empirical property but nations are constituted by way of talking and thinking and acting that relies on these sorts of claims to produce collective identity. Blogging is a typical example of how Zimbabwe is talked and thought about.

Bhabha's proposal (1994:39) is that literary narratives should be held central or recognized as potent symbolic and affective sources of cultural identity that dominate discussions of the nation as the cultural force. The nation, he says, is born out of narration where it seeks to portray the great power of the idea of the nation. His remarks are closely entwined with those made by

Anderson earlier in this discussion who states that although seemingly naturalized, the narrative is manipulated to support the objectives of the elite through ideology.

Ideology, in its classical formation, according to Williams (2003:09) refers to a system of beliefs that is partially misguided and distorted and conceal real social relations. Williams explains ideology in such a way that its intentions are similar to those of the myth, where the relationship between individuals and their surroundings is not real. Education, culture and communications such as the press, radio and television are some of the private institutions that are cited to function via ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects that behave accordingly and submit freely to ruling class issues.

Through ideology, the ruling class maintains dominion over the working class. Unlike Anderson, later writers such as Louw (2005:110) do not single out the print media, but states that in contemporary western society, all media, especially television, have become the dominant storytelling vehicles while journalists, among others, have become key players in myth-making and national identity building. Louw also implicates intellectuals and teachers among those responsible for myths associated with national identities. For example, the *1<sup>st</sup> Chimurenga* is taught to school children and is covered at length in the Zimbabwean history curriculum.

Journalists, according to Louw (2005:110) work with politicians to co-construct representations, package and circulate the political myths for mass consumption thus creating a sense of belonging and identity which underpins legitimate hegemonies. The representations are often reflective of the hegemony builders. Miller (2000:28) states that in the course of this history, various significant events have occurred, and through the media, we can identify with the actual people who acted at those moments, expropriating their deeds as our own. Often these events involve military victories and defeats and the media exert its influence when it implies that it is only good to emulate and continue with what our forbears started. The media therefore emerge as powerful tools for reinforcing national identities as it gives reasons why the maintenance of identity is thought to evoke emotions of attachment and are worth protecting and fostering. Miller (2000:31) states that such emotions are a result of the romantic conceptions of the state evoked by the dominant powers of each society.

## **2.4.2 National identity in post modernity**

Our discussion thus far has shown that dominant institutions play an active role in the type of identities nations construct for themselves. The elite, with the help of resources such as the media and the education system, among others, are at the forefront in coming up with the way they want to be portrayed while the nation's subjects are sidelined to merely being recipients of these identities. However, the postmodern age presents a different environment that has been referred to as the era of enlightenment where the individual is a conscious and thinking being that is seemingly free from the obligations of living as a nation and seeks human emancipation. According to Hall(1997:25), instead of being a mere recipient there is three possible ways in which a person may receive a text. So when the elite produce messages, the citizen may read and understand the message transmitted to them as intended by its authors or they may negotiate the message by taking into account their own beliefs or social positions. The citizen may also oppose the message completely if it is in conflict with what they believe.

According to Louw (2005:119) the postmodern era is based upon developments that place information at the heart of social organization where communication is central to production itself as the system is reliant upon telecommunications and computer networks. He argues that this shift from modernity has changed the nature of relationships because as information becomes abundant, there is greater individuation of opinion than before. Individuals are exercising personalized control over communication. Castells (1997:241) has a similar line of argument; he states that the shift from mechanical to informational technologies has helped to subvert the notions of sovereignty and self-sufficiency that have provided ideological anchoring for individual identity. In short, his argument is that technology is helping to take apart the very vision of the world that it initially helped build. Technology is making it possible that individuals narrate their personal thoughts through blogging. Both alternative media and personal narratives are discussed in detail further on in this chapter.

Unlike television and print media, new media is seen as a resource that has not allied itself with the ruling class and has led media users (citizens) to withdraw from civil engagement towards a more atomized existence, (Wasserman; 2003:254). Bennet (2003:27) also found that individuals are giving less importance to national identities because identities have become more fluid and

less rooted in geographical place and political time as individuals are both free to reinvent themselves and their political opinion. Individuals have access to global news and are learning how other nations are living their lives and this could be why they are under pressure to invent themselves as they have role models other than those provided by the state.

What happens in Zimbabwe does not only concern or remain among its citizens. The global world had a say on the election outcome and this also had its impact on how a nation is identified. The blogs' call for African leaders and United Nations, to intervene in Zimbabwe shows that the Zimbabwean government is no longer a totally sovereign country. Bloggers looked at other countries and argued that there are certain attributes the Zimbabwe government could have emulated or desisted from. In one of his letters, Eddie Cross says that the government should have taken valid lessons from the Kenyan voting debacle while Cathy Buckle cited Barack Obama's election as the president of the United States of America as something peaceful that Zimbabweans were supposed to practice.

Scholars such as Wasserman (2003) and Hetherrington (1998) make us understand that a nation projects itself directly in relation to what they are experiencing. This means the experiences of a nation are not always the same and differ from time to time. Miller (2000:32) states that the mythical or imaginary elements in national identity make it possible for it to be reshaped to meet new challenges and new needs. For instance, as the world becomes globalized, each nation faces new challenges, previously not encountered. The way it projects itself will be affected or sometimes might even clash with its earlier projections. The way Zimbabwe has handled sanctions from the European Union has affected the way it portrays itself. At each gathering during the election period, Zanu-PF members continue to present themselves as an Anti-British country that is sovereign and could not care less about the sanctions. As observed by Norman (2004: 139), "No speech by Mugabe would be complete without an attack on Britain of course." The Anti British rhetoric continued when Zanu-PF encountered a strong contender in the MDC. Zanu-PF accused the MDC of being "British puppets". This can be viewed as an act of dissimulation by Zanu-PF, where instead of addressing the issues affecting Zimbabwe; the party blamed the British and the MDC and continues to do so. Fourie (2007:217) states that dissimulation works by displacing attention from relations of domination and focusing attention on other issues.

Meanwhile, narratives produced at an individual level by bloggers revealed that for the first time they experienced food shortages in their country, and were exposed to electricity blackouts and health issues. They told a story opposite to that of the ruling party. Their narratives mourned for the happy times characterized with almost an abundance of basic goods they could no longer find in the shops. Although race and racism are not prevalent discourses in these narratives under study, Cont Mhlanga's post states that villagers in his rural areas were not happy with the blacks that had occupied the land in the *Third Chimurenga*, they reminisced and missed the displaced white farmers because they used to employ them and would even fund the education for their children. These different experiences altered their narrations concerning Zimbabwe. To a certain extent, this argument by Miller defeats the notion of identity as fixed phenomena.

Unlike Castells(1997:67) who thinks the concept of the nation has come to its end, McNair (2006:09) says the advent of new media has only unsettled most nation states, but that does not mean national identity has come to an end but it forces the nation to engage with other perhaps conflicting identities. McNair's observation is quite valid seeing as the bloggers under study did not only narrate issues personally affecting them, they encouraged solidarity and transparency for a better Zimbabwe. They maintained the vision of Zimbabwe as a nation but communicated that the ruling party, Zanu-PF has fallen out of their favor. It is a case where the elite have failed to cultivate the spirit of comradeship and loyalty to its ideas, but are willing to stay as a unit under new governance.

Miller (2000:29) states a number of particular features to be detected in order for one to identify a national community. In other words not every collective is automatically to assume the status of a nation. The first feature is that national communities are constituted by belief that the nation exists and that one's beliefs and commitments are mirrored by those who share the identity. He states that the existence of nation depends on a shared belief that its members belong together and share a wish to continue their life in common. Anderson (1983:28) suggests that when there is belief among nation's members that they belong together and also share a wish to continue their life in common, a nationality exists. Members should have denominators that bind them together; these could be in the form of cultural values sentiments and aspirations. Continuity is a result of these common denominators. In which case, Thomas' earlier discussion that national identity is constructed by the majority at the expense of the minorities, has to be revisited. Cont

Mhlanga always referred to how they, as the Ndebele tribe, seemed not to matter where the Shona, which is the majority tribe, were concerned. On the other hand Cathy Buckle and Eddie Cross faced problems as the white minority as their race was subject to slurs by the Government. They believed they were not being regarded as Zimbabweans because of their color. However, Eddie Cross emphasized that he regarded himself as a white African and Zimbabwean by birth and therefore felt strongly that he had earned the right to stay in the continent. However, race and racism discourses are not as prevalent as they were in the previous presidential elections. Citizenship rights and citizenship engagement are articulated in some posts as Cont Mhlanga focused on distribution of resources to his tribe and Eddie Cross argued that voting and taking part in national activities was right.

According to Cohen (1996) in Hearn (2006:37) individual identity or self-identity has to correspond to national identity as the individual's mind tends to conform to or reject the larger identity they are expected to belong to. The larger identity Cohen refers to is one originated by dominant institutions. However if the citizen, in their capacity as a social actor does not find themselves in agreement with the portrayal, they are bound to strike out with presentations of their own. Buzan (1983:21) states that the foundation of the state rests on the consent of its citizens to be governed and therefore the actions of the state can be judged according to their impact on the interest of the citizen. The bloggers expressed their dissatisfaction in their government. Their lines of argument differ, while Eddie Cross and Cathy Buckle shared the same opinion that both elections were rigged and Mugabe is an illegitimate president, Cont Mhlanga is of the opinion that only the second elections made him an illegitimate leader. The bloggers resisted governance by Robert Mugabe. The individual was exercising power that was unknown in the times of modernity and this has an impact on how we see the nation's leaders.

According to Castells (1997:07) identities are a source of meaning for the actors themselves and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation. However, he further develops his discussion of national identity by adding that identity originated by dominant institutions becomes national identity only when and if social actors internalize it. Castells feeds us the notion that even when dominant institutions create national identities meant for its social actors to embrace, it is not automatic that the social actors will do so. His argument presents a power shift from the passive social actor who internalized identities constructed by the ruling class. The

individual in this case, has the power to also reject that identity if they are not in agreement with it. This could be the situation that the bloggers under study found themselves in as there is a conflict in the Zimbabwe presentations projected by the state and by bloggers.

## **2.5 New media**

According to Marshall (2005:04), cultural studies have in the past been concerned with a “critical reading of the media” but new media has now widened the study to include the “process of production and the way in which the populace is engaged in that process of cultural production.” He also states that the cultural studies approach has had to broaden its argument because there is no longer a clear difference between a consumer and producer as new media has arguably transformed “the traditional media category of the audience to the new media persona of the user” (2005:04). New media has brought in different ways of communicating, information dissemination and storage, and the speed at which information can be accessed among other things. Castells (1997:01) describes the use of new media as a technological revolution, centered on information technologies, reshaping at an accelerated pace, the material basis of society.

The changes in the manner of communication that societies have had to adapt to are also having effects on society as a whole but that is not to say traditional media has lost its touch in society. McQuail (2000:125) states that it has become clear that there are issues from the early mass media theory that do not fit into the new media situation very well. He argues that the main issues, to have risen from new media theory are to do with power, inequality, social integration, identity and social change, and the fact that these concerns cannot be discussed in the same manner as they used to be in the traditional media set up. Marshall(2005:04) concurs, but is also of the perception that changes in the way people communicate results in “a new struggle over meaning significance, knowledge and power as old rules cannot be applied perfectly under the new regime of communication and as a result, formations of power are under threat from these new forms of expression.”

### **2.5.1 Describing new media**

In an effort to define it, most scholars tend to focus on its characteristics and how different it is to traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio. A number of new media characteristics differ from those of old media. New media is therefore often described as the transformation from old media. The differences have ushered in a number of scholarly reviews and observations as it is clear that the advent of new media signifies a change in the manner in which most cultures have been communicating. Some societies are now identified as living in the information society, a descriptive term for societies who on a frequent basis, apply and depend on Information and Communications Technology (ICTs). Brennan and Johnson(2004:12) summarize the information society as one that consists of global commons enabled by ICTs in which human needs are central. According to Fourie (2007:383) the information society approach is based on three broad areas of enquiry, which are:

- The definition, characterization and description of new media
- The impact of ICTs in society
- Policy related to the new media and ICTs.

A discussion of these three areas of enquiry gives an understanding of how new media have affected societies. The general perspective towards the use of Internet is its contribution towards democracy, which in itself is a broad term. However, most nations including Zimbabwe, have felt the impact of ICTs and different sectors of each nation are contributing towards the information society at their own pace. The use of the Internet by an individual has resulted in the transformation of the citizen.

#### **2.5.1.1 From consumer to producer**

New media, with particular focus on blogs, are a good example of how new technologies have engaged people more directly with media consumption and production too. Docter (2010:589) states that new media, particularly blogs have low barriers to entry and thereby potentially provide access to those segments of the population previously excluded from the market place of ideas. In the traditional media set up, the attributes of radio or television are that the citizen is a recipient of information and has few opportunities for audience participation. McNair (2006:200)

states that, “In the past, though, the great majority had no choice but to confront messages in sullen silence, having little or no access to the means of feeding back.” Such a relationship is not entirely interactive because the level of audience involvement at this stage is minimal compared to new media, which allows for the citizen to be not only a consumer but a producer as well. Anybody with the means can access the Internet as a sender, receiver or participant to whatever website they log on to and that explains why citizens such as Cathy Buckle, Eddie Cross and Cont Mhlanga are blogging. The Internet is actively involving these members of society to publish their own thoughts for the world to read. McQuail (2000:120) states that the audience member is no longer identifiable with the mass but is, “either a member of a self chosen network or special public or is an individual” because “the balance of activity shifts from reception to searching, consulting and interacting.”

Access to the Internet at this stage maybe viewed as a form of liberation for citizens who are sharing their thoughts on the World Wide Web since information broadcasting in Zimbabwe is restricted to the government or government approved entities. Keren (2006:08) states that by pronouncing their private thoughts, feelings, desires and needs, bloggers see this as a sign of emancipation, that is liberation from the authority of parents, peers, governments, institutions or publishers who, in the past decided which life story was worthy of print and which not. However control of information by government is not unique to Zimbabwe, most governments do so for security reasons among others. According to McQuail (2000:125) the ownership and power to control content makes communication flow in a predominantly vertical or centralized pattern from the ‘top’ or the ‘centre’ of society. The government’s ability to maintain a one- way flow of information is referred to as the centralization of information where the source of news would be solely from the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), the national broadcaster, to the entire nation. With the advent of new media, distinguishing the information producer from the receiver is blurry. Klotz (2004:204) states that the Internet does not exist in any central location and “from the perspective of the repressive government, Internet communication represents a confounding paradox of being everywhere but nowhere”.

According to Rettberg (2008:84), “Listener and radio contributions to mainstream media such as television and radio and newspapers existed but were always positioned in carefully bound spaces.” Content has to be subordinate to the advertiser or editorial policies which have to be strictly adhered to.

Comments or letters to the editor that are not in line with these policies do not get published. Distribution of information on the Internet disregards such gatekeeping methods and more over does not warrant one to register with the Zimbabwean Ministry of Information. The Zimbabwean government, to their frustration, cannot successfully impose its laws on new media; decentralization of communication has undermined its authority and order of information surveillance. Such a situation has resulted in “disorderly jungles” according to Castells (2004:341). Disorderly, because a flow of communication that has always been manageable seems no longer controllable. Fourie (2007:154) states that because of the Internet’s “free-for-all” characteristic, the world is experiencing an increase in the production and flow of information of all kinds.

### **2.5.1.2 Geographical restriction**

In traditional media, one’s physical location has a significant impact on their news consumption habits. The transportation of news from one location to another is not easy and, as a result, a certain village would only hear of a particular event after the event had ceased to be news in that area where it happened. McNair (2006:02) states that one advantage of new technologies lies in its global networks, “where an article in one part of the world immediately becomes part of a globally accessible system, and the posting is indexed, linked, signposted for others, rapidly becoming the conversation of millions”. The Internet is connecting people across the globe no matter their location and all villages are able to access news at the same time or while it is still of value. Instead of imagining the traditional geographically defined conception of the village where people relied on interpersonal communication, Burnett and Marshall (2003:18) urge people to think along the McLuhan concept of global village where the state of, particularly communication technology, affects time and space. This global village is maintained transnationally through the medium of the Web giving rise to virtual communities.

Working as a journalist at the *Sunday News*, a weekly paper in the Zimpapers stable gave me the opportunity to compare and conclude that the Internet has an advantage over traditional media where geographical issues are concerned. Operating from the country’s second largest city, Bulawayo, the paper was transported to nearest cities by company vehicles while long distance buses transported it to the further cities. The *Sunday News* could not afford the practice of having simultaneous editions of its paper in other cities. This form of transportation was not reliable as the buses would sometimes be late in their departures or break down and, as a result, the paper

would not hit the streets on time. Such delivery inconveniences are not experienced with new media. Hirst and Harrison (2007:345) say the development of cyberspace has created a blurring of geographic-and time-related boundaries. While Internet does have its disadvantages, distance is no longer a hindrance for people who are miles apart. Some of Eddie Cross's guests are from South Africa, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia just to name a few. Regardless of the geographical position, those interested in the Zimbabwean situation just have to click and access information on the country.

McQuail (2005:119) states that "the Internet transgresses the limits of the print and broadcasting models by providing instantaneous global contact." The brief portion of time in which electronic messages travel and are accessed on the Internet remains a marvel of new media. Once an event is over people across the world can view it or better still, audiences view it as it unfolds. New media's sense of immediacy and its ability to connect people from different parts of the world in real time and space distinguishes it from traditional media. Bloggers posted videos and reports of most political activities soon after the event took place and the audiences also responded with their opinions and comments about the election processes. Such communication activity was all happening in the cyberspace, where boundaries are disregarded to bring the largest distance into proximity because the Internet has the capacity to decrease that distance. Zygmunt (2002) in McNair (2005:214) states that distance no longer matters as, "speed-space enveloping the totality of the globe surfaces, brings every place into nearly the same speed distance from each other and makes all places mutually contiguous."

### **2.5.1.3 Interactivity**

According to Rettberg (2008:57) blogs are a social genre and therefore bloggers write into the world with a clear expectation of having readers. The bloggers coverage of the election period attracted a huge following locally as well as internationally. The multiple stories resulted in global debates concerning which political party and president was going to be the best for Zimbabwe at a time of being affected by hyperinflation, farm invasions, and drought among other problems. The blogs offered different public platforms which their audiences were to use to interact with the blogger by personally responding to articles they would have read thus developing a relationship or correspondence with the blogger or among themselves as the audience. Sending one message to many people is only one of the many communication models

enabled by computer mediated communication. Some blogs tend to incorporate adaptive interactive functions such as chat rooms or discussion boards to their sites. Deuze (2001:12) argues that blogs that adopt the one- to-many model of communication tend to limit the extent of audience participation. According to Burnett and Marshall(2003:47) by allowing anyone to be a sender or a receiver, anyone can send or receive personal or mass messages, and information can be provided or accessed by many.

## **2.6 Impact of ICTs in society**

Castells (2007:184) argues that its often the case that the government and citizens do not trust each other and “it is only logical that the emergence of the Internet as a space of freedom would epitomize this cleavage with advocates of liberty trying to preserve this new land of opportunity while government mobilizes their considerable resources to close this leak in their control systems.” The blogs took central stage in the 2008 elections as different posts alleged that political violence was rife but the government denied this, dismissing the articles as works of the opposition and the former colonizers, the British, who allegedly intended to recolonize Zimbabwe. The bloggers’ and government accounts of the same events were at times the opposite of each other. The citizens kept a hawk’s eye on the actions of each political party, forcing them to account for the political statements and promises made to them. Bloggers were on surveillance, closely scrutinizing political activities and demanding that government and all organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) ensure that their rights were not abused.

The use of ICTs has really had a significant effect on society. With particular focus on political activities in the cyberspace, the consequences of new media have changed the manner of both public and government participation in issues of democracy, governance and development. Brennan and Johnson (2004:12) state that one perspective of information society is one that sees ICTs as central to human needs. This perspective focuses on how Information Technologies have social implications where democracy and governance are concerned. Dahlgren (2001:148) points out that the mass media and now, more recently, the newer interactive media figure prominently and serve to facilitate communicative links between citizens and the power holders of society by permitting the circulation of information, ideas, debates ideally in an unfettered manner. Brennan

and Johnson (2004:27) states that ICTs reveal the plurality of the world as they are beneficial in raising participation in the decision making process, thus new media is significant in democracy.

### **2.6.1 Policy related to ICTs in Zimbabwe**

Even though, most policies have been observed to hinder use of ICTs in the country's media fraternity, Zimbabwe, like most African countries or third world countries has other factors contributing towards its digital inequality. McIver (2006:14) defines digital inequality as the gap between individual citizens having access to Internet technologies and those who lack such access.

Any study focusing on the use of ICTs by Zimbabwean nationals should take into account the fact that such technologies remain elite in the country. Castells (1996:360) in his explanation of how Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) develops in a society states that, "CMC starts as the media of communication for the most educated and affluent segment of the population of the most educated and affluent countries and, more often than not, in the largest and most sophisticated metropolitan areas." Such an assessment is true for Zimbabwe when broadly comparing it with developed nations and within the country itself, it is surely the metropolitan citizens of cities such as Harare and Bulawayo among others that are involved in the use of CMC. The use of ICTs is not evenly widespread throughout the country.

In the year 2005, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Science and Technologies conducted an e-readiness survey using the Harvard University Guide. The Zimbabwe 2005 e-readiness Survey Report identified, among other issues, existing communication policies that did not promote the use of technologies as some of the problems the country was facing. The identified issues continued to affect Zimbabwe even in 2008 and to date. Broadcasting, for instance, remains restricted to television and radio and is concentrated in urban areas thus creating a digital divide between the rural and urban areas.

The report also points out that, if the rural areas in Zimbabwe were electrified perhaps some of its problems would be wiped away. Entrenching the digital divide further is the fact that, only the urban areas are electrified while quite a few homesteads in the rural Zimbabwe have resorted to installing solar powered systems. On the other hand, not many can afford alternative electricity

sources such as generators as they are expensive. The Southern Centre for Energy and Environment Zimbabwe, in its Zimbabwe Country Study (2001:12), states that the main barrier to the dissemination of this technology is the lack of capital by the majority of Zimbabweans to acquire the solar home systems. Their study remains valid, a decade later. Since CMC depends on electricity, those based in the rural areas have very minimal chances of accessing Internet or becoming computer-literate. There is little hope that they would have managed to publish their own opinions of their experiences during 2008 elections. The bloggers are mainly from situated in urban contexts and their posts do not fully reflect the experiences of the rural folk.

Running online news editions or the general use of the Internet for other activities has been lauded as cheaper than running the traditional ones. In Zimbabwe, the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001 demands quite a large sum of money for an organization to be registered and be licensed to operate in the country. If broadcasting licenses costs an arm and a leg, it makes it impossible to see new players enter into the Zimbabwe media industry. This has seen most organizations operating from other countries. *Studio 7*, a radio station run by Zimbabweans, operates from Washington DC while *SW Radio*, also run by Zimbabweans, operates from the United Kingdom. Bloggers are not licensed by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe as required by the law but are actively disseminating news at low costs if not at no cost at all.

All policy is not entirely negative when it comes to the use of ICTs in the country; the Zanu-PF recognized the changing communication trends. In 2005, the president, Robert Mugabe launched a schools' five year computer program supported by the Education, Sport and Culture Ministry, and the Information and Communications Technologies Ministry who continue to acknowledge that in order to fit into the global village, the country had to integrate computer literacy programs at schools in their curriculums in order to improve the education standards in the country. However, the government did not seem forthcoming with its resources when it came to the use of ICTS in the media fraternity, but this sort of attitude has not inhibited the emergence of many news providers on the Internet.

## **2.7 The blogosphere**

Weblogging (in short, blogging) is defined by Burnett and Marshall (2003:209) as a website or a section of a website where users can post a chronological, up-to-date e-journal entry of their thoughts. The blog takes its form from traditional narratives where an individual would enter their private thoughts into a diary. Abbot (2002:29) argues that blogs may appear to be an entirely new phenomenon, “but it is important to bear in mind that far and away the majority of electronic narratives are transcriptions and imitations of hard copy.” Blogging, put simply, involves the act of narration whose form of communication is argued to have roots in oral story telling. The blogs as a form of communication have a number of aspects in common with other forms such as story telling from last centuries. According to Rettberg (2008:33), some aspects of blogging are certainly very similar to oral culture from past centuries, as they are conversational and social, they are constantly changing and their registers tend to be less formal and closer to everyday speech than is the general tone of printing.

### **2.7.1 Personal narratives**

According to Hoffman (2010:110), bloggers can speak their minds about almost anything, with anyone, anytime. His characterization of blogging brings to the forefront the idea that blogs are opinionated writings. Keren (2006:05) states that blogs, also known as online personal narratives or online diaries, are websites characterized by individual self expression. An individual would take up blogging in an effort to communicate their own views. According to Lacey (2000:13) a personal narrative “presents information as a connected sequence of events” and most narrators tend to “structure their sequences causally: each event logically follows on from the previous one; each event causes the next one”. By reading each post, one can observe how they are a string of events with one event being a result of the one before it.

According to O’Neill (1945:70), the narrator is not the only agent involved in the narrative transaction on the relevant diegetic level, storytelling is a two-way affair and not only presupposes a narrator but also a receiver in each case. Rettberg (2008:33) also uses an argument from Greek philosopher Plato, about how he found written text as unresponsive because if one tried to ask a text a question, it would preserve a solemn silence and not defend itself, even when

proven false the words remain the same. Yet in orality, a living person might not continue to make the same false claim. Writing on the Internet is different because blog posts can be edited even after publication. There is correspondence between the blogger and their audience and a question does engender a response from the blogger or other reader.

Through narration on blogs, perceptions of certain people or events are formed. Audiences rely on information provided by the blogger to make sense of the place and event they are reading about. McQuail (2000:229) states that “we are likely to have much familiarity of foreigners through media representations than in actuality because the degree at which the media affects our perceptions is very contentious and is probably inseparable from society as a whole.” Through each blog post, the consumer gets a deeper understanding of the relationship between the Zimbabwean blogger and the place they are living. One also becomes aware of their lifestyle and concerns and is able to relate to the bloggers’ experiences as their writings continue to generate important insights into Zimbabwean politics or living life in Zimbabwe. Gergen (2007:73) prefers to employ the term, autobiographies, as it is broad enough to include personal diaries, memoirs and travel journals. He states that autobiographies encompass a genre of writing in which the author serves as the chief focus of concern both as a unique individual and possibly as a lens through which to understand the world more generally.

### **2.7.2 Blogging, the ‘new’ fourth estate?**

According to Burnett and Marshall (2003:165) the advantage of news provision from blogs is that the individuals provide “tremendous insights for users to understand how major events have affected people close to the event, unmediated by the gatekeeping structures of contemporary television networks and news magazines.” The Internet has opened up the media to new voices which provide people with different interpretations of events. The 2008 elections were covered by quite a number of people whose focus differed from the next. They each managed to draw attention to a range of issues thus increasing the number of issues that required political attention in Zimbabwe. Abbot (2002:17) states that one role of a narrative is to be an instrument that provokes active thinking and helps us work through problems even as we speak or hear about them being told.

Towards the voting days, the bloggers present their audiences with a humanitarian crisis they allege is spiraling out of hand. According to Laqueur (1989:176) the humanitarian narrative “speaks of the pains and deaths of ordinary people in such a way as to make apparent the casual chains that might connect to the actions of its readers with the sufferings of its subjects.” So who better to tell the suffering of the ordinary citizens than the very citizens themselves? The posts by bloggers told of the suffering that voters were going through if they were suspected of voting for any party instead of Zanu-PF. They detailed the violence in the rural villages and streets in the city, the drought stricken people and the poor health system. Gergen (2007:13) argues that autobiographical writing within social sciences generally avoids mystical writings because an autobiographer typically attempts to present the fullness of life as experienced, so that the reader gains access to a curious elsewhere into a period of history, a culture or a particular personality-often of broad significance.

Despite the perception that blogs are fresh voices, narrative theory is of the notion that narratives are not one hundred percent true representations of events. One of the chief problems identified with narrative analysis is the fact that a narrative can either be used to document fictional events or actual events. To determine the narrative on this basis continues to be a struggle and scholars such as Abbot (2002:11) advise readers to tread with caution because even though a narrative is an instrument that provokes thinking, “it is also important to note that a narrative can be used to deliver false information; it can be used to keep us in the darkness and even encourage us to do things we should not do.” Personal interests in a narration can result in political bias, selective memory thereby distorting events in favor of the narrator. According to Lacey (2000:13) personal narratives are sometimes viewed as outlets of self-aggrandizements thus making it difficult for a reader to “sometimes evaluate what is factual and what has been dramatized or given too much prominence than it deserves.”

Reconciling what we have learnt on the nature of narratives with the fact the political blogs under study fall under narratives should therefore come as no surprise to the reader that their favorite blogger could be politically biased towards Zanu-PF, MDC or independent presidential hopefuls such as Simba Makoni. In their quest for emancipation, the blogger can misrepresent facts and fail to be objective. According to McQuail (2000:228) texts are often thought of as mimetic, that is they reflect reality; however this reflection is not neutral, it is often shaped by

ideological forces. McQuail's observations subscribe to the Barthesian idea that narratives are a form of representation.

In defense of narratives and objectivity, Campbell (2004:16) quotes scholars who argue that even in conventional news, objectivity has always been an impossible target and technology has made the concept unnecessary and redundant. According Pavlik (2000:34), although it is a laudable goal to strive towards, it is impossible to obtain or to even know whether it has been achieved. Hall (1997:61) is of the idea that by taking information from a wide range of sources and perhaps even by abandoning an impossible objectivity for a reasoned subjectivity or reflexivity, readers will be able to make up their minds for themselves. Gergen (2007:074) is also of the idea that it is up to the reader to draw objective lessons from a narrator's account and he also argues that the most significant characteristic of the genre is born of its attempt to share subjectivity.

The media are considered the watchdog of society, a role associated with social responsibility. Alternative media has been observed to play the watchdog card more seriously than mainstream media thereby fulfilling their role to the society they save. As a result, of its open access, Schudson (1999) in Deuze (2001:04) states that one added value of the Internet is the result of the changing definition of citizenship. He argues that:

In place of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century notion of the broadly informed citizen there is now the monitorial citizen who can be typified as a person demanding timely, detailed and full information of high quality at any given moment in issues he or she (individually) identifies as being of danger to personal or public good.

This holds true for bloggers as they called upon international bodies to intervene in Zimbabwe. The monitorial citizen is exercising a form of power invested in them by the Internet, as they interact; they become actively engaged in debates of how certain policies or political actors such as ministers affect them as the public. They demanded explanations from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and even consulted SADC Electoral Guidelines when they did not understand how some of the election processes were being done. They monitored the use of political power by the politicians and exposed what they found to be abuse of power. In so doing they were upholding the voter's rights, protecting the democratic and constitutional rights of the citizen.

The transformation of politics and shifting ideologies through blogs is not unique to Zimbabwe. Hackett and Carroll (2006:20) define ideology as the power to shape the very perceptions and desires of subordinate groups so they do not think to challenge existing social relations. The recent elections saw dominant Zanu-PF ideologies being challenged constantly by other opposing ideologies such as those of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Referring to past voting patterns since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980; it would arguably be safe to say Zanu-PF policies had been the dominant ideology. However, Lim (2008:274) argues that the internet can serve as a “medium that supports those who are dominated as they attempt to challenge the hegemonic power of the dominant.” The blog posts reflect different political interests and an urge to change the political situation in Zimbabwe. Scholars such as Hoffman (2010:110) and Docter (2010:588) identify blogs as the new left or as revolutionary taking into account how blogs are sometimes started to support thoughts of a radical nature.

### **2.7.3 Bias and lack of objectivity**

The fact that the Internet allows for any material to be published has raised concerns regarding the credibility of blogs. The reliability of blogs as credible sources of news always comes under scrutiny, as most discussions are centered on comparing blogging to journalism. Traditional journalism is associated with institutions of high professionalism where facts are checked and information is verified before print whereas blogging is taken to be immature journalism. It has been termed “vanity publishing” among other negative names it has accrued. McNair (2006:127) states that unlike print and broadcast media which are governed by the libel and defamation laws of the nation state, online sites are freer, if not entirely absolved of these constraints. “Many of these news blogs have little or no reputation to protect and feel free to publish and be damned.” In addition to such observations, the bloggers’ conduct has received mixed feelings among those who claim to uphold journalism as a profession. Reporting on the conference held in Capetown, (South Africa) in 2008, Garney (2008:07) states that “opinion on whether user generated content is a threat or boon to mainstream media is less tidy”. Although having broken stories worldwide and gaining respect, blogging seems to lack official recognition in some circles. The argument is that certain bloggers with no expertise in reporting bundle up because they have no editorial

values and a code of ethics to guide them. Their posts are mostly flawed as they lack research and official comments.

On the other hand, blogging has been viewed as fresh voices among tired ones (conventional journalism) and is referred to as a new form of journalism. According to Blood (2006) blogs are not obligated to anyone as they “point to, comment on, and spread information according to their own, quirky criteria” and that blogging gets its strength from its “ability to filter and disseminate information to a widely dispersed audience and their position outside the mainstream of mass media (Hirst and Harrison, 2007:257). Bloggers, using the narrative form continue to engage in the practice of posting stories about themselves and their life experiences in Zimbabwe.

#### **2.7.4 Diversity**

An increase in the number of news producers has its advantages, and one of them is the diversification of news. As stated earlier in the research, the Zimbabwean government has a lion’s share of media organizations operating in the country. It exercises total control of television and radio and has the largest newspaper stable. This kind of ownership often leads to media homogeneity where all news stories are one dimensional. According to Fourie (2001:133) from a democratic perspective, the main objection to concentration is that it diminishes the diversity or pluralism in news as most news products are not contested. He quotes Fisher and Merrill (1976) who state that the assumption is that a democracy is best served by a diversity of communication in the marketplace, and that a diversity of competing voices can provide the public with a range of information and opinions on which to base their decisions.

The unrestrictive nature of the Internet as a platform for infinite news producers makes it ideal for freedom of expression and it’s often been cited as free press. The term free press brings up the question, free from what? According to McQuail (2000:154) the underlying assumption of the theory is that the government is the constraint of free expression. Bloggers are independently confronting public issues freely in the privacy of their own homes for public consumption. During the 2008 elections they reported and gave commentary on political events such as rallies, demonstrations and political speeches and voting patterns as they saw fit.

Prior to the March 2008 elections, the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe<sup>7</sup> (MMPZ) of April 2008 reported that it welcomed a move by the national broadcaster, ZBC, to air adverts from opposition parties as this was a first in the country's broadcasting history. However, the monitoring body said the broadcaster remained biased towards the ruling party, Zanu- PF, as it enjoyed 80% news coverage. The Internet provided an easily accessible platform for other political parties to advertise themselves and present their manifestos to Zimbabweans at large. The MDC has been involved with cyber campaigning since the year 2000 and have countless websites detailing their party structure and agenda if voted into power. SimbaMakoni, another 2008 presidential candidate, lunched on to online campaigning to maximize his exposure. Political contestants were merging online campaign strategies together with the traditional way of campaigning such as rallies and fliers. The Internet has proven itself useful in political communication as a tool for political mobilization.

The government's tight grip on media has been loosened and the forms of censorship it applied on traditional media do not strongly hold in contemporary media as the Internet has redistributed power among people. Zimbabwe has been in some form of quarantine because of broadcasting policies such as the 100% local content that saw to it that there is no consumption of foreign cultural products. Zimbabweans turned to the Internet for international doses of news and entertainment while some bloggers openly kept relations with the outside world by relating the country's events to them. McQuail (2000:355) argues that by allowing an unlimited number of participants to produce their own news, the Internet permits diversity in content which is "a true or sufficient reflection in media of the varied reality of experience in society. The bloggers under study have experienced hunger or have friends and family that have faced health problems and received little or no assistance from government hospitals. Poverty and unemployment among others are some of the issues that make Zimbabwean identity problematic. The Internet provided a platform where such issues, pertinent to national identity construction could be discussed.

McNair (2006:02) states that, there has been unplanned outcomes in media content on the Internet that are sometimes different or opposite from the official. The wide range of news coverage has led to ideological competition and an increased volatility of news agendas. The 2008 elections confirm this point, the Government was frequently extinguishing fires started by

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<sup>7</sup> For the full MMPZ report, see <http://www.eepa.be/wcm/dmdocuments/MMPZ%20Daily%20Update.pdf>

bloggers, refuting the claims made by bloggers as untrue and as propaganda meant to usher back Western ideologies.

At this point, it would be unfair to completely dismiss the governments' claims on the bloggers or to also dismiss accounts from bloggers. While most discussions among society were mostly informed by the mass media, new media and blogs in particular have also been identified as having an impact on the very same discussions. Scholars such as McNair (2006) and Poster (2001) have argued that the Internet is significant in the formation of the public sphere.

## **2.8 The public sphere**

The term public sphere was coined by Jurgen Habermas in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) to explain how public opinion is formed (McKee, 2005:204). On the other hand, McNair (2005:135) states that even though it was first outlined in the 1960s, it remains the starting point for discussions of the relationship between media institutions and political processes. With the ever-changing developments in media technologies, with particular focus on new media, which in turn also affects various communicating cultures, the definition of the public sphere continues to be revised. The initial concept has been challenged and debates on whether the public sphere is present in the face of new media rage on.

A number of definitions of the public sphere have come up from different scholars. All definitions read almost the same but each scholar somehow emphasizes certain characteristics they find crucial in the discussion of what happens in the public sphere. The definitions are revisions of the initial definition by Habermas, who states that,

For something approaching public opinion to be formed, citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion that is with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest (Pusey, 1987:89).

McQuail (2000:158) defines the public sphere as “a notional space which provides more or less an autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate” while “one’s access to this space is free and freedom of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed.” Gardiner in Crossely and Roberts (2004:28) states that it constitutes an area of social life separate from the state

apparatuses, in which citizens gather to converse about the issues of the day in a free and unrestricted fashion either literally as in the town square or in the pages of diverse journals and periodicals. Negt and Kluge (1993:02) in their definition of the public sphere also reiterate on the fact that it runs parallel to the government as a fundamental social need and as the only form of expression that links the members of society to one another by integrating their developing social characteristics. Curran (1996) in McQuail (2000:158) defines it as a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free of domination and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. McNair (2006:136) identifies the public sphere as “the communicative institutions of a society, through which facts and opinions circulate and by means of which a common stock of knowledge is built up as the basis for collective action.

These various definitions of the public sphere either emphasize the need for free participation and individual expression in group debates with no state interruptions or involvement at the level of participants discussing issues to do with public good. For a society as diverse as Zimbabwe, one would wonder how or who would have the capacity to circulate and feed relevant information to the country’s citizens for use in their debates. As earlier indicated by Curran (1996), for a public sphere to be consummated, information must be widely available. Zimbabwe is one country whose public sphere is mainly informed by the mass media and in order for its citizens to have been able to cast votes in the 2008 presidential elections, information must have been made available to them. Information is identified as the foundation of societal debates which lead to the formation of an opinion about which political party one would vote for. Habermas (1989:213) states that, “ideally the vote is considered the concluding act of a continuous controversy carried out publicly between argument and counter argument because those admitted into the public sphere are the only ones entitled to vote”.

McNair (2006:137) identifies accessibility of information as one of the three characteristics of a normative public sphere. He argues that in the realm of media consumption and in the maintenance of a healthy public sphere, media institutions should supply economically affordable information for the individual reader and employ language that is understandable to the targeted public. It is clear that the concept of the public sphere is supported and driven by the liberal democratic theory and free press model, where according to McQuail (2000:160) “people

are considered as rational beings capable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood and between good and evil” while the media is “seen as a source of information capable of informing people to enable them to monitor their government and form their own ideas about policy.”

The role of the Zimbabwean mass media is argued to fall short of the required characteristics that McNair identifies as key in the constitution of the public sphere. The *2001 World Encyclopedia on Censorship* published that with the Zimbabwean government in control of major mass media in the country, the activities of independent weeklies try to enliven the public sphere but its only the small middle class that can afford the weeklies and have access to alternative sources of news such as satellite TV and,

the majority who live in rural areas are still predominantly reliant on the main newspapers and the ZBC for their information. Thus urban working class and the peasantry receive a news diet of presidential speeches and visits abroad, ministerial decrees and government rallies from the mass media, which also pours scorn on government critics and ignores financial scandals, demonstrations and policy failures (2001:2712).

Such lack of objectivity and reserved reporting on the part of journalists continues to be identified as an imbalance that would negatively affect the opinion formation of the citizen as they are not given the accurate reports.

Prior to the March elections, MMPZ reported that it welcomed a move by the national broadcaster, ZBC, to air adverts from opposition parties as this was a first in the country’s broadcasting history. However the monitoring body said the broadcaster remained biased towards the ruling party where Zanu-PF news coverage “translated into an 80% advantage compared to 13% for the MDC and just 6% for Makoni.”

McNair (2006:138) sites independence as a second essential characteristic necessary for a strong public sphere. “The system of regulation within which media operate should guarantee that neither political nor private interests in society can dictate or inappropriately distort to their advantage the content of the public sphere as a whole. In tune with Habermas pessimistic attitude towards the role of the media in the public sphere, some scholars believe that the media are responsible for the degeneration of this sphere because of the fact that the media take on a central role as the most utilized public organ in the dissemination of information therefore making it also quite significant in the creation of the public sphere. Carey (1999) in McQuail (2000:159) argues that, “Journalism can be destroyed by forces other than the totalitarian state; it can also be

destroyed by the entertainment state.” An assessment of the role of the media in the last two presidential elections would expose that the Zimbabwean public sphere received most of its dents from the government with an insignificant part played by the entertainment state as suggested by Carey. Even though ZBC is a public broadcaster, the Zanu-PF led government manipulated it in favor of itself over its political contestants. As a result the public broadcaster is seen as a smokescreen for state power.

According to Schudson (1998) in McQuail (2000:159) public broadcasting must be based on the trustee model, which states that journalists should provide news according to what they as a professional group believe citizens should know” because they “are professionals who hold citizenship in trust for us.” The reason why the media, in Zimbabwe among other countries, are argued to responsible for decomposing the public sphere is because “according to the Habermasian idea, media should have a demonstratable influence on political decision making, by enabling the formation and expression of public opinion and thus collective pressure or action on government”(McNair, 2006:139).

### **2.8.1 Revisions of the public sphere**

Garnham (1997) in Calhoun (1997:361) argues that the independence of a public broadcaster from government is never guaranteed and is ideal. He questions the extent to which various media reflect the existing balance of political forces and the existing political agenda and the media effects upon political action such as voting patterns. He insists the Habermasian model must be revised because the central and most urgent question that arises with the developing relationship between the new media and politics “fails to start from the position that the institutions and processes of public communication are themselves a central and integral part of the political structure and process.”

Fraser (1997) in Calhoun (1997:114) insists that the Habermasian public sphere is not wholly satisfactory and needs to undergo some critical interrogation and reconstruction if it is to yield to a category capable of theorizing the limits of actually existing democracy. Actually existing democracy, according to Fraser, incorporates the non-liberal; non-bourgeois and competing publics that Habermas failed to examine and ended up with the idealized liberal public sphere. To make her point, Fraser discusses arguments against the Habermasian public sphere from

Landes and Ryan(1997). Ascribing to the post modern school of thought, Landes in Calhoun (1997:199) argues that the Habermasian sphere was bourgeois and not in recognition of women. She states that the reason for this exclusion can be traced back to the political culture of the 18th century in France where, according to Habermas, “The symbolic politics of the emerging bourgeois public was framed from the very outset by masculinist interest and assumptions.” The masculinist strategy was characterized in such a way that in its social structures of society, the woman was restricted to the private area while the man was the public person.

According to Ryan (1997) in Calhoun (1997:267) at that time, the notion of a republican mother is, “now familiar prescription that women’s stake polity was the private nurturance of infant citizens was more than a rationalization of misogynist politics”. In accordance with Ryan and Landes, Sitanene and Stanworth (1984) are Roberts and Crossley (2004:12), who argue that to equate ‘male’ with ‘public’ establishes all sorts of false and misleading dichotomies and it actually impedes a thorough theoretical investigation of the public sphere by refusing to examine the exclusion of many social groups from public issues. In his line of argument, Ryan observes that it is the same structural transformation that gave definition to a public realm that designated women a second species of citizens and marked out around them a social space called the private.

However, Fraser (1997) is reported to be of the idea that the gender exclusionary claims made by scholars such as Ryan and Landes among others are also to a certain extent ideological because history has indicated that despite exclusion from the official public sphere, women in their different stratas of society used their private domains as spring boards for public activity before finally contesting exclusion from the official public sphere and the privatization of gender politics. Also in agreement with Ryan, she argues that despite not being part of the official sphere there were a number of other spheres present at exactly the same time as that of the bourgeois, and therefore, it was never the only public as implied by Habermas. On the contrary, virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counter publics including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women’s publics and working class publics.

Not only was there a plurality of publics but the relations between other publics and the bourgeois were at loggerheads. The counter publics would be contesting their segregation, trying to forward their alternative style of political behavior and their norms of public speech. On the other hand the bourgeois sought to bar their participation. It is because of such conflicting interests that scholars such as McCarthy (1997) argue that rational discussion as discussed by Habermas is hard to achieve if not impossible. McCarthy in Calhoun (1997:54) states that achieving national political consensus in a pluralistic society is farfetched as it seems to take participants at face value. In national discussions one has to take into account the different participants' needs and values, interests and aims based on their culture. Their initial needs differ and to have all these needs first placed on the table and argued out until a consensus is reached is a long way off before one is arrived at.

### **2.8.2 The virtual public sphere and its viability**

In the same manner that the advent of the Internet differentiated old and new media, a distinction of the early public sphere from the 21st century public sphere has been made too. According to McNair (2006:138) the former is national and was bounded temporally and geographically to a particular country while the latter is much more complex and interconnected and it is global, interacting with the local and using New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) to involve global publics in debating the key issues of the time. Scholars are divided in their assessment of the role of the Internet in promoting democracy. The optimistic believe it assumes a significant role as it is heralding new possibilities for political participation, if not direct democracy itself.

Definitions of the traditional public sphere have been revised to accommodate new media. For optimistic scholars such as Bennet and Entman (2001) in McNair (2006:136) it is "all locations, physical or virtual where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged." These scholars are detaching themselves from the notion that face to face interaction is the only form of interaction. Bohman (2004:133) argues that while it is has been significant to assume that face-to-face interaction guides the public sphere it is misleading and complicates any discussions of electronic public sphere. He contends that if we are to consider this technological condition a possibility for any modern public we must relax the requirements of the public sphere as a forum for face-to-face communication.

Scholars such as Poster (2001:04) have observed that the interactive places such as the town and coffee houses may remain but no longer serve as the organizing centers for political discussion and action because of present social relations that do not require physical presence. Therefore, Poster identifies the folly of virtual communication in that “the media, especially television but also other forms of electronic communication isolate citizens from one another and substitute themselves for older spaces of politics”. This sort of fragmentation has also been identified at group level by Dahlberg (2001:06) who argues that what can be experienced on the Net is the formation of virtual communities by individuals who offer each other mutual support on issues of similar interest and their interactions are minus the rational-critical debate meant to extend the public sphere. Most individuals offered their sympathy towards one another and reinforced their claims or beliefs that Robert Mugabe or Morgan Tsvangirai was the ideal candidate without presenting critical debate of why they thought so. Perhaps the issues of public good were neglected in favor of their own uncontested beliefs.

Even though such activity on the Internet makes it a good medium for the kind of dialogue that Habermas requires, McKee(2005:115) questions if the conversations or debates are carried out rationally and cautions scholars to recognize the shift in meaning of what constitutes rational discourse. He states that according to its definition it means the use of reason but it is more complex in practice because of the increasing presence of spectacular forms of political communication in the public sphere. Dahlberg (2001:04) also queries the extent to which conversations are carried out rationally on the Internet. His argument is based on the fact that because of the nature of the Internet, CMC exchanges are carried out at high speeds such that consumers do not have enough time to reflect upon what they would have consumed in order for them to contribute to the sphere effectively. He argues that reflexivity is a necessary step in order to transform privately oriented individuals into publicly oriented individuals.

The major contribution the Internet has made to the public sphere is the plurality of publics as it facilitates an impressive communicative heterogeneity. The multiple online public spheres, according to Dahlgren (2001:152), are where differences of all kinds including political orientation and interests, gender, ethnicity, cultural capital, and geography can warrant specialized communication spaces. He acknowledges that this contribution validates arguments put across by Negt and Kluge (1993) and Fraser (1992) who disagree with Habermas’s notion of

a single bourgeois public sphere. According to Kolb (1996) in Dahlberg (2001:04), CMC encourages a dialogic form of conversation essential to the public sphere. The animated conversations and exchanges on the Internet encourage opposing manifestos and summaries while one's position to an argument gets examined from a variety of angles and demands for backing on specific points are required.

The presence of different publics on the Internet has been highlighted as a positive step toward democracy but despite all these opinions floating in virtual space scholars such as Dahlgren (2005) and McNair (2006) question the effectiveness of the global public sphere's impact on the nation state. How alternative media such as blogs, effectively contribute to policy decisions in the official public sphere has been another of the questions asked by scholars because the impact of the public sphere should be felt by the decision makers.

With so many evident multiple spheres and debate forums and opinion mobilization, Dahlgren (2005:153) says the "mechanisms for transforming opinion at the global level into decisions and policies are highly limited, to say the least." International groups such as Amnesty International and International Crisis Group contributed to the increasing number of organizations demanding for international action to be taken against Zimbabwe, Zanu- PF in particular. However not much was actually done by the global village to enforce change or alleviate the problems Zimbabwe was facing. This observation can be supported by the bloggers posts of cynicism as they questioned how even the so-called big global decision-making bodies such as the UN were not practically intervening in the Zimbabwean crisis but continued to make recommendations that went unheeded by the Zimbabwean government. Cynicism among bloggers had also set in on the role of SADC in solving the political chaos and the role of South Africa as a mediator between the two rival parties.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, there a number of attributes that indicates the possibility of having an online public sphere at a global level as there is an increased visibility of issues happening in Zimbabwe. Such exposure should be acknowledged as a positive step toward achieving democracy but at the same time one must also acknowledge that despite the exposures by alternative media such as blogs very minimal changes in the Zimbabwean government can be attributed to the global sphere.

The chapter has discussed how the Internet has provided an interwoven link between narratives produced at a personal level and the representation of the nation. The literature review explains how national identity has been produced in the past in order for the reader to understand explains the change or shift new media has brought to the creation of national identity.

## **CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

To draw out the discourses of national identity, an analysis of each post from the three blogs was conducted. Such research calls for an interdisciplinary approach, as its methodological framework. A content analysis of the posts was thus conducted, to offer insights into the statements (messages) as repositories of “meaning” and values. The posts were further examined individually and in comparison to each other using a discourse analysis.

### **3.2 Sample selection**

The focus of the research is on the blogs’ coverage of the 2008 Zimbabwean presidential elections. The Internet broad search for election related blogs resulted in large number of bloggers that either lived in Zimbabwe or were based in other countries but focused on Zimbabwe and its elections. To limit the scope of my research, I chose to go with bloggers belonging to the former and this became my first criterion in choosing a sample. This criterion enabled me to eliminate from the sample blogs reporting on Zimbabwe by individuals living outside of the country. Bloggers living in the country are either involved in or have first-hand information on the events they write about. The argument that informs this criterion is that compared to foreign-based bloggers, the internal bloggers are preferably better sources of news as they are directly linked to the election. In addition to this, the bloggers reported that they cast their votes in the elections. This presents opinions from people who had direct involvement unlike foreign based bloggers who did not get to experience the elections first hand.

Despite the initial elimination of external bloggers, the remaining blogs each covered the Presidential elections well but their number was still too large a sample for this research. Each blog was then assessed in terms of the hits it had received throughout the election period between February and June, the five month period which the researcher has chosen to select blog posts for analysis from. According to Rettberg (2008:57) hits are one way that one can track how many browsers have requested a page. He states that the assumed relationship between blogs and hits is that the more interesting the posts one makes on their blog, the more users they get requesting

that page thus the number of hits can be used to determine the popularity of a blog among users. The three blogs with the most hits ultimately became the sample for this research.

After settling on these three blogs as my final sample, I went on to collect the posts from each blog. The posts to be analyzed are from February to June of 2008, thus presenting this research with an overwhelming amount of content. A pre-sample analysis of all posts was conducted to aid in the content analysis; it introduces the reader to particular post extracts from the pre-election period, the polling day itself and the announcements of the results and lastly, the runoff elections. Following the sequence not only helps the research have a controllable sample size but it also helps one follow the developments of the 2008 elections and understand, how one event led to the next.

It is also important to note that each blog's style of narration and commitment to posting their entries is slightly different. As discussed in the previous chapter, a blogger is the producer and publisher of texts such that different bloggers decide when to post their entries and therefore blogs can never be similar in that regard. These three blogs have no established pattern in terms of when they make their postings; they are random. It is important to note that each of their styles of narration and commitment to posting is slightly different and therefore can pose as limitation to the research. Cathy Buckle and Eddie Cross make regular short posts compared to Cont Mhlanga whose posts maybe few but long and therefore cover the events just as well as the other two bloggers do.

I settled on the three blogs because they blog independently of each other, even though pre-content analysis indicates that at some point they seem to share the same opinions in their posts. They make good comparison on how each viewed the election event as it unfolded and how they their opinions or stories each contribute to the creation of national identity. Compared to analyzing a single blog, a comparison of the three blogs provides a wider range of sources from which I can explore or evaluate patterns and trends to emerge from the blogs. Data from the three blogs can be analyzed and compared to each other on how they describe the elections and give their opinions. The research also briefly looks at the availability of each blog's discussion board, and how each contributes to the public sphere.

### 3.3 Content analysis

The research uses content analysis to compliment the analysis of discourse. Berger (2011:135) states that the basic assumption implicit in content analysis as a research technique is that an investigation of messages and communication will allow some insight into some aspect (e.g values or opinions) of the people who receive the messages.

Content analysis, not in terms of a mechanistic counting but in a more interpretive form, can be used to connect textual content to broader discursive contexts. Reaves (1992:112) states that in content analysis, the researcher typically is trying to measure some aspect of a person or culture by carefully counting the number of times certain ideas appear in the messages which that person or culture produces.

In his introduction, Krippendorf (2004: XVII) states that content analysis is firstly an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process and predictive or inferential in intent. The role of the content analyst, he says, is to examine data, printed matter, images, or sounds-texts-in order to understand what they mean to people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by these texts then does. The data from blog posts, which are electronic texts, can also be included for analysis.

Just as Marshall (2005:04) argues that cultural media studies have had to revolutionize from studying media messages as texts from the sender to the receiver, Krippendorf(2004: XX) also argues that communication has undergone a number of conceptual revolutions, among them the idea of computation. The fluidity and enormous complexity that computation has introduced into almost all spheres of life challenges researchers to not limit themselves to questions of who says what, through which channels, to whom and with what effect Lasswell(1960). Thus extending content analysis to involve how society operates and understands itself through texts.

The blog posts are to be analyzed through the use of inferences. An inference maybe made based on my observation of the bloggers' choice of vocabulary, use of metaphors or words frequently used among others. According to Berger (2011:169), content analysis is concerned with headlines, relationships implied, paradoxes generated, affirmations offered as well as arguments and appeals made in texts. Since the blog posts are texts that other researchers can analyze, this

means that the texts are open to multiple interpretations, with none of them being wrong and therefore not replicable.

After a content analysis, a discourse analysis of the blogs will follow. Mills (1997:134) states that the need to integrate content analysis with other approaches to textanalysis in modern linguistics has been recognized for some time because the technique of content analysis has come under criticism in some quarters for the decontextualization of words from the discourse being examined. In an effort to understand discourse analysis, this research breaks down the term first to define discourse and then explain that which constitutes a discourse analysis.

### **3.4 What is discourse?**

I discuss a number of definitions of discourse from both the linguistic and sociological disciplines. Proponents of the former posit that discourse refers to whole units of speech (conversations), and the speech community in which these units were communicated, (Wodak1996:16). Michel Foucault (1972) transformed the concept from its linguistic formulation, to mean an institutionalized way of communicating that according to Fairclough (1995:57) determines not only what we say and how we say it, but also (sociologically) what we avoid saying. Garret and Bell (1998:02) have observed that discourse is a fusion of the two disciplines where in sociological oriented areas, discourse is considered primarily in relation to social context of language use, while in linguistics, discourse is said to focus more on language than its use.

Fairclough (1995:76) defines discourse as a particular way of constructing a particular (domain of) social practice. In this study, national identity would be identified as the domain. Discourse; put simply, according Phillips and Hardy (2002:03) is defined as the actual practices of talking and writing. How and what the blogs write about Zimbabwe would therefore constitute a discourse on its identity.

Hall (1997:46) states that while other scholars focused on language, Foucault's discussion on discourse shifts from this to focus on language as a system of representation, where language is used to say something meaningful about the world to other people. The Foucauldian

understanding of discourse also considers discourse to include how a group of statements provides a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. He places discourse in a historical moment and within a particular context. He also argues that discourse constructs the topic and governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. Foucault emphasizes how structures of discourse affect everything we do in our society while remaining almost obscure.

According to Hammersley (2008:12) one of the driving forces behind the turn to discourse was the influence of constructionism, where human beings make sense of their surroundings, devise forms of action thereby producing and reproducing social institutions. On the other hand, Parker (1992:05) argues that discourses provide frameworks for debating the value of one way of talking about reality over other ways. This reinforces Foucault's take that discourse not only rules the manner in which a topic is discussed but it also rules out, limits and restricts other ways of talking or constructing knowledge about it. One gets to understand that from a number of ways in which Zimbabwe can possibly be discussed, the blogs can limit the reader's opinions of the country.

Candlin (1997:03) states that discourse is a means of talking and writing about worlds. Put simply this definition would mean that how humans discuss a particular subject or topic amounts to discourse. He furthers his definition to include that discourse is a means which both constructs and is constructed by a set of social practices within these worlds. This means that discourse can be understood in two ways, the first being that the practices a society may be into tend to shape what people talk about and secondly, what people discuss in a society also has bearing on that society as it can also shape its practices. In the same line, Parker (1992:09) describes discourse as a social practice socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned. He explains that discourse constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships in-between people and groups of people. He also argues that discourses help sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and its transformation.

### 3.5 Discourse analysis

The term discourse analysis has evolved from broadly referring to the study of meaning inferred by texts to a general term for a number of approaches to analyzing written, spoken, signed language use or any semiotic events. Contrary to ‘earlier’ scholarship, discourse linguists, not only study language use ‘beyond the sentence boundary’, but opt to study naturally occurring language use. O’ Leary (2010:270) states that discourse analysis is taken up in studies where text is assumed to have real political power and has influence on social consciousness.

Parker (1992:05) states that discourse analysis deliberately systematizes different ways of talking so we can understand them better. By ways of talking, Parker alludes to the fact that there is no singular but multiple ways of writing or talking about the same event, and it is through studying these multiple ways that we can understand the event. The three blogs focus on the elections and their different narrations contribute to understanding the 2008 elections and thereby Zimbabwean identities.

Discourse analysis is a tool of inquiry that considers language as actively constructing versions of the social world. According to Burman and Parker (1993:17) given that there are a number of ways in which an issue or event can be described and the participants have a wide choice of linguistic resources at their disposal, it must be noted that the ways of describing or making sense of the events is constructed and one particular version has been obscured. By obscurity, these scholars were bringing to the fore that a single event is likely to have multiple versions of interpretation yet most versions may remain hidden in favor of a particular one. In the same thread of obscurity, Fairclough (1995:60) also states that the analysis of texts allows one to note that which is present or absent in it. This has to do with how texts can be explicit or implicit. For instance, one of the blogs under study can be explicit in its opinion and be implicit in another opinion. Even though absent, a certain opinion can be suggested or implied in a text.

Wodak (1996:19) states that discourse analysis is an instrument whose purpose is precisely to expose veiled power structures, by making more visible these opaque aspects of discourse. Like Wodak, most scholars place emphasis on discourse analysis being able to unpack the hidden in addition to the surface meaning of texts. In other words, discourse analysis is a method of inquiry that is concerned with the deeper meanings a text conveys to the researcher. Fairclough (1995:76)

states that “the main concerns of discourse analysis are to view a text as multifunctional. Always simultaneously representing the world (ideational function) and enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function); seeing texts as built out of choices from within available systems of options in vocabulary, grammar, and so forth.” Using this as a guideline, content from the three websites is to be studied not only as simple texts but as ones embedded with various meanings aimed at producing certain perceptions.

Fairclough (1995:60) also argues that the perspective of discourse analysis lies in questioning how a communicative event draws upon the order of discourse and whether its effect helps reproduce its boundaries and relationships or helps restructure them. An analysis of the reproduction or restructuring of boundaries and relationships through language use is central in discourse analysis as language is argued to be constitutive of social practice.

On the other hand McDonald (2003:24) also states that individual agency should not be ignored when assessing how readers relate to media discourses. Using criticisms from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, he argues that human subjectivity has a controlling stake in the process through which we react differently to media texts. This method of analysis offers a social account of subjectivity by attending to the linguistic resources by which the socio-political realm is produced and reproduced. Having said that he points out that analysis of discourse should pay little attention to the questions of authorial influence and instead examine what is being communicated and in whose interests.

### **3.6 Reliability**

Benwell and Stokoe (2003:08) state that although there are numerous titles on narrative analysis and a journal dedicated to narrative studies and countless examples of empirical research, there is no agreed method of going about analyzing narrative data. The non-availability of a standardized formula of analysis has been seen as a negative thing because it means one can apply any approach in their analysis. Phillips and Hardy (2002:11) argue that since discourse analysis as a method has no established exemplars to guide newcomers to the field. Reviewers who are not familiar with this methodology may not appreciate its value. However Phillips and

Hardy (2002:11) state that the very aim of discourse analysis is to identify (some of) the multiple meanings assigned to texts therefore a single recipe for successful data analysis is somewhat difficult to provide. However, the analysis of data in context as explained by Krippendorf (2004:14) ensures the reliability of one's analysis as it eliminates the number of ways that the text could have been read if not contextualized. Reliability basically ensures that a researcher has done their research to the extent to which the results found can be replicated with repeated tests according to Kalof et al (2008).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

To conclude this chapter, the use of both content and discourse analysis in the following chapter will help draw out the number of ways that discourses are drawn upon and articulated together in the blogs as they seek to legitimize their views on Zimbabwe. In deconstructing the three blog accounts to extract various meanings, the research produces knowledge on the country's national identities.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins with a content analysis of all three blogs so as to give meaning to the posts. This will be of aid in the discourse analysis to draw out possible meanings conveyed by the texts. I also analyze each blog's choice of words, tone and use of language, the repeated words and metaphors and how each of these contributes to the meaning of the texts. Fairclough (1995:54) states that a discourse reader must be aware that the grammar of language, at the level of representation can be analyzed in terms of the relationship between the text and reader or those involved in the text.

The pre-election content understudy informs audiences that on 29 March 2008, Zimbabwe held its presidential election together with a parliamentary election where the incumbent president, Robert Mugabe of Zanu-PF, Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC-T, Arthur Mutambara of the MDC, SimbaMakoni and Langton Towungana (both independent candidates) were the five presidential aspirants. The research observed that of these five candidates, the blogs mainly focused on the characters of Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai who were the major candidates in this particular election. In addition to these two characters, the blogs also regularly discussed the Zimbabwean citizens; and interchangeably referred to them as ordinary masses, the people or citizens. Based on this observation, the research concluded that Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai played significant roles and were therefore more visible social actors than others in this election because they are constantly featured in the posts.

In addition to identifying the main characters involved in the posts, the research also assessed the descriptions each blog employed to describe each character. The characterization of social actors or subjects is a significant part of any narrative plot. However, the aim of discussing these principal characters and the environment in which the elections take place is to deduce some of the themes emerging from the descriptions the bloggers give of the characters. To successfully do this, the research conducted a search of descriptive adjectives explicitly used or implied in the blogs. This information was useful in determining each blog's attitudes towards the characters. The research is to refer to each blogger by their last name.

## 4.2 Content analysis

### 4.2.1 Pre-election content analysis

The pre-election postseagerly expressed anticipations of the possible outcome of the elections and even shared a strong prediction that the incumbent, Robert Mugabe, would not win the 2008 elections as had been the norm in the previous elections. The three also arrived at their prediction in almost a similar fashion, with a number of slim differences. The research looks at their election forecasts in order to draw out their opinions.

Buckle's posts seemingly present the idea that it was only logical that Zimbabweans would not vote for Zanu-PF because in her opinion, the party was the reason why the citizens were suffering. In the post, *We are ready*, (16 February), she blamed Robert Mugabe, for turning Zimbabweans, herself included, into a desperate group, struggling and scrounging for food to survive. She bemoaned the unavailability of food in the country. As indicated by Fourie (2007:244), one's identity is constructed from their everyday lived experiences. Fourie argues that a subject is bound to view life in reference to their experiences. Buckle narrates about her bad experiences in the country and states that a life of struggle and desperation is intolerable.

After detailing the hardships Zimbabweans are experiencing, she presents a nation of eager people who are ready to "vote for change" with phrases such as 'hope for real change is now less than six weeks away' and 'now is not the time to give up'. The phrases 'vote for change' or 'real change' are common phrases in the field of politics and where campaigns are concerned. The phrases are commonly used to indicate an amount of significant preference for a party or idea where vote intentions are concerned. Reno (1998:63) states that voting for change in most African states is usually influenced by lived experiences. One could argue that Buckle's confidence that Zimbabweans would vote for change is based on the idea that their voting decision would be poverty induced. As indicated in Chapter Two by scholars such as Wasserman (2003:244) and Castells (1997:06), identity construction tends to take place in relation to forces of an economic, political or social nature. Buckle expected that the Zimbabweans' voting decisions in this particular election were to be reactions to their poor situations. They would put

into power a party such as the MDC-T or any other candidate that would make food available to Zimbabwe.

In the post *Not too late*, (15 March), she also envisaged that separated families would reunite, communities would rebuild and Zimbabwe would also “eventually stand straight, tall and proud again.” She personifies Zimbabwe, making the reader visualize the country as human, giving it human characteristics of stature and pride. The reader conjures a visual image of a man standing straight, tall and proud, characteristics associated with not only being able-bodied, but confident and strong. According to Berger (2011:56), personification is when an object takes the form of a human being in a text. Her use of the word ‘again’ makes readers aware that Zimbabwe was once a wealthy country and had not always been impoverished and would therefore regain its state. A nation, according to Anderson (1983:106), is a product of history, where there is continuous comparison between times, past and present. Zimbabwe, according to Buckle, had been socially and economically stable until the year 1999, so she compares the standard of life in Zimbabwe before and post-1999. In her comparison, she stated that from 2000, Zimbabwe has been in a trauma, another personification aimed at making the reader understand how Zimbabwe has had severe problems brought on by the Zanu-PF leadership.

She mentioned that following the elections, most families would reunite and explained how those in exile wished they could be home. She gives readers the impression that Zimbabweans in foreign countries were there under duress and would have definitely returned home at the news that the elections had ushered in a different democratic order (perhaps the MDC-T). Exile can be identified as one of the issues her blog focused on because she often stated that quite a number of Zimbabweans was in political exile. Exile or forced migration contradicts issues of the nation subjects laying claim to a particular geographical area (Miller, 2000:30). These blogs presents those in exile as victims to traumatic events such as non-employment and drought, political violence and victimization.

An underlying tone of optimism can be detected in her pre election posts. While these are just forecasts, one can note that Buckle relayed them with certainty that Zanu-PF would not win the 2008 elections. She sounded excited at the possibility of a leadership change from Zanu-PF and made it known that she was not happy with the fact that Robert Mugabe was again the

nominated Zanu-PF presidential candidate. She provides the reader with background information of Zimbabwe's previous elections. The post extract reads:

March 2005 parliamentary elections were held in the country, Zanu - PF and Mr Mugabe had been in power for 25 years, factories were closing or relocating to other countries. ....In March 2002 presidential elections were held in Zimbabwe; Mr Mugabe was again the candidate of the ruling party and had just turned 78. .... On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2008, Zimbabwe will hold combined parliamentary, presidential, senate and municipal elections; Mr Mugabe is 84 years old and is again standing as the head of the party (*No questions, 23 March*).

She simultaneously threw in a number of seemingly parallel issues such as the state of the economy through the years and Robert Mugabe's age in her background. With each election she recalled, she repeated his age, perhaps with the intention of deliberately creating an adverse relationship between the Zimbabwean economy and his age to insinuate that that as he aged, Zimbabwe was aging with him too. One gets the impression that she felt a president must only remain in power if they exercised good governance yet Mugabe had failed in this regard. The audience is led to conclude that Robert Mugabe's aging or repeated standing for presidency had negatively affected the country and its citizens. She portrayed him as someone who selfishly clung on to power. A nation's style of leadership has an impact on its governance and eventually its national identity.

She continually picked at his age of eighty four, perhaps with the idea that Robert Mugabe should have retired from presidency or from politics because in the years he had run the country, he had proven to be inept as evidenced by the impoverished state of Zimbabwe. In each paragraph, audiences were reminded of his age and how he was still in power reinforcing the perception that he was a selfish person or a self absorbed person interested in himself at the expense of the entire country. In her conclusion of this post, she stated that there was no doubt who to vote for in the March elections. All three blogs discuss his age and this could have been informed by the presidential succession debate where due to his age, he had been expected to stand down as his party's 2008 presidential candidate.

Her specific preference of a presidential candidate remained ambiguous as she would not clearly state who exactly she was to vote for but judging from the brief history she provided earlier on in her post would have led her audiences to conclude without doubt that she was not voting for Mugabe. She gives the impression that old age could also have been responsible for his failure to govern the country well.

Contrary to the research's conclusion in the beginning of this chapter that Robert Mugabe was a visible presidential candidate, Mhlanga stated that in his district, the only visible candidates in the presidential contest were Dr Simba Makoni and Mr Morgan Tsvangirai, (*Food and elections, 14 April*). In his appreciation of the political situation, he concluded that, "In this district, President Robert Mugabe is as good as not being in this race." He claimed that people in rural areas of Zimbabwe had indicated that they no longer favored him and would not vote for him because they strongly felt that he unjustly distributed land and food in the area. As indicated earlier, the availability of food has significant impact on a nation's identity. However Mhlanga's post also highlights the issue of food accessibility in Zimbabwe as it suggests that Robert Mugabe was manipulating food supplies in the Matebeleland region and, as a result, people in the area had not received any grain. A reader can interpret such allegations to mean that the unfair distribution of food in Zimbabwe had left the Matebeleland citizens marginalized or vice versa. Mhlanga reported that "the people simply did not want Mugabe as president of Zimbabwe because of his party's show of favoritism." Compared to other bloggers, the theme of tribalism is one he touches on frequently, as he constantly mourned that Zanu-PF neglects tribes from Matebeleland.

Mhlanga's allegations of how the Zanu-PF led government preferred other regions over Matebeleland brings to surface observations by Thomas (1997:02) that while national identity is a supra consciousness that seeks to stand above other identities such as birth, ethnicity and gender, it is these very identities that result in conflicting national projections because identity is concerned with how subjects in a nation see or view themselves and then construct differences within that representation and the presentation of others. Mhlanga's allegations could have been made following observations of how Mashonaland was provided with food yet Matebeleland received none thus making him conclude that the government was tribal and believed the Shona tribe was superior to his tribe, the Ndebele and others.

On the other hand, Cross's pre-election posts expressed how hopeful he was that the 2008 presidential elections would be different and see the MDC win. Cross had a countdown to the election date and had headlines such as *Let the games begin, 8 days to go* and *4 days to go*. Even when Cross relayed his excitement and confidence that the MDC would win, his posts also relayed his suspicion that Zanu-PF was capable of manipulating votes in their favor. In the post,

*Decision time*(4 February) he wrote: “Our main task will be to stop Zanu-PF doing a Kibaki on us- stealing the result when we have actually done enough to win.” Cross was of the opinion that MwaiKibaki, the Kenyan president, cheated his way into presidency in 2007. This opinion is not exclusive to him as bloggers and civil society in Kenya also claimed that MwaiKibaki’s presidency is illegitimate and wanted him to step down. Cross’s observation of what occurred in Kenya highlights how national identity is concerned with similarities or differences between nations, where subjects of one nation look at another, compare their behaviors sometimes with the intention to either adopt or reject what they have observed. Hetherrington (1998:15) states how national subjects see themselves in representation and construct differences within that representation and the representation of others. Both Kenya and Zimbabwe practiced the ballot electoral system; Cross’s remark indicates how national identity may focus more on its differences with others so as to identify itself. Nevertheless, he was excited and the post, *4 days to go*(26 March), expressed his high expectations for the MDC-T and was already planning what he termed would be the ‘biggest street party celebration’.

He remained cynical of Zanu- PF and his posts continued to express his worries that it would cheat its way to victory. He also alleged that Zanu-PF had created ‘ghost voters’ and ‘denied thousands of citizens to vote on spurious grounds’ in addition to inviting election observers that are ‘friendly’ to the party.

Thus far, the blog posts published before the Election day itself are filled with high expectations and excitement because the bloggers were hopeful that their preferred party, MDC-T would win the election. The pre-election day posts from all the blogs heighten the reader’s interest to find out who was to be Zimbabwean president. The blogs gradually built up suspense in the audience as to how the Election day would unfold and also wonder if the results would resolve the problems the blogs stated in their expositions. The blogs had anticipated the voting day, and in turn created a feeling of anxiety around the event. This could have aroused the audience’s curiosity and made them eager for the election outcome. The reader’s awareness that the results could either confirm or contradict the blogs’ expectations contributes to the feeling of suspense.

#### 4.2.2 Post-election content analysis

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, a day after the voting exercise Cross and Buckle posted articles on their blogs. The latter, in her post, *Uncharted water* (30 March), initially described the Election day itself and wrote, “We finally arrived at the March 29<sup>th</sup> elections in typical Zimbabwean splendor. It was a glorious day, bright blue sky, a warm sun and everywhere an overwhelming positive feeling.” The post sounded cheerful and her account of the weather corresponded with it. She said people were relieved that the momentous day had arrived; their mood was equally as good as the weather on that day. Her post connects nature, which is independent of human activity to the elections, which is a wholly human activity. The clear bright blue sky and warm sun could be understood to express how well she thought the voting exercise unfolded in her neighborhood. Her description of beautiful weather is used to mirror the lively mood people were in on the polling day. This is an implicit metaphor, she does not directly or openly express the correspondence of the weather and the people’s mood. It is a subtle way of getting the reader to think about the day. The research noted that Buckle’s enthusiastic, optimistic and cheerful post concerning the entire event mark one of the last light letters she posted.

The headline, *Uncharted water*, is an idiom, she used to communicate the uncertainty which came with not knowing the outcome of their votes and the many unofficial conflicting messages on who had been elected as President. In her conclusion of this post, Buckle’s tone of excitement, dictated in previous posts, is replaced by that of worry. She concluded her post in a concerned but hopeful tone and wrote, “We can do nothing but hope and pray that somehow we will emerge from this with a true and honest reflection of the people.” Her statement placed Zimbabwean citizens as crucial elements to the voting exercise and the election of a leader of their choice. As highlighted by Buzan (1993:21) citizens have to give their consent to be governed, so opposed to a false reflection, which Cathy seemed to believe could also emerge, a true reflection of the people expressed through voting would communicate the Zimbabweans’ preferred presidential candidate.

Unlike Buckle, Cross's post assured the reader that the ZEC would make an announcement confirming that Morgan Tsvangirai was the 2008 elected Zimbabwean president, *A political Tsunami* (30 March). Reporting on the election outcome, he said "the outcome of the election had been a stunning victory for the MDC-T and Morgan Tsvangirai". He also described the voting day as an extra ordinary day that had seen the Zimbabweans ushering in new leadership. In conclusion of his letter, he identified the people as the real champions of the elections as they had chosen to suffer in silence and then vote for the MDC-T. One can make sense of his choice of a headline, *A Political Tsunami*, only after reading his entire post. A tsunami is defined as a destructive killer water wave yet Eddie writes about a political tsunami. The headline is both metaphorical and hyperbolic, overstating Eddie Cross's belief that the MDC-T and Morgan Tsvangirai had won the election by a margin of 103 seats to Zanu-PF's five. His declaration of victory concluded the election event but the fact that his news is not backed by any official announcement from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission keeps the audience in suspense.

Eight days after the election, his following post *Wounded buffalo* (06 April), exuded the same confidence that the MDC-T had won the elections and Zanu-PF could not come to terms with their loss. The other two blogs did not exude any of Cross's confidence and expressed their worries that it was for the first time that presidential election results had taken a long period before being pronounced. At this point arguments by Docter (2010:589) that blogs fill in the information gap and discuss issues the mainstream press ignores are reinforced.

Mhlanga stated that in his home area the people simply did not want Robert Mugabe as their president even for "one more hour and the delay to announce the result was nothing to them but a scheme to cook the people voice" (*Food and elections, 14 April*). He communicated that he had found it unusual that the results had not yet been released and seemed more concerned with the safety of the ballot boxes and also introduced the idea that the delay in the announcement of the results was not genuine. His statement, "Who has been guarding these boxes all this time anyway? Them of course! What is this old man up to?" suggests that he was of the opinion Robert Mugabe had been falsifying the results. His last sentence is a rhetorically posed question, not warranting an answer but emphasizing Mhlanga's belief that while the people awaited their results; the president had tampered with them. His post highlights how the confidentiality associated with the ballot box could have been possibly jeopardized.

### 4.2.3 Runoff elections

Almost five weeks after the Election day, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission on the second day of May 2008, announced that even though Morgan Tsvangirai had the most votes, none of the candidates had received more than 50percent of the votes cast and therefore there was to be a runoff election<sup>8</sup>.The announcement by ZEC could be viewed as another unexpected turn of events in the narratives. The research can conclude that even when the blogs expressed that Zanu-PF would cheat they had been confident that MDC-T would win. Compared to Zanu-PF, the blogs communicate that they preferred Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC-T to be the ones to restore Zimbabwe.

Buckle's letter, (*Never the same again, 03 May*) presented a worried and an uncertain group of citizens who did not believe Morgan Tsvangirai had lost the elections. She communicated her skepticism:

In a country where junior school children have learnt to count, add, subtract and even multiply in millions and now billions in order to survive our collapsed economy, five weeks is insulting and highly suspicious to say the least.

Her remarks scoffed at the ZEC for taking so long to do a job she believed could have been completed in less than five weeks. Like Mhlanga she gave the impression that it is possible that in those five weeks, the vote counting exercises was manipulated in Zanu-PF's favor. Her post also echoes the opinion expressed by Cross that the MDC-T had won the elections. She argued that,

Whatever the MDC decide, the ordinary people of Zimbabwe know one thing: the MDC won the 2008 election.....and their candidate got more votes than Mr Mugabe in the presidential count.

The headline, *Never be the same again*, is a result of Buckle's observations that following the elections, Zimbabwean political landscape had changed. She stated that Zimbabweans had taken initial steps to rid themselves of Zanu-PF for the first time in 28years. Buckle and Mhlanga's sentiments bring to light how through voting, national identity is also projected. To a certain extent, all blog accounts influence their audiences to think that the delay in announcing the results was not as genuine as the ZEC had claimed.

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<sup>8</sup> The Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13)Section 11(03) states: where two or more candidates for president are nominated and after a poll taken in terms of Subsection (2),no candidate receives a majority of the total number of valid votes cast, a second election shall be held within 21 days after the previous election.

Following ZEC's announcement, posts published by Cross and Buckle continued to express their disappointment, however, Mhlanga argued that the March elections were free and fair, (*Breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe 07 July*). His statement is of interest as it followed soon after another, where he gave the impression that the presidential results had been falsified. He argued that, Zimbabweans were supposed to recognize the election outcome as the will and voice of Zimbabweans. Such mixed individual thoughts can be confusing to the reader, however, one must take into account that blogging allows it.

The blogs shift their attention back to the socio-economic situation in the country and reported that Zimbabwe's woes were worsening. They also sounded distraught at the thought of another election. The three reported that the violence was getting worse ahead of the runoff elections. In the post, *Hunting us down* (13 April) Cathy reported that she received reports alleging that Zanu-PF was searching and beating up those that had not voted for them in the initial elections. She also claimed that people were being intimidated into voting for Zanu-PF ahead of the runoff elections. In another post, (*Hold on. Do not be afraid Change is coming, 27 April*) she said,

What a disgraceful insult these 2008 elections have become to the people of Zimbabwe who have suffered so much, lost so much and yet have remained peaceful and turned the other cheek despite the most extreme provocation and deprivation.

The post's headline could be an indication that she was coming out of her sadness to look forward to voting again. Her comments concerning Zimbabweans who 'continue to turn the other cheek at extreme provocation' are taken from the bible, the New Testament<sup>9</sup> in particular. Jesus teaches his followers that when struck on the right cheek one must also give the left. This teaching has been interpreted to mean that when attacked, one must not respond with aggression because revenge is not theirs but for the Lord. The theme of Christianity is a religion often referred to directly and implied in Buckle and Cross's posts.

All the three blogs portrayed a concentrated moment characterized by intense conflict as they reported on new spurts of violent clashes among party supporters especially clashes between the MDC and Zanu-PF supporters. The audiences' interest is aroused further at the news that Morgan Tsvangirai had pulled out of the second election. The three also speculated that the

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<sup>9</sup>For further reading, see **Holy Bible** - King James Version, New Testament. Matthew 5:39 or Luke 6:29.

violence against Morgan Tsvangirai's supporters could have been the reason he withdrew from the contest at the last minute. Such speculations to explain his behavior presented a character that had his supporters' welfare at heart. The three blogs' accounts of his withdrawal, imprisonment and torture at the hands of Zanu-PF perhaps serve to portray him as a hero. According to Miller (2000:28) the media expose readers to significant military victories and defeats that have occurred such that we can identify with the people who acted at those moments and expropriate their deeds as our own. Although the blogs expressed disappointment at Morgan Tsvangirai's decision to withdraw, the reader is made to feel the decision was a sacrifice taken at the expense of his political career to save people from being harmed. This would also make the reader think of him as a hero, putting people first before himself.

Responding to the news of Morgan Tsvangirai's withdrawal, Mhlanga suggested that the elections be postponed until the nation had calmed down and Morgan Tsvangirai gives an explanation of why he had pulled out of the presidential race. On the other hand, Cross urged the people to keep the faith and be determined to fight until Zanu-PF fled from the battlefield (*Now what? 26 June*). The headline was chosen in line with the news that Morgan Tsvangirai had pulled out of the runoff elections, it suggests that he could have been baffled about who he would vote for since he had indicated that Morgan Tsvangirai was his preferred candidate.

Contrary to her jovial mood in her pre-election posts, Buckle's following post *Blanket of fear* (22 June), stated that the intimidation and violation of the locals by Zanu-PF had made it obvious who to vote for. She gives the impression that people were being forced to vote for Robert Mugabe and would abide because they feared for their lives. According to the Marxist approach, the power apparatus of a nation extends to the repressive and ideological state apparatus. Zanu-PF's use of force on citizens to gain votes and remain in power can be said to be repressive. Buckle depicted a picture of a crushed and sullen Zimbabwean population and the miserable tone she employed in this particular post set the tone for most of the letters she posted ahead of the second polls.

She described the 27<sup>th</sup> of June in the following manner, "It was ten past six in the morning, the sun was hardly up and a cold sheet of frost lay across gardens and along roadsides" (*Four against hundreds, 29 June*). This description is a sharp contrast to the one she provided to the reader depicting the 29<sup>th</sup> of March as a beautiful sunny day. She depicted a cold and dull day

which she claimed was a dark day in history. She informed her readers that there was no excitement or expectations among the voters and as a result they saw no need to even talk about the possible results. Again, Buckle's description of nature corresponded with the voters' moods. The cold and the almost absent sun mirrored the miserable people. She communicated how sad she was that the elections had turned out with Robert Mugabe as the president.

Mhlanga expressed his opinion that Zimbabwe should not have gone ahead with the runoff elections and urges all Zimbabweans to reject the validity of the results. He rationally gave out ten reasons why people were not supposed to accept Robert Mugabe as president based on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June results. In support of his opinion, he even provided the following scenario:

If I was taking a 100m race with a challenger and they put their foot in a mice hole, fell down and broke their ankle, I would not be proud of the medal if after checking the race field I discover that indeed they put their foot in the mice hole, I would call for quality maintenance of the track field and take on my challenger one more time (*Breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe, 07 July*).

Like Buckle, he sounded resigned to the idea that Mugabe would be president and called the situation, a political mess that Zimbabweans enjoyed to create. He seemed to blame the Zimbabweans for Mugabe's election into presidency and also suggests that this was a habit they were fond of even though he does not explain how he came to this conclusion.

Cross on the other hand, remarked that if the elections were not a significant event, they would make a "fine story for a farce". Unlike Buckle and Mhlanga, he did not resign himself into accepting that Mugabe was the Zimbabwean president again. He expressed his hopes that the African Union would intervene and resolve the crisis. The identity of Zimbabwe as a sovereign state is tested as the blogs suggested that the global world could have influenced or forced Robert Mugabe to step down. Nhema and Zeleza (2008:45) state that African countries, under the unilateral intervention, were to review each other's performance on good governance in an effort to become each other's keepers. However, the two scholars emphasize that having been reviewed; a state is not forced to adopt any of the suggestions.

Thus far, the research has analyzed posts from before the election, the election and the runoff elections. According to Krippendorff (2004:46) content analysis makes inferences as to what was said, how it was said, to whom, and with what possible effects. While a number of issues were

identified, there are some that were mentioned several times in these blogs and Zimbabwe would therefore be memorable as they formed the basis of discussions concerning this country.

### **4.3 Recurring themes**

#### **4.3.1 The Zimbabwean Crisis**

The blogs used the phrase ‘the crisis in Zimbabwe’ or ‘Zimbabwean crisis’ to broadly refer to the Zimbabwean situation as the word ‘crisis’ means anything from a disaster to an emergency. Even though the blogs used it to describe economic and social problems they mostly used it with reference to the country’s political problems. Other phrases used alternatively with ‘national crisis’ are political mess, political situation, political impasse, political turmoil or complex situation. The blogs used specific phrases such as food crisis, health crisis, water crisis, media crisis, cash crisis and human rights crisis; these are also closely related to the phrase ‘national crisis’ too.

Huria (2008:01) states that the term national crisis is euphemism for failing or fragile states that “have weakened to such an extent that they are unable to provide basic public goods like territorial control, education and healthcare, and legitimate institutions to their people.” For instance, Mhlanga took offense to the former South African president, Thabo Mbeki’s declaration that Zimbabwe was in no crisis. He argued that the death of the rural folk due to hunger surmounted to and even surpassed a crisis. To Cross, the tourism sector’s failure to rake in the millions it used to in the past also surmounted to a national crisis as tourism proceeds used to contribute to the people’s welfare. The school going children’s failure to attend school because their parents could not afford to pay school fees constituted a national crisis to Cathy Buckle. These three different examples show that each blog used the phrase differently to describe any negative situation they identified.

### **4.3.2 Economic sanctions**

Alternatively referred to either as the meltdown, the economic collapse or the economic crisis by the blogs, the term sanctions is contextually used in all three blogs to describe Zimbabwe's inability to sustain itself economically after many of trading partners imposed the sanctions on the country for allegedly failing to observe human rights. It is important to note that this is one of Zimbabwe's identities to emerge from assessing its relationship to other countries. Its identification as a country under sanctions is purely shaped by global trade issues.

The term economic meltdown was used to specifically discuss issues of corruption, low income, unemployment, high inflation, empty shops, and poor banking system, exorbitantly priced goods and exclusion from international markets (economic sanctions). In their discussions, the blogs mainly focused on how poor economic policies had negatively affected Zimbabwe's domestic industry and precipitated the individual's struggle to survive.

### **4.3.3 Zimbabwe as remote**

The posts suggested that Zimbabwe was a remote, undeveloped country. They could have come to this observation after making a comparison of their country with other countries. They complained that the country's low standard of life was a distant outcry to the modern world the posts want Zimbabwe to be. Cross stated that all economic activity had slumped and that there were virtually nonfunctional industries to employ the people and the absence of heavy traffic in the town was proof of that too. It could be that he also measured the life in a town by its heavy traffic. Buckle's complaints were concerned with the 16-hour electricity cuts and water shortages in urban areas and Mhlanga claimed that there was no longer any difference between living in the urban or rural area anymore as wood is the only available source of energy for people to use (*Food and elections, 18 February*). As highlighted by Cox (2007:3148) nations can be identified as a product of modernity, where its industrialization serves to confirm its wealth. Identifying Zimbabwe as remote suggests that the country lacked or abused its resources hence the undeveloped remote look.

Mhlanga could have been of the view that staying in the urban area is one sign of civilization and the rural areas in Zimbabwe were uncivil. He also added a few photographs to his post, one of the

pictures he used features a woman with a huge bucket of water on her head, crossing a make shift bridge. The research is not focusing on image analysis hence the photographs were not studied in depth but it seems Cont Mhlanga used them to support his observations or opinion, that Matabeleland was underdeveloped. This particular blogger's failure to rise above tribal differences and territorial issues defeats the idea of nationhood, according to Bhabha (1994:140).

#### **4.3.4 Drought stricken Zimbabwe**

The blogs labeled Zimbabwe a drought stricken nation and cited inadequate rainfall and the unavailability of food in the country. They described hundreds of hungry people: men, women and children begging for temporary refuge and humanitarian assistance at foreign embassies in the capital city of Harare. One is left with the perception that Zimbabweans were at the brink of death for lack of food. Cont expressed his worry over the decision made by the government to ban nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as people were solely dependent on them as a source of food (*Food and elections, 14 April*). Eddie also raised his concern about the country's falling agricultural standards and reminisced about how Zimbabwe was once recognized as Africa's bread basket but could no longer even provide for its own citizens. The Zimbabwean government was also portrayed as ruthless for intentionally letting people to starve by turning away food donors.

#### **4.3.5 A deserted country**

In addition to being deserted by its international trading partners, the blogs described forced migration, mass desertion from Zimbabwe by its own citizens who they depicted as a desperate population forced to flee because they feared for their lives, lacked food and were unemployed among other reasons. The blogs would also use phrases such as 'the exodus', 'pariah state', 'fleeing citizens', 'forced exile' to discuss the desertion of their country.

One would perceive Zimbabweans were desperately seeking refuge in other peaceful countries or greener pastures. Cont Mhlanga argued that Zimbabwe had nothing to offer its citizens and it was only reasonable that they left the country. Cathy reported that due to the violence breakout she was in no doubt that thousands had fled for other borders and crossed over illegally and legally to stay alive. This gives the impression that Zimbabweans had not initially harbored intentions to migrate but were forced to do so and were even leaving the country by unlawful means. National

identity is concerned with issues of belonging or identifying with a nation. The reader is made to think that Zimbabweans could not have continued to commit or be loyal to their country as there was nothing to hold onto anymore. The posts repeatedly stated that Zimbabwe had been also deserted by its neighbors and international bodies that could have assisted them in ending the crisis. They made repeated calls for international intervention on the Zimbabwean matter. The pleas and expectations of the international community provide another angle from which the construction of Zimbabwean national identity can be discussed. One gets to understand that other states or international bodies can be involved and can contribute to another's welfare and therefore help shape its identity to a certain extent. The posts claimed that their neighbors and the rest of the world had a duty to Zimbabwe and should have pressurized Zanu-PF to either uphold the law or step down. In other words, the posts believed the concerned states supposedly had power and should have exercised it to shape Zimbabwe's state of affairs or practices.

However, the blogs were to later doubt the effectiveness of these international bodies and also relayed their frustrations with the international world for not been forthcoming with the assistance Zimbabwe needed. For example, Eddie Cross described the United Nations as a "lumbering elephant" because he was annoyed with the UN for not treating the Zimbabwean issues urgently (*The end game, 17 May*). The blogs also relayed their dissatisfaction towards then president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki and alleged that he had failed in his role as mediator between the MDC-T and Zanu-PF to a certain extent.

#### **4.3.6 Hostile nation**

The blogs give the impression that Zimbabwe was a hostile and an unsafe destination because the Zimbabweans themselves were not at ease in their own country. The blogs' continuously used words such as 'political bickering', 'mayhem' and 'widespread violence' to describe fights among different party members. The reader could have perceived that Zimbabwe was a terrifying country where its citizens and the government were not tolerant of each other's political party preferences resulting in violent outbreaks, mystified disappearances and even death. Mhlanga alleged that a reliable source had informed him that soldiers had been sent out to every district to terrorize chiefs, head men and village heads to make sure they influence the people to vote for Zanu-PF. On the other hand, Cross uses subtle descriptions to state that people were being harassed and violated. He alleged that Zanu-PF thugs seemed to be free to do their

will and, as a result, a number of people had been hospitalized. Such depictions of brutal acts create the idea that Zimbabwe is a no-go area.

#### **4.3.7 Zimbabwean genocide**

The blogs claim there had been genocide in Zimbabwe following the violence and murders allegedly committed by Zanu-PF. The posts alleged that the Zimbabwean youth were used by Zanu-PF to rape, murder and beat up innocent people. The blogs also used the words ‘massacre and ‘mass destruction’ to describe the genocide. Buckle wrote about reports of “people having burning, molten plastic dripped onto their backs and doctors treating patients who had been whipped with bicycle chains”(*Hunting us down, 13 April*). These graphic posts also described broken limbs, gashed heads that people have been terrified and violated to such an extent they will not voice their opinions. She also mourned at the news of the death of a five year old boy burnt in his family home. Mhlanga informed his readers that a reliable source had informed him that there were soldiers who were terrorizing and invading farms to intimidate people into voting for Zanu-PF, (*What is this old man up to? 04April*). He expressed his fears that the violence could be a repeat of the infamous Matebeleland massacre, known as *Gukurahundi*. Cross implored that people were supposed to understand that the MDC had to withdraw from the second elections because since Morgan Tsvangirai announced that he would stand for the second elections, a nationwide campaign of violence and intimidation had ensued, closing down all democratic space inside Zimbabwe(*What Now, 22 June*).

The blogs’ use of numbers in an escalating pattern when talking about citizens that had been violated is also of interest. Cross stated that, “Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes, tens of thousands have been injured-many with serious injuries, hands and feet amputated, broken limbs, smashed hands.” Buckle also wrote, “More than twenty people are dead, hundreds are injured, thousands have been left homeless and everyone has seen horrific images of people with broken limbs, bloodied, bruised and burnt bodies.” Buckle and Cross did not specify the exact number of how many people have been killed but they raised the alarm among audiences because of their use of generalized statistics to give count of the people their sources alleged had been affected by the violence. Although their source of such news was not ascertained, it could have an alarming effect on the reader.

The study limits itself to events between February and June, the month of the runoff elections. The repeated phrases and words reinforce particular meanings and contribute to how people talk about Zimbabwe. Repetition is crucial to discourse analysis because it tends to highlight particular meanings or particular opinions. The previous chapter presented the argument that language constructs the topic and tends to govern the way audiences would talk about it. By relating their experiences and opinions, the posts produce knowledge on Zimbabwe and how they contribute to their audience's understanding of Zimbabwe before and after the elections. The research has been able to identify the feelings and opinions of the bloggers towards the event itself and how it unfolded. The content analysis allowed for a discourse analysis in the following section of this chapter. Parker (1992:11) states that the statements in discourses can be grouped and given certain coherence insofar as they refer to the same topic.

#### **4.4 Discourse analysis**

##### **4.4.1 Anti-Mugabe discourse**

The narratives conveyed their disappointment in the government alleging it had infringed on their right as citizens to collectively select a leader of their own choice. All blogs at one point or another in their narrations of events claimed Zanu-PF had either forced people to vote for it or manipulated the votes in their favor. The blogs interchangeably used words such as undemocratic, aggressive, anarchy, tyranny, unruly, illegitimate, dictatorship, evil regime, mafia, militia, perpetrators and barbaric to all characterize their government.

Contrary to her jovial mood in her pre-election posts, Buckle's following post *Blanket of fear* (22 June), stated that the intimidation and violation of the locals by Zanu-PF had made it obvious who to vote for. She gives the impression that people were being forced to vote for Robert Mugabe and would abide because they feared for their lives. According to the Marxist approach, the power apparatus of a nation extends to the repressive and ideological state apparatus. Zanu-PF's use of force to gain votes and remain in power can be said to be repressive. Buckle depicted a picture of a crushed and sullen Zimbabwean population and the miserable tone she employed in this particular post set the tone for most of the letters she posted ahead of the second polls.

The blogs emphasized on the importance of equality among citizens, the importance of the ordinary citizens' welfare and also stress that the government should have been the one to protect them. According to the posts, Robert Mugabe and the government have failed the people in this regard and that is why Zimbabwe, as a nation, was not able to realize or enjoy being Zimbabwean. According to Bell and Garret (1998:59), negative opinions about ones' actions follow an evaluative logic based on the opinion giver's best interests. Robert Mugabe is marginalized and constantly portrayed as an unfit political leader because he did not govern Zimbabwe with their interests at heart. The posts present a conflicted relationship between Robert Mugabe and Tsvangirai and the rest of the ordinary citizens. The blogs alleged that Mugabe's ideas did not take their welfare into account.

As a pronounced member of the MDC-T, Cross's posts, display open detest for Robert Mugabe as president and the ruling party Zanu-PF. Name calling is evident throughout the blog as all of his posts refer to Robert Mugabe as a "tyrant", "devil", "small boy" and "thief" among other negative and derogatory names. These names carried emotional overtones that the blog seemed to use with the intention of discrediting Robert Mugabe as a capable president. The post held by Mugabe as president of a nation commands respect and therefore a polite address could have been expected. According to Joseph (2006:68), one's choice of language to describe a subject can be used to determine their attitude towards the subject. Cross seemed to disapprove of Robert Mugabe as president and his style of leadership.

Cross claimed that Mugabe was an unfair ruler who together with a few privileged others in his cabinet was plundering what was left of the country's resources to bank them in overseas accounts. In the introduction of the post, (*The price of tyranny, 19 May*), he shared his observation that people would often highlight the humanitarian crisis and neglect the depletion of the country's resources when discussing the cost of having Mugabe as Zimbabwean president.

He dubbed Mugabe a tyrant arguing that in the past ten years, Zimbabwe's total loss as a result of tyranny exceeded US\$100 billion which to him is "a big price to pay for the ego of one man and his gang of thieves". The word tyranny carries intense and extreme emotional overtones if compared to similar words such as dictator or oppressor that mean about the same thing. His contextual use of the word tyranny gives the reader an idea that Cross believed Robert Mugabe

was an autocratic head of state. Boromisza-Habashi (2010:284) states that to the frustration of many producers and consumers of political discourse, a number of terms such as democracy, genocide, tyranny and war have meanings that appear to be eternally contested. For example use of the word tyranny is associated with oppressive rule and therefore presidents that have been labeled tyrants such as Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi easily come to mind when tyranny is mentioned and the labels help make sense of what the blogs purported Robert Mugabe to be.

The audience could find his allegations ironic considering that one would expect a president to guard a nation's resources for the benefit of its citizens. Cross also referred to Robert Mugabe's associates as his "cronies", to the certain extent that the word 'crony' is fraught with hints of dishonest association or favoritism. It is not as neutral as words such as friends or colleagues that are similar to it. The issue of plundering a nation's resources is a political matter and highlights how citizens believe that national resources, limited as they are, should be shared equally. National resources and their allocation, according to Giddens (1991:15), situates the nation itself as a product of modernity, where wealth is owned and distributed by the dominant class, sometimes to the dismay of its subordinate classes.

He also frequently called Robert Mugabe's government an evil autocratic regime. Cross even associated the Mugabe regime with the Hitler and the Nazi regimes. The history of this regime is well documented and known to have been an oppressive type of governance. Cross harbored no kind words for the ruling party, and actually predicted that the June elections would see to it that they experienced what he described as "a final collapse that will be fast and comprehensive" (*In the heat of the battle, 25 June*). In his confidence, he employed harsh words that make it known to his audience that he enthusiastically looked forward to the end of Zanu-PF rule. New media provides a platform for individuals to express themselves to such an emotional extent. He was also of the idea that its collapse was going to be similar to that of the East German and Soviet Empire, (*In the heat of the battle, 25 June*). He trivialized Mugabe's ability to win the elections and stated that the collapse of his empire would be another well recorded historical event. He sarcastically commented that the Mugabe regime was not even equivalent to the Nazi regime in magnitude because it was pathetic.

Cross's posts also branded Zanu-PF as the mafia. After the MDC-T lost the second round of elections to Zanu-PF, Cross stated that there was no more hope for survival among ordinary citizens since the mafia were back in charge of the capital city of Harare and would commence with the looting (of stores) and the violence they were accustomed to. Stereotyping Zanu-PF as the mafia is of advantage to the blog reader because they catch on quickly to the idea that the ruling party was characterized as a criminal syndicate, corrupt and involved in a number of illegal activities. Cross was negatively portraying the ruling party. His projections can be analyzed in line with Marxist theories that seek to explain how ruling minorities are able to dominate large masses of people, however, one must note that instead of using the ideological state apparatus to hold onto power, Cross implied Zanu-PF used repressive apparatus where instead of consenting, Zimbabweans were coerced into voting for it.

A month prior the March elections, Robert Mugabe had turned eighty four and his birthday could have influenced blog posts to discuss his age and closely link it to his behavior. For instance Cross said that watching Robert Mugabe launch his campaign made him conclude that age really matters because he was no longer a spring chicken. A spring chicken refers to a young chicken but metaphorically refers to a young and therefore lively person. These posts sought to portray Mugabe as old and frail and therefore unable to govern. According to Pollick (2011:03), this metaphoric phrase is commonly used negatively to emphasize one's non youthful status. He states that status refers to the position a person has in a group and the prestige attached to that position. The research concluded that Robert Mugabe's age left him vulnerable to ridicule by the bloggers.

On the other hand, Mhlanga referred to him as the "old man", (*What is this old man up to, 04 April*). Throughout his entire post, he repeatedly asked "What is this old man up to?" The rhetorical question perhaps implied that Robert Mugabe was a mischievous person. This implication is reinforced later in the post, *Breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe (07 July)*. Mhlanga recognized Robert Mugabe's acumen and cautioned that he was crafty and anybody he dealt with would only realize later that they had been cheated. Commenting on the pending negotiations between Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai, he advised the latter to be wary of him as:

He is an intelligent genius, seasoned politician and we cannot take that away from him. If he is given an opportunity to lead any interim (government) rest assured that he will dribble everyone to the finishing line.

The reader is made to visualize Robert Mugabe and other presidential candidates as players in a football pitch. Dribbling is a soccer skill that involves great handling and control of the ball and is often mastered over time. By likening Mugabe to a dribbler, Cont could have been using this simile to inform his audience that instead of negotiating a fair sharing deal, Robert Mugabe would domineer the interim government and be solely in charge of the government. While acknowledging that the man was a veteran in the field of politics, Mhlanga was also issuing a stern warning to other presidential candidates to be cautious as they were dealing with a cunning man who would repeat what he did to ZAPU<sup>10</sup>. An earlier post from Cont Mhlanga sheds more light on this remark. He said the behavior of the president towards the Ndebele tribe led him to conclude that the president hated the Ndebele people (*Vote of death, 18 February*). Cont Mhlanga's claims are not exclusive to him, according to Ranger (2002:289), even in the past, Ndebele identity has had its construction based on being wary of the Shona tribe as they have always equated the Shona identity to Zimbabwe identity. Ranger states that the Ndebele will often issue dire warnings of the dangers of alliance with the Shona. Ranger's assertion would make one think perhaps Cont Mhlanga issued this warning to Tsvangirai as a result of his own wariness of the Shona tribe.

In the post, *Food and Elections* (14 April), Cont Mhlanga states that propaganda had made Robert Mugabe unpopular with the rural people. He made this observation after a visit to Lupane district where he was at that time a councilor. He wrote that, "Rural people hate him. Period. They go to his star rallies for entertainment and to see what the evil leader who has caused them so much hunger and suffering looks like." Seemingly exaggerated, Cont Mhlanga's claims serve to express how openly repulsive some citizens were of Mugabe that year. The reader is made to imagine a severed relationship between a president and his people yet national identity is argued to concern itself with issues of consent, where a nation's subjects express their willingness to be governed (Buzan, 1983:21).

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<sup>10</sup>ZAPU was a militant political party that merged with Zanu-PF under the Unity Accord of 1987. Scholars have argued that ZAPU did not benefit from this merger. For further reading see C. S. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890-1990* (Harare: College Press, 1989).

Thus far, the content analysis has been helpful in making inferences, qualifying the comments and opinions that the blogs expressed. The research has established that the blogs under study offer no outright positive descriptions of Mugabe except for Cont Mhlanga who described him as intelligent and clever but quickly highlighted how his intelligence made him sly. The majority of the posts depict a selfish, manipulative man principally responsible for running Zimbabwe down.

#### **4.4.2 Pro-Tsvangirai discourse**

Following the MDC's split ahead of the 2008 polls, Morgan or Tsvangirai, as the posts refer to him as, became the nominated leader of the other MDC faction known as the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T). However, the blogs refer to his party as the MDC only and the research is to also refer to it as the MDC-T if there is a need to differentiate it from MDC-M. Prior to these particular elections, he had contested in two previous presidential elections and on both times, lost to Robert Mugabe. Pre-election day posts identified him as the strongest contender to Mugabe in the 2008 elections and also tipped him to win. Compared to Robert Mugabe, the posts say relatively little about him even though their general attitude towards him indicated that compared to Mugabe, they held him in high esteem.

Buckle's letters posted before the month of May, are specific that she was not in favor of candidate Robert Mugabe but are also ambiguous, as they did not really specify which candidate she favored. Through deduction, one could have concluded that perhaps Morgan Tsvangirai could have been her preferred candidate. This deduction is only confirmed in her post after the March elections, (*Never the same again, 3 May*), where she insisted that the MDC-T won the 2008 elections and got more votes than Robert Mugabe in the presidential count. She gave this comment after the electoral body declared that there had been no winner. She was adamant that despite the official announcement that there was to be a runoff election, the MDC-T had won implying that they had been cheated of their victory. A post from Cross, *The end game* (17 May), also carried allegations similar to Buckle's. Such claims suggest the illegitimacy of Mugabe's rule.

Compared to the other two, Mhlanga's attitude towards Tsvangirai is not that clear, as he sometimes sympathized with him when the police banned him from holding public campaigns. In the letter *Breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe* (07 July), he pointed out that Morgan Tsvangirai deserved public media exposure and it had been unfair to ban him from holding public campaigns because just like Robert Mugabe, he also had been entitled to the right to use the media to sell his ideas to the people.

#### **4.4.3 Religious discourse**

The posts draw on a religious discourse that heavily leans on Christianity as indicated in the content analysis. Buckle employs the religious discourse to relate how Zimbabweans have been brutalized and remain peaceful at the face of such brutality. She also reported that ever since the elections people had been brutalized and "in God's hands". This statement depicts Zimbabweans as powerless and unable to do anything about their desperate situation and leaving it to God, who is believed to hold more power than the human being. Long-suffering, peace loving and humble are some of the perceived characteristics of Christians. Some of these characteristics are similar to the descriptions the blogs ascribe to Zimbabwean citizens. Subconsciously, the Christian discourse also portrayed Zimbabwean citizens as a passive group, not so proactive when attacked by Zanu-PF youths.

Eddie cross also borrowed from the Christian discourse to liken Mugabe to the devil (*The devil that just will not die, 11 April*). The devil is known to be an evil spirit or force that attacks the godly. The Christian ideology teaches that although hard to conquer, the devil dies when confronted. Chitando (2002:01) argues that as the political and economic climate worsened in Zimbabwe the religious rhetoric became pronounced as people borrowed phrases, catchwords and ideologies from the Christian religion.

The religious discourse is quite evident in most posts. Cross narrated how the police raided his son's church in search of weapons of war and he gave the soldiers the bible and said it was the only weapon present in the church and it brought life and not death (*The price of tyranny, 19 May*). He insinuated that the bible, a Christian artifact, symbolizes life and is a weapon on its own.

Upon receiving the news that Tsvangirai had agreed to take part in the second round of elections, Buckle commented that she was happy that the President-in-waiting was coming home to see for himself the hell his supporters had to endure (*On the roadsides, 10 May*). She held the expectation that Morgan Tsvangirai would win the run-off elections. Buckle used the word hell to describe the difficult situation the MDC supporters were in. The theory on binary oppositions according to Levi Strauss in Fourie (2007:249) teaches that society makes sense of itself through opposites, where the meaning of something depends on its opposite. In order to understand the meaning of hell, one would have to know its opposite, heaven. Buckle also borrows from the discourse of Christianity which teaches that as a form of punishment, hell is where the evil people go to after death.

#### **4.4.4 Economic discourse**

The economic discourse is drawn from the poor banking systems, mining and retail industries that resulted in most companies closing or relocating their businesses to other countries. The short supply of money and the weakness of the Zimbabwean dollar have also been the basis of a number of discussions concerning Zimbabwe. Buckle employed some sarcasm when she suggested that even primary school going children exposed to counting millions of money would have counted the votes faster than the ZEC. Cross on the other hand described how "hundreds upon hundreds of people are crowded outside banks across their country desperately trying to withdraw their money" (*The economic fundamentals, 15 April*).

The economic discourse is encouraged by the release of information by experts who commented on inflation statistics that the blogs pegged at hundred thousand. For instance Buckle stated that in the year 2000 inflation was at 59,3% and by 2008 stood at over a thousand percent, (*No question, 23 March 2008*). It is likely that Cross's background as an economist informed his discussions on the country's GDP, national debt, foreign earnings and export business.

#### 4.4.5 Human rights and democratic discourse

The first section of human rights identifiable in these posts concerns the physiological welfare of the Zimbabwean which covers food and drug provision, destruction of homes, beatings, arrests, torture and even death. The abuse of power by Zanu-PF is argued to have extended to brutality hence the discourse on human rights and the physiological welfare of the people whose homes were burnt down and killed.

For example democratic and humanitarian discourses both inhabit Cont Mhlanga's post. He argued that the violations on Morgan's rights to communicate undermined the nation's democracy. Mhlanga's opinions on individual rights could have been informed by Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The right to communicate and the freedom to associate among others are some of benchmarks used to rate the extent a nation is said to be democratic. To him such unfair practices and intimidation tactics by Zanu-PF already made the elections illegitimate even before the voting day because the thought of a war could have forced some vote against their interests for the sake of peace. The human rights discourse present in this letter takes a different angle from the first, which discussed the right to food, health and shelter.

The blogs discuss the democratic discourse mostly based on issues such as the fairness of the elections. The blogs discuss liberties such as being entitled to one's opinion and freedom of association that every Zimbabwean was supposed to enjoy. The democratic country according to all blogs treats people equally hence their arguments that Morgan Tsvangirai was unfairly treated when he got minimal media exposure, arrested and the police banned his political rallies. On the other hand, Mhlanga's post, *What is this old man up to?* (04 April) shared his opinion that the national democratic space shrunk when violence broke out and Zanu-PF threatened to start a war if Mugabe lost to Tsvangirai in the second elections. They also believed that in a democracy, they would exercise power vested in them to vote and elect a leader of their choice. However voting under duress and rigging of votes are topics that frequently emerge in conversation where Zimbabwean elections are mentioned.

One has to note that the blogs' rigging claims are not unique to this particular election. Cross claimed that the previous election had also been manipulated and Zanu-PF had registered 3 million ghost voters in preparation for the 2008 elections. Such lack of accountability and

transparency by the Zanu-PF led government is also an issue that contributes to the democratic discourse. The blogs sought clarity on a number of electoral policies. One could conclude that the democratic discourse, in particular unfair elections, continues to shadow conversations about Liberal democracy and social democracy are indirectly referred to in the posts. For example the blogs refer to lack of food as impingement on democracy and also refer to tyranny as undemocratic too. Food and tyranny are two different issues but are both used to determine the extent of Zimbabwe's democracy. Looking at the use of the term, democracy is wide a concept and therefore a government can be described as undemocratic on many or different issues. The three blogs believe there was a democracy deficit in the country. Eddie Cross and Cathy Buckle believed Robert Mugabe was entirely to blame for the deficit. The anti-Mugabe rhetoric is quite profound in all the blogs understudy.

The human rights discourse is mostly informed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a country such as Zimbabwe, where even the president has urged parents to educate their children, it comes as no surprise that Buckle and Mhlanga worried that most children had been denied education because their parents could not afford the fees or the children had to travel very long and unsafe distances to their nearest schools. Ironically, Mhlanga also suggested that the villagers regretted the 2005 land redistribution programme as the previous white farmers used to buy textbooks and pay school fees for their children (*Food and elections*, 14 April). They claimed that education was a human right and the government owed it to its citizens to educate them. Buckle discussed education as a right following Mugabe's launch of his party's election manifesto, where she said he emphasized that every child was supposed to attending school. Government teachers on strike, the ridiculous school fees and poor remuneration inform this part of education as a human right no longer attainable.

The human rights and democracy discourses are therefore the most common among all the blogs understudy. Scholars such as Burns (2009:21) emphasize that the Declaration is not a treatise and is therefore not legally binding on states. Burns argues that the Declaration only serves as an inspiration or model for various national bills of rights.

#### 4.4.6 Discourses of resistance

The same themes drawn out in the content analysis can be recognized as reasons why the blogs resisted the idea of Robert Mugabe becoming the Zimbabwean president. The posts relayed feelings of frustration towards their government and cited past events from as far back in 1980 together with recent ones such as poverty, violence and lack of employment as the reason why they were dissatisfied with their government. The blogs indicated that with each year, their confidence in Zanu-PF ideologies was decreasing and as events in the year 2008 worsened, they were prompted by them into action and, as a result, they eyed the presidential elections as an opportunity for them as a nation to redress the issues affecting them.

Through studying these texts, one can concede to ideas by scholars such as Parker (1992:34) that discourse analysis is a tool of inquiry that heightens questions of power relations in a society and therefore researchers must talk of discourse and power in the same breath. The blogs are narrative accounts that help make sense of how Zanu-PF as the dominant ideology in Zimbabwe maintained its dominance. These accounts also highlight to the researcher how narratives can challenge the hegemonic status quo, questioning Zanu-PF's governing style. The research established that the unavailability of medical aid and drugs, empty shops, shortage of money among other problems are the immediate reasons that led to the blogs wanting to change their government. The accumulated and immediate frustrations are linked because the bloggers imply that Zimbabwe is in a rundown state because of past events. The 2008 elections provided an opportunity for them to act (by voting) upon these frustrations and thus they mobilized and urged people to vote against Robert Mugabe.

Buckle's long term frustration towards Robert Mugabe was for being the only man to preside over Zimbabwe since its independence in 1980. Mhlanga's long term frustration with Robert Mugabe and Zanu-PF borders on tribal grounds. He believed Mugabe's policies had always marginalized the Ndebele tribe in favor of his own tribe, the Shona, a dominant group in the country. Cont identified himself with Matebeleland, one of Zimbabwe's eight provinces where the minority group of Ndebele tribe hails. He claimed the Mashonaland area was more developed than Matebeleland because the Unity Accord of 1987 never benefited the majority of the Ndebele as had been expected.

As a result of their frustrations, the blogs articulated the need for Zanu-PF to adopt equality, fairness and recognize human rights which they alleged were not being observed. The development of such ideologies by blogs, alternative media users was to counter Zanu-PF ideologies which were dominant and therefore hegemonic in the country. In seeking to change the social and political practices within Zimbabwe, the posts suggested a shift of power from Zanu-PF to the MDC-T or at least any other party that would be accountable to its people and exercise democracy. The posts encouraged the Zimbabweans not to vote for Robert Mugabe by arousing compassion and action in its audiences. Since the creation of wider social participation by the Internet afforded the blogs an unlimited potential of Zimbabwean readers, it probably sought to facilitate a change to the Zanu-PF hegemonic status quo by repeatedly highlighting the negative consequences to be faced if their fellow citizens voted for Zanu-PF.

Buckle and Cross emphasized on the importance of the people's votes in the 2008 elections and that they were to vote for Morgan Tsvangirai. Buckle's concluding remark (*No question, 23 March*), read, "There is no questioning who to vote for in a few days time. We must vote for ourselves, our children and our physical survival. The time is now; the power is in our hands." She was mobilizing Zimbabweans to unite and vote for themselves, their children and their survival. Perhaps, she recognized the importance of family hence she appealed to the paternal and maternal instincts of her audience to get them to vote. She sounded determined and convinced that through voting, Zimbabweans would have been ensuring themselves of control over their government. One can detect an underlying attitude of logic fused with persuasion as Buckle implored that it would be wise for the people not to vote for Robert Mugabe because he was responsible for their economic slump and the death of many. Her encouragement invoked a feeling of excitement and she viewed voting as a very decisive moment.

According to Brown and Held (2011:437), social actors belong to the same community of fate if they feel some sense of responsibility for one another's fate and want to deliberate together about how to respond collectively to the challenges facing the community. As indicated in the literature framework of this research, blogs are personal diaries but created with the assumption that it has readers. The blogs offer its readers historical information on Zimbabwe's past ills such as the *Gukurahundi*, white farm invasions, *Murambatsvina* maybe as evidence of Robert Mugabe and

Zanu-PF's evil nature. Voting was precisely the collective action the blogs encouraged in its readers.

Mhlanga argued that based on the June elections, Mugabe's legitimacy as president should have been rejected. He urged all political formations, NGOs, Central Statistics Office and all Zimbabweans to reject the validity of the June elections and the swearing in of President Mugabe. He even suggested a second presidential runoff election as he was of the opinion that the first electoral process had been flawed. He urged for civil society to unite and reject Robert Mugabe as president. He used capital letters on words such as 'invalid' and on phrases like 'not free and fair' to draw attention and emphasis to his call for collective action against Robert Mugabe.

Cross reported that while the global world had also declared the June results null and void, the local struggle also continued virtually. He identified the Internet, cameras, and clandestine visits by the international media as some of the weapons used in the ensuing fight, (*In the heat of the battle, 25 June*). He could have figuratively identified the media as a weapon because he ascribed to the common thought that new media provides a platform where individuals like him can also cast their protestant views and discredit Robert Mugabe and the Zanu-PF. He understood that the Internet was also a weapon, used to counter information Zanu-PF was producing. Cross's post also interpellated the audience as soldiers in a war. He wrote, "If you are not already in the fight, think about what you can do to help us win this battle." Eddie Cross' post mobilized other Zimbabwean citizens into participation by using terms such as the fight and the battle that tend to be associated with comradeship. He also provided a cell phone number on which people can contact him. Phone calls and face-to-face meetings go beyond online communication as they are considered as direct communication and perhaps more effective in mobilization than online discussion boards, Hackett and Carroll, (2004:63).

Buckle reported that the Zimbabwean crisis was at its peak, her post made a desperate plea to the international world and bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) for help needed urgently to save lives, (*Simply sit down, 05 July*). She wrote that by speaking out against the violence before the polls, Zimbabwe's neighbors were making them hopeful that justice would prevail (*Blanket of fear, 22 June*). Mhlanga also had expected that the AU, UN and

the SADC would play a more effective role to ensure the fairness of an election in Zimbabwe, (*Breaking the political impasse in Zimbabwe, 07 July*). Eddie Cross on the other hand, suggests that African leaders were not taking action against Mugabe's quashing of democracy. He said their failure to take action against him failed Zimbabweans and if African leadership was to fail them again on the 27<sup>th</sup> June, it was to be a step too far for Zimbabweans to ignore.

The bloggers' expectations of these bodies emphasize how in globalization, nations are no longer rooted in geographical places. The bloggers themselves are able to interact with people or make appeals to the global world, proving that new media disregards issues of territory in national identity. At the same time, the existence of bodies such as the UN and SADC that can intervene in the Zimbabwean situation shows that a nation's identity is also shaped by a flow of ideas from other countries. Zimbabwe's interactions with countries such as Botswana and South Africa, which remains a mediator between MDC and Zanu-PF, are evidence that nations can shape and reshape themselves in these interactions.

All three blogs evidently encouraged Zimbabwean citizens to vote against Robert Mugabe and were to a large extent biased towards Morgan Tsvangirai. The use of pronouns like 'we'/'our' and 'us' are fairly evident in all blogs, the research concluded that their use was perhaps essential to mobilization as they intended to make the reader realize that the blogger was identifying with them and also considered themselves a part of the suffering of the ordinary Zimbabwean. Sentences such as 'We are fed up.', 'Let us go and vote', 'We all know Morgan Tsvangirai won the 2008 elections,' are littered in the posts, maybe to forge a sense of belonging. The research has established that new media affords the individual a platform and opportunity to openly state what they think, in this specific case, the blogs shared their opinions of the Zimbabwean situation and caucused against Robert Mugabe.

According to Parker (1992:34), discourses are related to power and have been used to either reinforce or attack institutions in society. This research found that as members of the minority in Zimbabwe, the bloggers employed discourses that justified their action to resist the dominant discourses of Zanu-PF. The blogs' democratic and humanitarian issues can be identified as discourses used to counter to Zanu-PF ideologies. Counter discourses such as these, functioned in an ideological manner not only to contest Zanu PF ideologies but to also expose how the

dominant ideology of Zanu-PF was competing with others in the public sphere realm. This confirms Dahlgren's argument that the Internet allows the establishment of different opinions by different publics (2001:152).

The themes highlighted in this research are the most visible a reader can easily conceive from their interaction with the blog posts. The research observed that from these texts Zimbabwean negative identities were drawn out; perhaps the bloggers' authorial intentions were to discredit Zanu-PF as ruling party and Robert Mugabe as Zimbabwean president. In most cases these are closed texts as they are to a larger extent explicit in their intentions. Unlike open texts, closed texts limit the number of ways one would interpret it. The readers' interpretations of the posts are limited as it seems the blogs aimed at making voters resist voting for Robert Mugabe. The research has noted with interest how the blog posts from buckle and cross fully illegitimize Robert Mugabe's presidency while legitimizing Morgan Tsvangirai. This is seemingly profound in the pro-Tsvangirai and anti-Mugabe discourses where even after the last runoff posts; one is left with a strong conviction that Tsvangirai was the rightful president.

The bloggers can be identified as political actors, circulating information and sharing their views on the Zimbabwean issues in an unrestrained manner. They presented their readers with an analysis of each presidential candidate's possible contribution to Zimbabwe. Through reminiscing and predicting future events they were able to measure Zanu-PF and Robert Mugabe's success of governance by examining his policies. Although personal, their analyses of events are therefore crucial in providing different interpretations of the country's national identity in terms of its material wealth, peace and justice, stability among others.

However it is essential to note that in discourse analysis, an author's intentions must not be allowed to dominate the analysis as it is difficult to ensure the authorial intent even in closed texts. Even the accuracy of the texts in discourse analysis is not supposed to dominate discourse analysis. According to McDonald (2003:23), the analysis of discourse pays little attention to these questions of authorial influence, choosing instead to examine what is being communicated and in whose interests.

Discourse analysis neglects issues of authorial influence yet blogs are often argued to have little or no reputation to protect and as such the credibility of the blogs under investigation could also

be questionable. Even though the reliability of their sources is not verifiable, the blog posts, unmediated by gatekeeping structures provided an insight for their users to understand how the Zimbabwean elections unfolded. According to McDonald (2003:17), reality remains profoundly unknowable since our only access to it is through the constructionist prism of discourse and it is therefore pointless in the Foucauldian view, to argue about the accuracy of any representation of the real world. The blogs shape or limit the way in which people would talk about Zimbabwe. According to Fairclough (1995:55) language use or any text is always simultaneously constitutive of social identities. The blogs make a contribution towards the knowledge that people have on Zimbabwe and its presidential election in the year 2008.

At this stage, the research has to bring back the initial definition of the public sphere by Habermas and its revisions. On the Internet, the blogs expressed their interests and published their opinions on matters of personal and public interest in an unrestricted manner. However, the research has concluded that the swearing in of Robert Mugabe as president in 2008 is evidence of the fact that despite the blogs' counter ideas and political mobilization, transformation of opinions into decisions (voting), arguably remains limited. It is also important to take note of arguments that suggest new media was influential in the formation of Government of National Unity<sup>11</sup> (GNU) formed in February 2009 between Tsvangirai and Mugabe. Scholars such as Chigora and Guzura (2011) and Matyszak (2009)<sup>12</sup> have since argued that although a milestone, the GNU has not been effective as economic sanctions, drought and violence continue to characterize Zimbabwe even after its formation.

Chapter two of this research extensively discusses the emergence of an alternative public sphere from online interactions. The blogs increased the visibility of Zimbabwe's political problems and at the same time offer their audiences a platform for interaction. All three blogs ensure that there is feedback to their posts. They use reciprocal functions of the Internet such as quick links.

Each blog uses the quick link facility in order to enhance their interactivity by exposing their readers to other sites that share their opinions. These sites are also their sources of news. These

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<sup>11</sup> The Government of National Unity was formed in February 2009, seven months after the elections. For further reading, see scholars, Chigora and Guzura (2011) The politics of the Government of National Unity and power sharing in Zimbabwe: Challenges and prospects for democracy. <http://www.academicjournals.org/ajhc/PDF/pdf/2011/Mar/Chigora%20and%20Guzura.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See Matyszak (2009) Power dynamics in Zimbabwe's inclusive Government. [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/demgg/rau\\_power\\_dyamics\\_govt\\_090915.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/demgg/rau_power_dyamics_govt_090915.pdf)

relations that the blog form between the website and other websites can be viewed as a form of coalition. Buckle's links include Cross, Human Rights Forum, SW Radio Africa, The Standard and ZW News among other websites. Cross's links include Zimbabwe Information Center, MDC (before the split) and theNew Partnership for Africa's Development(NEPAD) websites. Buckle and Mhlanga also have other people's opinions that feature in their blogs. The blogs' use of such interactive functions enhances their interactivity by allowing for its readers to correspond with them. However, the effectiveness of the online counter public sphere remains obscured. The adaptive interactive features of the blogs could also have been important in the mobilization of the people to resist Robert Mugabe as the president.

Even though the research was mostly focused on content from the bloggers' accounts, it also assessed content from the public platforms. Public platforms in blogs would allow for interaction between the blogger and his/her audience as well as communication among the audience itself. According to Deuze (2001:27) the level of adaptive interactivity of website enhances public connectivity because surfers of that particular site can respond to any news posted in the blog.

The public platforms the blogs understudy offer are quite limited. Gadzikwa (2009:63) argues that websites that publicize feedback from their content tend to encourage debate among the readers compared to those that do not offer such functions. Eddie Cross has a guestbook, which his audiences signed into and posted their comments which can be easily accessed and viewed by anyone who logs into his blog. However, with the exception of a few comments, the rest of the feedback was from audiences who were either sympathetic or agreed with his opinions. Cathy Buckle's blog only offered her readers an email address, [cbuckle@mango.zw](mailto:cbuckle@mango.zw), where they can communicate with her. Her blog can be classified as a one-to-many model of communication which is mainly a news site for her to share information and publicly display any correspondence she has with her audiences.

Cont Mhlanga's blog seemed to seek out likeminded people. He identified himself as an artist and as a result his posts mostly appealed to artists and those who had any readers with any interest in art. He introduces the reader to a movement he calls *Voices For Change* and explains that the purpose of the movement is involved with the production of protest art and it needs financial support from the reader through funding. As discussed in Chapter two, social activism

manifests itself in a number of ways in a society and protest art is one of them. Such art is used to convey messages of displeasure and promotes the expression of counter ideas. He states that;

In this day of media oppression in Zimbabwe, it is critical to support this link to the outside world for protest art. This online vault of protest artwork will serve as eyewitness testimony to the abuses of the Zimbabwean people by its own government for years to come.

He also extended his blog to the reader by inviting them to contribute and share ideas among themselves as artists in a link dubbed *Voices for Change* hosted by Google Groups, a service that supports discussion groups and is offered by search engine, Google. One has to send a request and be accepted as a member or to comment on his posts. The blog also advises that Cont Mhlanga reserves the right to make one a member of his Google group discussion which can only be viewed by its members.

However this research would like to conclude that the blogs are largely opinion based, with each blogger expressing their own and allowing little room for comments different from theirs. Such sites are conducive for mobilization as they limit opinion formation to one particular one. The blogs posts largely communicated anti-Robert Mugabe discourse. While promoting mobilization, this also negatively affects the online public sphere as diversity of information is limited. According to Hoffner and Rehkoff (2011:738), people that spend so much time talking with likeminded individuals may increase their perception of bias. Debate which is essential in the public sphere is arguably nonexistent when likeminded people commune online because they only reinforce each other's thoughts.

Despite alternative media's effectiveness in transforming opinion, one has to note that the interplay of different political ideas about Zimbabwe and its leadership not only produced diverse information to help make the voter come to their decision but it also brought forward a number of different interpretations from which the virtual reader, with no prior knowledge of Zimbabwe, also used to construct their understanding of Zimbabwe. The blogs helped their audiences make sense of Zimbabwe. They mostly made use of the social genre and interpellated their readers as citizens interested in collectively determining their governance. Their narratives communicated that they had withdrawn their consent to be governed by Zanu-PF.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The content and discourse analysis of the posts sought to answer the research questions the research presented in its first chapter. Through a content analysis, the research was able to measure the perceptions of Zimbabwe that the blogs produced.

The national identity discourses drew upon Christianity, universal human rights and economic discourses among others. The blogs' discussions on oppression and abuse are articulated in the religious discourse which is also intertwined with the human rights and identity discourses. The relation of one discourse to another confirmed the argument by Parker (2002:43) that one discourse is shaped by other discourses. The blogs often referred to the issue of democracy and human rights at each turn in their accounts thus I concluded that both these discourses can be argued to be limitless principles referred to at any given issue because the blogs cited many different contexts in which either democracy was not served or where their rights were impinged upon.

The bloggers repeated a number of descriptions and as a result made them quite visible to their readers. The research analyzed texts for repeated accounts influential in constructing counter discourses. Drought, violated bodies and economic sanctions, self-exile would have been influential in shaping the manner in which people talked about Zimbabwe as the texts constantly discussed them. As part of its findings, the research listed what it identified as the most influential descriptions that people were likely to memorize and associate with Zimbabwe. However, the research could barely find positive descriptions as the bloggers negatively portrayed their country, and used this as their basis to discredit Robert Mugabe and create resistance among voters.

The chapter's use of content and discourse analysis has been useful in reflecting how new media, offered the blogs a platform to unfetteredly scrutinize and write self opinionated pieces on the 2008 elections. Through data analysis, the research was therefore able to draw out the possible common Zimbabwean national identities readers could have conceived from their interactions with the blogs. Even under the GNU, the identities drawn out of this discourse analysis have remained and are likely setting precedence for most enquiries on the country. The following

chapter concludes the entire research and highlights how its findings can be recommendations for further research where national identity is concerned.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, I discuss new media and highlight how its characteristics afford bloggers an opportunity to express their personal thoughts to the public. The dissertation sought to understand the blogging phenomenon and explore its contribution to understanding national identities by outlining various concepts of national identity and its construction. I conducted a content and discourse analysis of the blogs to explore the language patterns and trends that could be used to interpret Zimbabwean national identity. To conclude the entire research, this chapter discusses findings from the previous chapter to establish if the data analyzed successfully answered the questions posed at the beginning of the research. The chapter will finally present recommendations for future research on new media and blogging.

The coverage of the 2008 election period even by personal bloggers attests to two facts, first, how nations are conceived as symbolic frames constituted by ways of talking and thinking about the nation and secondly, the idea that the Internet sanctions different opinions to compete in the public domain. The continuing plurality of assorted opinions online has produced diverse claims that can be identified in the production of Zimbabwean identities. Cathy Buckle, Cont Mhlanga and Eddie Cross continue to express their personal opinions on their blogs to their local and global audiences. Their blogs and let alone their self-sanctioned content is evidence that the Net offers opportunities through which one can understand Zimbabwe to have been like in 2008.

The main question the research sought to answer was concerned with the opportunities offered by new media in understanding national identity. The research was able to identify the Internet as a resource whose interactive functions are quite influential as they allow for the publication of unmediated user generated content. The blogs were able to post their accounts of events surrounding the polling day as they witnessed it and were only subjected to gate-keeping at an individual level. Such free reign allowed them to exercise the freedom to write as they pleased and to give their take on contested issues of Mugabe's leadership, drought, violence and shortage of basic goods among others.

Their inability to use or express their views on mainstream mediums makes the Internet an alternative to mainstream media. The inaccessibility of mainstream media by its citizens brings to the forefront issues such as unequal access of the media and the impingement of freedom of

expression, where as the Internet is unrestricted in this regard. Compared to traditional media, there is minimal censorship on the Internet. One of the major issues to arise in the research is that new media is a resource that offers the minority an opportunity to narrate events as they experienced them and thereby constructing their own versions of Zimbabwean identities.

The second question in this research was concerned with how these three blogs offered public platforms for interpretation of Zimbabwean national identity. This dissertation has focused on the personal narrative and its contribution to national identity construction. It drew focus on how national identity is grounded in quotidian practices; this is in comparison to the dramatized national identities that nations are often identified with. Personal narratives play a role in the way Zimbabwe or any other country for that matter is perceived or becomes understood because they tend to offer their readers insights into their daily activities and experiences in the country. This also highlights the assumptions of critical theory that identity is a social phenomena to emerge in relation with others and social structures. The dissertation acknowledges that there is a possibility that the blogs like any other form of narrative selectively produces or falsifies information. However, the previous chapter has shown that the Foucauldian view argues that ethical issues of accuracy, bias or objectivity in discourse analysis are pointless because versions of reality remain profoundly unknowable since our only access to it is through the constructionist prism of discourse (Law, 2004:129). Biased or not, the blogs offer their readers stories which when they read, they become familiar with Zimbabwe in 2008 and beyond, thus confirming Law's statement that discourse surely sets limits to what is knowable.

The third question was, "What are the discourses of national identity employed by the blogs?" I observed some uniformity of the discourses present in each blog even though there were some slight differences. In its initial chapters the research highlighted that the bloggers are ordinary people and the previous chapter exposes how as ordinary people they appropriate the discourse of national identity in their accounts. As ordinary people, their narrative accounts drew upon their day to day experiences, hence human rights and the economic discourses that have to do with their well-being were mostly employed. The research analyzed this data as information produced within the context of the elections, therefore an underlying political discourse was forever present in the other discourses the bloggers employed to discuss the unfair distribution of food and abuse of state resources.

This dissertation has focused on blogging as an extension of the personal narrative and therefore its contribution to national identity construction. Blogging draws focus on how national identity is grounded in quotidian practices; this is in comparison to the dramatized national identities that nations are often identified with. Personal narratives continue to play a role in the way Zimbabwe or any other country for that matter is perceived or becomes understood because they tend to offer their readers insights into their daily activities and experiences in the country. This also highlights the assumptions of critical theory that national identity is a social phenomenon to emerge in relation with other nations, the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by members of the European Union confirms the assumption.

The dissertation also affirmed a number of key points that have been highlighted in theories of identity. For instance the post-structuralist approach that emphasizes that identity is socially constructed. In sharing with the readers their daily activities, the blogs created perceptions of Zimbabwean identity that is enmeshed in their everyday life. Social practices basically refer to the way people live and blogs shared with their audiences how they found food to be expensive and how they also intended to use their votes. The idea is that every day experiences are never the same among a society and therefore the Internet allows for each person to share their experiences. As revealed in the previous chapter each blog told of its own experiences. According to McQuail (2000:355) the diversity in content permitted by the Internet is a true or sufficient reflection in media of the varied reality of experiences in society. The production of messages within the economic and social and political contexts of the bloggers is evident in their narratives.

The bloggers repeated a number of descriptions and as a result made them quite visible to their readers. The repeated accounts of seemingly starving people, violated bodies and economic sanctions would have been influential in shaping the manner in which people talked about Zimbabwe. As part of its findings, the research listed what it identified as the most influential descriptions that people were likely to memorize and associate with Zimbabwe. However, the research could barely find positive descriptions as the bloggers negatively portrayed their country. The content analysis revealed an overwhelming uniformity of national identity discourses the blogs used in order to describe the Zimbabwean elections negatively. The dissertation acknowledges that there is a possibility that the blogs like any other form of

narratives selectively produce or falsify information. However, the previous chapter has shown that the Foucauldian view argues that ethical issues of accuracy, bias or objectivity in discourse are pointless because versions of reality remain profoundly unknowable since our only access to it is through the constructionist prism of discourse. However, biased or not the blogs offer their readers stories which when they read they become familiar with the country.

The national identity discourses drew upon Christianity, universal human rights and economic discourses among others. The blogs' discussions on oppression and abuse can be realized or seen as articulated in Christian discourse is interrelated with the human rights and identity discourses. The relation of one discourse to another confirmed the argument by Parker (2002:49) that one discourse is shaped by other discourses. The blogs often referred to the issue of democracy and human rights at each turn in their accounts. I thus concluded that both these discourses can be argued to be limitless principles referred to at any given issue because the blogs cited many different contexts in which either democracy was not served or where their rights were impinged upon.

The impact of new media and blogging on society is that it has transformed the nature of politics and elitist ideologies have to compete with other ideologies side to side. The suppression of views conflicting with elitist views is minimized on the Internet and as a result national identity constructions have also undergone similar transformation, it has moved from being exclusive to be inclusive to a certain extent. The World Wide Web has resulted in the distribution of material that makes the research conclude that exclusive constructions of national identity are also in competition with other interest groups in society.

Another key point highlighted by the research concerns the issue of how personal identity is a political issue that plays a significant role in the construction of national identity. Chapter Two of the dissertation quoted Castells(1997:96) who argued that one's personal identity should have some correspondence with their national identity in order for the individual to accept it as national. The individual's failure to find themselves represented in what is said to be their national identity is often the cause of resistant behavior. The research was able to identify that the personal narrative format created spaces of resistance, fighting dominant ideologies such as those of Zanu-PF.

In line with arguments from scholars such as Fraser (1992) and Negt and Kluge (1993), the research also concluded that bloggers can be identified as belonging to counter publics as they identify themselves as a people outside the dominant class and have opinions that counter the dominant class ideologies too. The Internet is a platform that has allowed the emergence of other public spheres to operate at the same time as that of the dominant class. They vehemently opposed the idea of Robert Mugabe becoming president by questioning and challenging the status quo, and argued that the MDC-T was a worthwhile alternative to Zanu-PF. This confirms that information availability on the Internet, precisely discourses as social practices, is inscribed in the play of power and also helps to transform the status quo through mobilization.

Thus far I have focused on how the research was able to answer questions posed in its initial chapter. While the study has been focusing on the opportunities the Internet provides for understanding national identity, a number of issues also surfaced, presenting other possible angles in which blogging can be understood.

One issue to surface in the research is that one characteristic of the public sphere as discussed in Chapter Two, is ample provision of information to the public in the first place. The research concluded that the Internet has enabled the documentation of vast information which audiences may use to familiarize themselves with the country but this specific research also noted the homogeneity of content in the blogs understudy. The blogs under study are products of marginalized groups who have found a platform to freely express themselves. They express their opinions, vent out their anger, throw accusations and even engage in name-calling. The descriptions found in the blogs are largely negative and depict Zimbabwe as a country in conflict. In this regard, the extent of content diversity associated with blogs can be analyzed for homogeneity or heterogeneity. Further research can investigate the extent to which blogging really permits the diversity of debate and opinion formation.

One can also explore the fact that use of the Internet in particular countries remains to a larger extent exclusive and will therefore have a number of bearings on the type electronic public sphere to emerge from it. Research concerning the exclusivity or inclusivity of the electronic public sphere can be insightful in understanding the public sphere.

The other issue to arise from research findings is that the blogs offer limited interactive functions. While the research was focused on deciphering interpretations of Zimbabwean national identity from blog posts, it realized that the absence or presence of interactive functions such as discussion boards can be essential in providing a researcher with valuable insights to Zimbabwean identities (Gadzikwa 2009:67).

In conclusion, the dissertation as a whole presented insight into how individuals using the Internet are able to appropriate certain discourses to narrate their lived experiences, political interests and these portrayed their national and power struggles. Although this research is specific to Zimbabwe, it would be of interest to other scholars because it provides data that even when argued to be from sources with limited perspectives it highlights the role played by personal narrators in the construction of any country's identity as the research will contribute useful understanding of the manner in which people can blog or approach blogs. Blogging serves some purpose in the documentation of national events and the practice of national identity construction at a personal level.

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