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The nation under scrutiny: A post-colonial critique of selected editorial cartoons in *Isolezwe*

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Author:
Sizwe Z. Dlamini[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of African Languages, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Sizwe Dlamini,
sizwed@uj.ac.za

There is a dearth of research on cartoons in the African indigenous languages of South Africa. This article seeks to fill this gap by analysing isiZulu cartoons from a post-colonial point of view. The study adopts systematic visuo-textual analysis as a qualitative research technique because cartoons are the primary sources of data collection and analysis. These cartoons are composed by Mqapheli Mngadi, and they are published in the isiZulu newspaper *Isolezwe*. Through the application of the post-colonial theory, Barthes' semiotic theory, and Aristotelian rhetoric theory, the findings demonstrate pertinent post-colonial issues depicted in the selected cartoons. These issues are economic, social, and political in nature. They range from issues such as gender-based violence, flux identities, difficult economic living conditions, unemployment, racism, corruption, and leadership concerns in government. These issues are depicted creatively through literal and figurative visual representation that are marked by caricature, metaphor, and personification. They are also depicted through satire as a persuasive technique, which has been determined to be effective in appealing to the audience's logical reasoning, emotions, and character.

Contribution: This article contributes to research on the decolonisation of knowledge production and representation in African media and popular culture. The article examines several perspectives on the role of visual media in shaping and expressing indigenous worldviews and experiences. Furthermore, by connecting fields such as visual communication, linguistics, rhetoric, media studies, and postcolonial theory, it opens up new avenues for critical engagement with indigenous language media while emphasising the intellectual and cultural significance of cartoon art in contemporary South African society.

Keywords: editorial cartoons; post-colonial approach; semiotics; rhetoric theory; nation.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyse isiZulu editorial cartoons through the lenses of post-colonial theories. The study focuses on the isiZulu editorial cartoons of Mqapheli Mngadi that are published daily in the isiZulu newspaper entitled *Isolezwe*. Although Mngadi's cartoons cover a wide variety of themes such as sport and music for instance, this article focuses on cartoons that highlight social, economic and political post-colonial issues that are pertinent in South Africa. The cartoon genre in the South African indigenous languages has received relatively less academic attention, and this may be attributed to the dissatisfying development of this genre (Dlamini 2024:15).

Mqapheli Mngadi is a cartoonist who consistently draws cartoons in isiZulu. His cartoons became the focus of this study because, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, less scholarly attention has been given to cartoons designed in South African languages, and how they serve as visual artefacts that represent social, economic and political complexities in the South African context. While most of the studies on cartoons focus on dominant languages such as English, this article focuses on isiZulu editorial cartoons that have more data available in comparison to other South African indigenous languages. These cartoons are published daily in *Isolezwe*, which made them readily available and accessible.

Most of the studies on cartoons focus predominately on dominant languages like English. It is also the case when it comes to similar studies that opt for post-colonial critique to analyse cartoons. For instance, Kodabux (2024) attempts to contribute to the study of humour in African political cartoons from Mauritius by applying the post-colonial translation theory. It is argued in this

study that political cartoonists are translators of ideas about foreign affairs. Hammett (2010), on the other hand, examines the potential of political cartoons to contribute to post-colonisation of knowledge. Other related studies, such as those by Swain (2012); Al-Momani, Badarneh and Migdadi (2017); Sani et al. (2012); Imperial (2020); Hasanah and Hidayat (2020); Benoit et al. (2001); Mwetulundila and Kangira (2015); Ghilzai (2020) and Prendergast (2019) are examples of studies that focus mainly on post-colonial issues by means of political cartoons. However, most of them are grounded in semiotics and discourse analysis and do not necessarily take a post-colonial approach. Although this article also touches on semiotics, it is post-colonial in approach and focuses on how semiotics and rhetoric theory complement this approach.

It is evident from the brief overview of literature above that there is still a gap to analyse South African languages cartoons by means of a post-colonial approach. By focusing on Mqapheli Mngadi's cartoons, it was evident that they depict post-colonial issues. However, no study that focused on this aspect of the cartoonist's work could be found. With this article, the author tries to bridge the gap.

Theoretical framework

This article is primarily informed by post-colonial theory. However, because editorial cartoons are visual representations, Barthes' semiotic theory and Aristotelian rhetoric theory were added as supplementary theories. It is believed that these added theories will contribute to the effective analysis of data. The following will provide an overview of each of these theories.

Post-colonial theory

The post-colonial theory is an interdisciplinary scholarly field that is interested in investigating the impact of colonialism on a region's society, culture, history and politics. Although post-colonialism generally observes the impact of colonialism towards the former colonised regions, this school of thought also considers the effect of colonialism on issues of gender and status (Cuddon 2013:551). Similarly, Hamadi (2014:39) posits that post-colonial studies attempt to trace European colonialism and how it informed the various aspects of the colonised people's lives. The assumption proposed here is that the current observation of people's lives and the different layers of societal structures are a possible mirror of the influence of colonialism. The topic of identity is also central to post-colonial studies. This approach encourages reflection on past and present identities.

One of the objectives of the post-colonial theory is to investigate how issues of culture, history, politics and identity are depicted in formerly colonised regions. Motloung (2023:21) argues that different genres can be used as tools to depict post-colonial authenticity and issues. They are mediums that are utilised to teach and expose the truth to people. In this article, cartoons are the medium that is used to depict post-colonial issues. Analysing these cartoons by using the post-colonial theory unpacks how post-colonial issues are mirrored in this specific genre.

Barthes' semiotic theory

In its basic definition, semiotics is the study of signs and their meaning. Derived from the Greek root *sema* or the word *semion*, meaning 'sign', it is a theory of sign systems and their meaning in different societies and cultures (Wales 2011:380). Coincidentally developed by the French Ferdinand de Saussure and the American Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics, sometimes interchangeably referred to as semiology, began to take formal structure in the late 19th century and early 20th century (Jadou, Iman & Al Ghabra 2021:482). The development and prominence of this theory can be traced to the 20th century under scholars such as Roland Barthes who expanded it from Saussure's work. The key features of Barthes' work are centred on his integration of culture and media in language. He attempted to explore meaning from the context of ideology (Wijayanto & Iswari 2021:101).

Barthes' approach to semiotics encourages the examination of signs and how they are represented culturally and in media platforms (Anwar, Nirwana & Suharjianto 2022:198). Barthes also applied his theory to visual representations. Here he argued that communication through images occurs through three levels of meaning, namely the linguistic message, the denoted image and the connoted image. According to Barthes (1999), the linguistic message refers to written texts that are found in the text. This includes labelling and captions, for instance. While the denoted image refers to the clear and literal meaning of images, the connoted image focuses on the figurative meaning conveyed by the images.

Editorial cartoons are part of creative media, and they are often used as mediums to convey layered social, cultural, economic and political messages through signs and symbols. Barthes' semiotic approach is therefore relevant to a study such as this, which seeks to investigate the depiction of post-colonial issues in editorial cartoons and how signs and symbols also contribute to them.

Aristotelian rhetoric theory

This article considers Aristotelian rhetorical theory as another framework. Motivated by the desire to pursue pragmatic and scientific approaches to rhetoric, Aristotle formed the basis of the study of rhetoric and defined it as the art of persuasion that concerns itself with the manipulation of language to achieve persuasion (Torto 2020:271). It is the ability to effectively use language and techniques to persuade the audience that the ideas of the speaker are valid. Not only that, but rhetoric is also a valuable tool to establish what can be deemed as just and true (Murthy & Ghosal 2014:249).

According to Torto (2020:272), Aristotle identified three modes of persuasion, which he labelled as logos, pathos and ethos. In the art of persuasion, logos appeal to logical reasoning, and while pathos attempts to appeal to the

audience's emotions or feelings, ethos appeals to their character. Persuasion is one of the outstanding features in cartoons. Cartoonists generally use persuasive expressions to communicate their messages powerfully. By using persuasive language, they attempt to stimulate the audience's reasoning faculties, their feelings and their character or ethical orientation.

Research methodology

The 'systematic visuo-textual analysis', as a qualitative research technique, is adopted as the article's research methodology. This technique is regarded by Brown and Collin (2021:1275) as a research methodology that considers both visual and written materials in the analysis of data. This approach essentially advocates for a binary approach to the analysis of data. Because cartoons consist of both visual and written language, this approach is perceived as a suitable methodology for the systematic arrangement and interpretation of data extracted from cartoons as the primary source of data collection. The cartoons are published daily in the isiZulu newspaper *Isolezwe* and they are also available online on the cartoonist's Facebook page. Nine of them, evident for their socio-cultural, economic and political themes, were selected. Although there are other isiZulu newspapers such as *Ilanga*, only editorial cartoons from *Isolezwe* are selected for analysis because the cartoons of Mqapheli Mngadi, whose cartoons are the subject of interest in this study, are only published in *Isolezwe*. The selected cartoons were analysed by considering both their visual and written language elements.

Data analysis

The analysis of data in this section is done according to the following three themes: socio-cultural issues in question, socio-economic issues in question and political issues in question.

Socio-cultural issues

This section considers issues that are socio-cultural in nature. These issues focus mainly on the question of identity flux among black people in South Africa, as demonstrated in the selected cartoons. The first example to be examined is Figure 1.

Figure 1 depicts two characters named 'Ben 10' and 'Sugar-mama'. The name 'Ben 10' is generally used to refer to a young man in South Africa, while 'Sugar-mama' refers to old and rich women who usually spend their money on young men. The cartoon depicts the young man wrestling the old woman. He seems to be unhappy that the old woman wants to leave, and this is marked by the words, '*Mina angikadeli, kusemnandi ukudlala*' [I am not done, it is still fun to play]. The old woman, on the other hand, desires the opposite. She is trying to flee. To express this, she remarks, '*Hhay'bo! Ngimdala phela, sengikhathele ukudlala*' [No! I am old. I am now tired of playing]. The bed in the background is used to insinuate the

FIGURE 1: Cartoon examining the question of identity flux among black people in South Africa.

idea that this young man and the old lady are engaging in sexual activities, which they both figuratively refer to as '*ukudlala*' [to play]. The young man is dragging her by her dress because he is making an attempt to pull her to his bed because he wants to continue to engage in the mentioned activities, while the old woman expresses her desire to stop. Young men usually have a desire for such relationships because they receive monetary benefits. Older women, on the other hand, engage in these relationships for predominately sexual and intimacy reasons. They classify themselves as financially independent and sexually autonomous.

According to Bishoff and Mlangeni (2021:1), relationships between Ben 10s (young men) and older women are not a new phenomenon in South Africa. The phenomenon reached its peak in the mid-20th century when independent township women resisted and challenged the apartheid patriarchal social setting. They challenged the system by brewing beer and arranging rooms to express and affirm their sexual independence. Since then, this phenomenon became predominant in the South African society. While some feminists might endorse it with the notion 'my body, my rights', other individuals might have a more critical perspective. For instance, traditional people in the isiZulu community might classify such acts as immoral because how taboo it can be deemed to see older women engage in sexual relationships with men who are relatively too young for them.

Mngadi uses the cartoon in Figure 1 to highlight the predominance of the sexual relationships between older women and young men in this dispensation. This phenomenon is a regular occurrence and is regarded as 'normal', although some might argue that this phenomenon was not 'normal' and predominant in pre-colonial isiZulu communities. A careful analysis of Figure 1 depicts that the cartoonist uses caricature to illustrate the young man (Ben 10) and old woman (Sugar-mama). The old woman is exaggerated to be physically bigger than the young man to convey and reiterate the idea that the age gap between the two individuals is too big.

As a semiotic aspect, caricature has received a lot of scholarly attention. As indicated earlier, semiotics in general consider signs and their meaning. In this case, with reference to the two characters, caricature is a visual sign used as a signifier (meaning) of the idea of 'big and small' and 'old and young'. By using this caricature, it seems as though the cartoonist is inviting the audience to reflect on the irrationality of this relationship. It also seems that he is ridiculing this relationship because the old woman seems to be much too old for the young man. From a logical perspective, the relationship does not make sense on surface value. The facial features of the woman in the cartoon and her dress code suggest that she is very old. In the cartoon, the audience is invited to justify it. One can also argue that the cartoonist is also attempting to stimulate an emotional response from the audience through this cartoon. Depending on the individual, the emotions can range from shock and disgust to confusion and amusement, among others.

When the cartoon in Figure 2 is examined, a sociocultural message becomes apparent. The cartoon in Figure 2 depicts a female teacher who is teaching the learners about respect, hence the written phrase '*yini ukuhlonipheka?*' [what is to be respectable?] on the blackboard. However, it does not seem the lesson is meaningful because the learners are staring at her body instead of the blackboard. They seem to be distracted, which is made evident by their facial expressions. The distraction seems to be created by how she is dressed. There is a paradox between what the teacher is writing and how she is dressed in the cartoon. She teaches her learners about respect, but she, herself, is not practising that concept through her dress code, which is the message the cartoonist intends to convey.

The cartoonist also uses the caption '*Kunxuswa othisha ukuba bagqoke bahlonipheke*' [Teachers are requested to dress in a respectable manner] to make the intention of the cartoon clear: teachers are requested to dress well. This call is the result of several instances where teachers in South Africa were reported not to be adhering to appropriate dressing codes. For instance, a teacher went viral for her inappropriate manner of dressing, even though she made several attempts to justify how she dresses (News24, 2019). As indicated earlier, Barthes' theory maintains that

communication through images takes place on three levels, of which the linguistic message is regarded as one and refers to a caption or label that accompanies a text. Mngadi uses the caption highlighted above to guide the interpretation of the cartoon. In this case, the second level of the denoted image is also relevant because the cartoon is literal and has no figurative visuals.

Mngadi uses the cartoon in Figure 2 to express society's concerns on this matter. In the community, teachers are usually regarded as role models. They are expected to be morally sound because it is believed that learners look up to them. Parents generally trust teachers because they spend a lot of time with learners. In terms of the dress code for teachers, the career teachers choose propels them historically to dress appropriately. The sudden shift in perspective indicates the change in some teachers' perception regarding this issue. With the cartoon, a plea is made for moral reawakening.

In Figure 2, Mngadi uses satire as a persuasive technique. He is attempting to appeal to the audience's logical reasoning, emotions or feelings as well as character. The way the teacher is visually represented in the cartoon encourages the audience to think critically about the implications of the teacher's dress code. The cartoon is persuasive in nature as it encourages the audience to empathise (emotion) with learners and understand their struggle to concentrate in the classroom. For some people, the cartoon might cause negative emotions, such as disappointment or disgust. Parents, in particular, are more prone to be critical. The cartoonist is raising concern, and he does this by appealing to the audiences' feelings and logical reasoning about the mentioned issue. The cartoon in Figure 2 is mostly directed to teachers and other relevant parties. Mngadi is using the cartoon to make an appeal to teachers to re-evaluate their dress code for the benefit of effective teaching and learning. In essence, Mngadi is encouraging them to reflect on this issue as a concern in morality or character.

The final example to be examined is the cartoon shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 highlights one of the most pertinent and sensitive social issues in South Africa: gender-based violence. The battle against this social illness has been ongoing, with South Africa being rated as one of the top countries on the list of gender-based violence. At the writing of this article, the latest crime statistics for the country reported that 957 women and 314 children were murdered in the space of three months (News24, 2024). These statistics reveal just how critical the situation is.

Cartoons are one of the platforms used to expose social illnesses. In Figure 3, a conversation between a man and a woman is depicted. Through the words '*yini sesteri usaba inja?*' [what is it sister, are you afraid of the dog?], the man is trying to determine what the woman is afraid of. He seems to be confused about why she is afraid. It is for this reason that he assumes that the woman is afraid of the dog next to him.

Source: Mngadi, M., 2017b, viewed 28 November 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi

FIGURE 2: Cartoon examining socio-cultural issues.

In response to this question, the woman remarks '*usho yiphi yona inja?*' [which dog in particular?]. By posing this question, the woman is insinuating that the man is also a dog; in other words, men are compared with dogs because of their barbaric behaviour. In fact, women feared them more than dogs, and this is demonstrated by the following statement, '*Abantu besifazane sebesaba abesilisa ukwedlula izilwane*' [women now fear men more than animals]. This statement is used as a caption to guide the interpretation of this cartoon as suggested by Barthes' linguistic message as the first level of meaning. The comparison of men with animals indicates how much value men have lost in the eyes of women in South Africa. To this day, this relatively remains to be a sad reality.

In African societies, men were traditionally regarded as providers and protectors of women and children. However, statistics prove that they have lost their identity. Instead of protecting women and children, they abuse and murder them. For this reason, the phrase 'men are trash' was adopted by women in South Africa to refer to men (News24, 2017). The cartoonist condemns men's barbaric behaviour in Figure 3. He is using the cartoon to challenge men to reflect on their actions.

Just like in Figure 2, Mngadi also uses satire in Figure 3 to convey his message. Even here, Aristotelian rhetoric theory through the three modes of persuasion is applied. For instance, the cartoon engages the audience on a critical issue that stimulates their thought processes. The cartoon is leading the audience, particularly men, to rationalise the issue of women and child abuse. The comparison where men are compared with dogs is an indication of how negatively men are viewed. They are encouraged to reflect on their character. The sensitivity of the issue at hand automatically appeals to the audience's emotions. The cartoon is likely to stimulate emotions from the audience, such as helplessness and powerlessness, anger and rage, betrayal, anxiety and revulsion.

Source: Mngadi, M., 2017b, *Figure 3*, viewed 28 November 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi

FIGURE 3: Cartoon illustrating gender-based violence in South Africa.

Socio-economic issues

This section considers economic issues that are affecting people on a day-to-day basis in South Africa. These issues are observed from a post-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) perspective, and they reflect some of the economic implications of this pandemic on the nation. Some of them are also a result of the Ukraine and Russia war. For instance, one of the implications of this war in South Africa was the hike in petrol costs, which proved to be a challenge for most citizens (Figure 4).

In the cartoon in Figure 4, the cartoonist creates an analogy between a petrol pump and a robbery. For this reason, the petrol dispensing nozzle has a gun head. This analogy is used to propose the idea that people spend a lot of money on petrol. The remark 'Izandla phezulu! Khiphani imali!' [Hands up! Take out your money!], by holding the fuel dispenser nozzle by hand, indicates that the price that is demanded from people felt like robbery. It also suggests that people pay this amount unwillingly and from their bitter hearts. Generally, in real life, no one gives something willingly when they are robbed. The idea that is emphasised here is that South Africans found it very hard to deal with a high petrol price. The cartoonist uses analogy as a semiotic 'sign' to depict this reality.

The war between Ukraine and Russia affected the oil price globally because it disturbed regional energy supply chains. This affected many countries, including South Africa. The government found itself under immense pressure from the citizens to the extent that it sold a considerable amount of the country's strategic crude oil stocks to temporarily reduce the fuel levy (News24, 2023a). Hikes in petrol prices had direct implications on necessities, such as food and clothes. For instance, in 2022, the annual consumer price inflation rate was reported to increase to 5.9% from 5.7% between February and March. As a result of this, basic food items such as bread, cereal, meat, milk, egg, and sugar-related products continued to be expensive (News24, 2022b). The rise of petrol prices in South Africa felt like robbery because it affected different aspects of people's lives. Not only did it affect transportation, but it also had an impact on food prices.

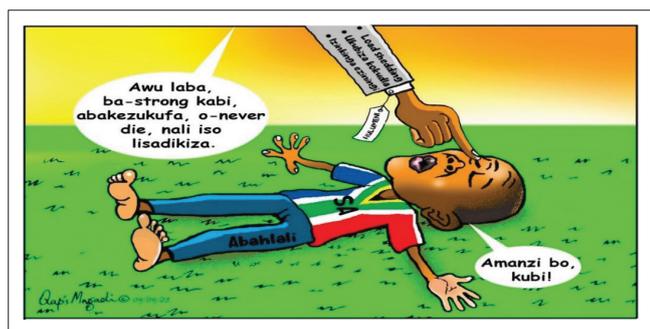Mngadi, M., 2022a, *Figure 4,* viewed 28 November 2024, *from https*://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi.

FIGURE 4: Cartoon showing the analogy between a petrol pump and a robbery.

The cartoonist conveys the issue of petrol hikes powerfully. To demonstrate how these hikes felt to South Africans, he uses a metaphor by comparing a petrol dispensing nozzle to a gun. In this case, Barthes' level of meaning, in the form of connoted image, is observed. By painting the petrol dispensing nozzle as a gun, Mngadi is attempting to convey a message figuratively and use the gun as a symbol. For instance, a gun symbolises power and authority. In the context of the cartoon in Figure 4, the gun symbolises the economic authority petrol hikes have on people; in other words, it signifies that people are struggling financially to keep up with petrol hikes.

During and after the COVID-19, South African citizens began to critically question the government's leadership. The general belief was that the government fails to cater for the basic needs of South Africans (Figure 5).

The cartoon in Figure 5 depicts a man who represents South Africa and its citizens. He seems to have fainted. For this reason, he asks for water to drink through the expression '*Amanzi bo, kubi*' [Water, please. It is bad]. He is addressing his plea to the government, which is represented by the hand with a tag and the words '*Hulumeni*' [government]. Instead of giving him water, the government responds by saying: '*Awu laba, ba-strong kabi, abakezukufa, o-never die, nali iso lisadikiza*' [Ah, these ones are too strong, they will not die. They are ones who never die. Here is an eye, it is still moving]. It appears as if the government is pointing at the man's eye to determine if he is still alive. The sleeve is labelled 'load shedding', '*ukubiza kokudla*' [expensive food] and '*izinkinga eziningi*' [many problems] to indicate that these are some of the issues that are affecting people. The government seems to be implicated for not addressing any of them.

As alluded to earlier in Figure 4, food prices in South Africa increased drastically around 2022. Citizens frequently blamed the government for not providing solutions to improve the situation. In addition, the country also faced electricity challenges due to the energy crisis. The word 'load-shedding', which was declared by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) as the word of the year for 2022 (News24, 2022a), became a popular term to refer to the electricity crisis. Not only were South Africans struggling economically, they were also facing huge electricity

Mngadi, M., 2023a, *Figure 5,* viewed 28 November 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi.

FIGURE 5: Cartoon depicting a man representing South Africa and its citizens.

challenges. Load-shedding had economic implications, because some businesses and other related entities suffered severely from the lack of electricity to produce products and/or stay in business.

The use of a figurative visual presentation is evident in Figure 5. The visuals used are connoted (figurative) and not denoted (literal). For instance, the government is figuratively portrayed as a hand. Because the government is an abstract institution without any physical form, figurative portrayal assists in making the institution easier to relate to and to visualise it. Although the government is an abstract concept, it is an institution that consists of people. By figuratively regarding the government as a sleeve, the cartoonist has attempted to attach actions to the government in a clearer way. Satire is used in Figure 5 to ridicule the government for some of the socio-economic issues that affect people. Ridiculing is more understandable when it is attached to something people can relate to. In this case, the sleeve is used as a point of reference. To put it succinctly, the cartoonist uses personification in Figure 5 to enhance his satire.
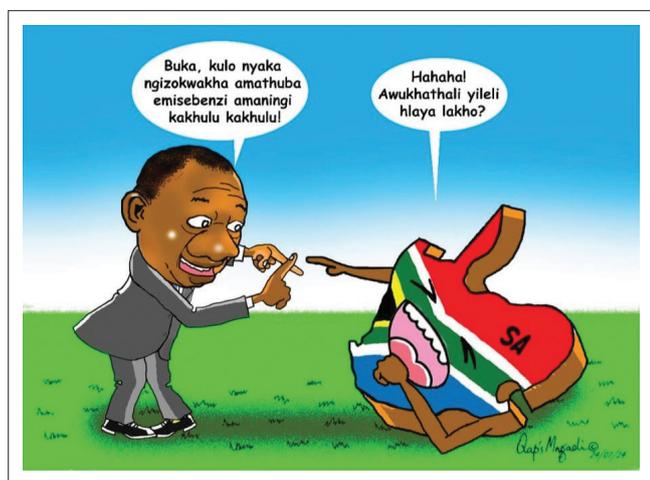
The fact that the government is saying '*Awu laba, ba-strong kabi, abazekufa, o-never die, nali iso lisadikiza*' [Ah, these ones are too strong, they will not die. They are ones who never die. Here is an eye, it is still moving] instead of helping the character who represents South African citizens, signifies that the government does not take people's concerns seriously. Generally, when people regain consciousness after fainting, they are usually given water to help them regain their strength. The fact that the man is lying down indicates that he has fainted. This is indirectly used to convey the idea that South African citizens feel defeated and discouraged by the highlighted socio-economic issues. When they need assistance the most, the government takes them for granted, as implied by the quoted words in the government's speech bubble. Such an act is prone to stimulate the audience's emotions. Mngadi's art of persuasion is in effect here. If people are raising concerns and they are downplayed by the government, they are likely to have negative emotions, such as disappointment, frustration, hurt, helplessness, among others. They are also likely to question the integrity of the government.

The last example in this section stemmed from the cartoon shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 resembles Figure 5 in terms of the issues being raised. It depicts the current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa. He is talking to the character, who represents South Africa, about the issue of unemployment. Unemployment is one of the important socio-economic issues that the country has been battling with for years. The cartoon depicts how much faith the citizens have lost in the government for failing to solve this issue. The President attempts to convince citizens about job opportunities by saying: '*Buka, kulo nyaka ngizokwakha amathuba emisebenzi amaningi kakhulu kakhulu!*' [Look, this year I will create a lot

of job opportunities]. In response to this, the addressee, who represents the nation, sarcastically remarks: '*Hahaha! Awukhathali yileli hlaya lakho*?' [Ha ha ha! Are you not getting tired of this joke of yours?]. The sarcasm behind this response signifies that people no longer believe the promises made by government about the creation of job opportunities. They refer to this promise as '*ihlaya*', a joke. It is for this reason that this character is laughing. It indicates that citizens do not take the promise seriously. This reaction stems from the fact that citizens believe that they have not seen the promised job opportunities being created. To them, this is joke because they have been disappointed over a long period. As a result, they feel lied to and betrayed. This is one of several cartoons that Mngadi uses to satirise the government in this analysis section. He ridicules the President for the unfulfilled promises. The cartoon depicts how hopeless people have become. This is an overall general reflection of the sentiments held by most South Africans. They have lost confidence in the people who lead them.

After President Cyril Ramaphosa's election in 2024, job creation was one of the promises he made as a matter of priority. Prior to his re-election, the manifesto of the political party he leads, the African National Congress (ANC), promised 2.5 million jobs in the next five years (Mail & Guardian, 2024a). The accuracy of this remains to be seen. At the writing of this article, the latest employment rate in South Africa was reported to be 33.5% with 8.4 million unemployed South Africans (News24, 2024c). From this figure, Statistics SA reports that 3.6 million are youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (News24, 2024c). It is reported that this is the highest unemployment rate overall since 2022. These statistics make it clear why people believe the government will not fulfil its promises of creating job opportunities. The issue of unemployment remains an area of serious concern, and this is what the cartoonist seeks to highlight in the cartoon in Figure 6.

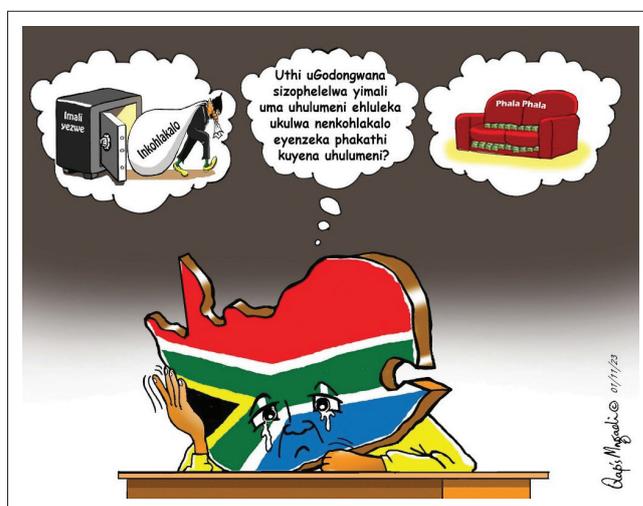*Source*: Mngadi, M., 2024a, *Figure 6,* viewed 28 November 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi

FIGURE 6: Cartoon depicting the current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa.

Political issues

This section considers some of the pertinent political issues in South Africa. The first issue is explored in the cartoon in Figure 7.

Corruption is one of the issues that was exposed largely during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. Just like in Figure 6, the cartoonist uses a personified character to represent the Republic of South Africa in the cartoon in Figure 7. This character is portrayed in a bad emotional state that is triggered by his thoughts. The first thought he has is about cruelty and the embezzlement of state funds. The cartoonist uses the analogy of a robbery of a money safe deposit box to represent the idea of corruption. This safe deposit box is labelled as '*imali yezwe*', which refers to state funds. The deposit box is depicted as being robbed by a criminal who is carrying a sack called '*inkohlakalo*', which is being translated as cruelty. In this case, the word '*inkohlakalo*' [cruelty] is used to emphasise the point that cruelty is at the root of the corruption that is taking place.

From the second thought, which is expressed by the words, '*Uthi uGodongwana sizophelelwa yimali uma uhulumeni ehluleka ukulwa nenkohlakalo eyenzeka phakathi kuyena uhulumeni?*' [Godongwana says our money will deplete if the government fails in its fight against inside corruption], it is evident that the depicted character in the cartoon, who is carrying a sack, represents government officials. The cartoonist is trying to portray the idea that corruption by government officials, who are embezzling state funds, is taking place here. Enoch Godongwana, who is the Minister of Finance in South Africa (when writing this article), has always prioritised attempts to combat corruption in government. According to Mokoena (2024), he allocated R765 billion in the 2024 budget to fight crime and corruption. The concern for the implications of corruption on the country compelled Godongwana to take this step.

Source: Mngadi, M., 2023b, *Figure 7,* viewed 28 November 2024, from https://www.facebook.com/qaps.mngadi

FIGURE 7: Cartoon depicting South African citizens' concerns about state funds.

This indicated that corruption became an important issue in South Africa during COVID-19. While the country was fighting the pandemic, there were several corruption scandals implicating government officials. This led to citizens criticising and questioning the government. For this reason, President Cyril Ramaphosa eventually appointed a Cabinet Committee to deal with tenders (News24, 2020a). The battle against corruption has since been an area of interest in the Republic of South Africa. This is precisely what the cartoonist is attempting to convey in the cartoon shown in Figure 7: corruption as one of the political concerns plaguing the country.

The last thought expressed by the character in Figure 7 is represented by a couch labelled 'Phala Phala'. Phala Phala is the name of the game farm that President Ramaphosa owned. It became one of the buzzwords in South Africa after it was revealed in the news that a burglary took place and a large sum of money was reported to be stolen. This incident became a national interest as it sparked allegations that saw criminal charges being laid against Ramaphosa (Sunday Times, 2022). This matter was also regarded as a case of corruption by the critics.

In Figure 7, a couch is used because it was allegedly claimed that the stolen money was 'hidden' there (News24, 2023b). The cartoonist uses the cartoon to artistically portray corruption as one of the critical political issues concerning South African citizens. The character in the cartoon is portrayed as emotional. This is reflected by the tears on his face. Tears are used to figuratively convey the idea that citizens are troubled by this issue as they understand that it directly and indirectly affects them. Because black people struggled during apartheid, the idea of feeling betrayed by their own leaders is tormenting them. The fruits of the democracy and freedom they fought hard for are questioned.

Mngadi's ability to depict the issue of corruption in Figure 7 cannot be ignored. He creatively uses visual language to convey a message. For instance, as indicated above, he uses a safe deposit box and a criminal holding a sack with money to figuratively denote the idea of embezzlement of state funds. This is in line with connoted image in Barthes' theory, which suggests that cartoons have symbols that carry meaning. Figure 8 is another example of a political issue that is of interest in South Africa.

Any racial issue will always attract attention in a country like South Africa, where there is a constant quest to address past imbalances that were created by the apartheid regime. Racism is one of the issues that the South African government has declared to combat. Despite these attempts, there are several racial cases that have and are still being reported. Figure 8 depicts one of these cases. It was reported that a group of white men assaulted two black teens in Bloemfontein, Free State, in 2022. In a video that went viral on social media, a white man is identified slapping a 13-year-old boy. He threw him in a pool and attempted to drown him. An 18-year-old is also seen being choked and dragged by the head in the pool (News24, 2022c). It is alleged that these white men were trying to prevent the two teens from swimming in the pool of a resort.

Figure 8 depicts the highlighted incident. In the cartoon, a big white arm with the words 'ukucwasa ngokwebala' [discrimination by colour] is depicted strangling a young black boy. In his attempt to reason, the boy remarks: 'Kwathiwa sesikhululekile futhi sesiyalingana!' [It was said that we are free and equal!]. The white man replies by saying: 'Kwasho bani lo owayedlala ngani?' [Who deceived you by saying that?]. The cartoonist uses this statement by the white man to sarcastically suggest that racism is still practised by some white people, even though there is a general assumption that it has been done away with. The cartoonist uses this cartoon to condemn the act. This is a real-life event that he portrays artistically.

Apart from the written words in the speech bubbles, Mngadi uses caricature in Figure 8 to convey his message. The white arm with the written words 'ukucwasa ngokwebala' [discrimination by colour] is used as a symbol in this instance. It is exaggerated to be bigger in order to symbolise the idea of superiority, power or strength. The strangled boy, on the other hand, is depicted as skinny to indicate weakness. Even though the white man was older than the young boy, his arm was not muscular like the way he is portrayed in Figure 8. The exaggeration is done for symbolic purposes as indicated above. For symbolic purposes, the cartoonist also personifies racism as an arm. The muscular arm in this case is used to stress the predominance of racism. While the cartoon satirises and condemns racism, the cartoon has the capacity to stimulate serious emotions, especially for black people. Racism is a sensitive issue for most black South Africans because of the country's history of apartheid and racial segregation.

Another political issue that is depicted in Mngadi's cartoons is that of leadership in the South African government (Figure 9).

After the 2024 national elections, a new Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed in South Africa. This government consisted of the following political parties: Democratic Alliance (DA), African National Congress (ANC), Freedom Front Plus (FF+), Rise Mzansi, GOOD, Patriotic Alliance (PA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), United Democratic Movement (UDM), Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) and Al Jama-Ah (ALJA). The ANC, as a ruling party, was declared the leading party of this newly formed government. It is for this reason that the ANC is represented by the man sitting in the driver's seat in the cartoon shown in Figure 9. The analogy of a travelling car is used to denote the idea of leadership. It was anticipated that the newly formed government would drive South African citizens into a better future. Prior to the elections, many complaints were raised against the government. Even though some challenged the new government of national unity, some saw it as an opportunity to improve South Africa.
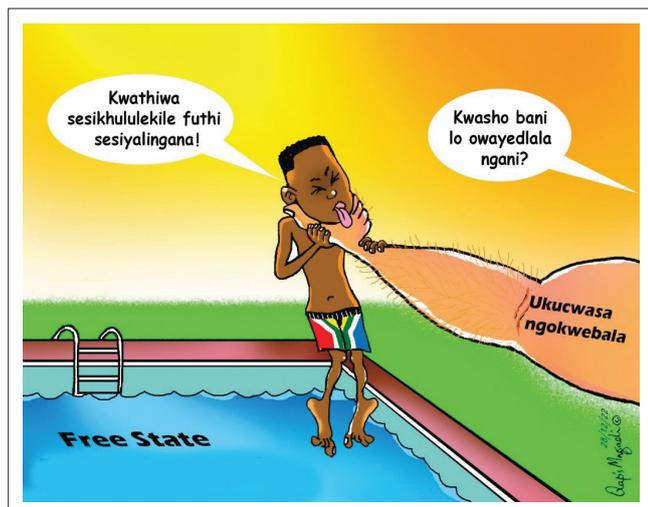
FIGURE 8: Cartoon depicting a racial issue in South Africa.
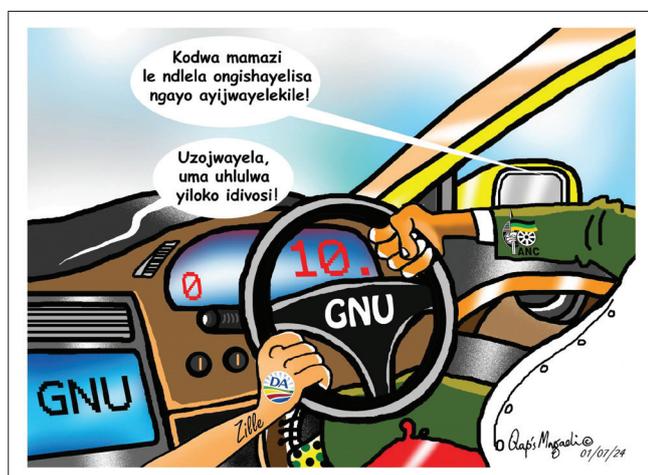
FIGURE 9: Cartoon depicting leadership in the South African government.

A careful analysis of the cartoon in Figure 9 indicates that there seems to be a conflict between the driver and the person sitting in the passenger seat. The driver, who represents the ANC, remarks: '*Kodwa mamazi le ndlela ongishayelisa ngayo ayijwayelekile!*' [But, Ma'am, I do not know the way you are making me drive] to suggest that he is finding it difficult to drive because he is made to drive in a way that is unfamiliar to him. Prior to the elections, the ANC enjoyed sole leadership of the country. However, this sole leadership was surrendered when the GNU was formed. This meant that the party had to embrace the idea of joining other parties. It is for this reason that the passenger, Helen Zille, who presents the DA, responds by saying: '*Uzojwayela, uma uhlulwa yiloko idivosi!*' [You will get used to it. If you can't, it will be a divorce]. This statement is used to emphasise the fact that the ANC had no choice but to embrace working with other parties.

The ANC and DA have a history as opposition parties. It became evident that many in the ANC did not take the idea of working with the DA well. They viewed this as a betrayal of the liberation struggle. The DA has been viewed as a party that represents whiteness and racism (Mail & Guardian, 2024b). For this reason, there were boycotts by ANC members to dissolve any government coalition with the DA. For instance, some of the ANC youths picketed outside one of the ANC meetings, holding placards with the words 'Not with the DA' (Mail & Guardian, 2024b). Although the GNU consisted of several political parties, it is only the DA and the ANC that are depicted in the cartoon in Figure 9 because the rivalry between the parties was mainly between the ANC and DA. The use of visual analogy is an example of how cartoonists can use this technique to convey a message artistically. In this case, Mngadi has used this technique to artistically convey leadership concerns under the GNU. The car is used figuratively.

Conclusion

Through the application of the post-colonial theory, alongside semiotics and rhetoric theory, it was demonstrated that Mngadi's cartoons depict socio-cultural, socio-economic and political issues that are pertinent in South Africa. These issues include immorality, identity crisis, gender-based violence, difficult economic conditions, unemployment, racism, corruption and leadership concerns in government. Even though these issues are real-life issues, Mngadi depicts them by using signs and symbols. For instance, he uses analogy to narrate events depicted in the cartoons. In general, analogy encourages readers to think critically and out of the box because it requires from individuals to compare two similar things to understand a point. It also plays a significant role in making reading or analysis meaningful because it contextualises ideas. Even in Mngadi's cartoons, as readers learn about issues that are affecting South Africa, they are encouraged to think critically. By doing so, there is stimulation of their logos (logical reasoning), pathos (human feelings) and ethos (human character) as proposed by Aristotle's rhetoric theory.

There are also some instances where Mngadi uses satire and humour to expose issues of concern. Satire is one of the common features in cartoons. Its role is to condemn with the intention of sparking moral re-awakening. This is also the case in Mngadi's cartoons. The cartoonist condemns post-colonial issues, such as gender-based violence, immorality, difficult economic conditions, racism and corruption with the intention of inspiring change. The cartoons are overall characterised by humour, which makes it pleasant to engage with them. Readers are exposed to critical issues while getting amused. Satire and humour are examples of Mngadi's persuasive techniques.

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Author's contribution

S.Z.D. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Disclaimer

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