

## ISOJ 2018: Day 2, Morning Session

### **GLOBAL ROUNDUP: How News Organizations Are Using Satire Online Around the World**

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**Chair: Maria Teresa Ronderos**, Director, **Program on Independent Journalism, Open Society Foundations**

- **Carlos Cortés**, Creator, **La Mesa de Centro** (Columbia)
  - **Haris Dedović**, Executive Director, **Šatro** (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
  - **Samm Farai Monro (aka Comrade Fatso)**, Creative Director, **Magamba TV** (Zimbabwe)
  - **Marianna Grigoryan**, Co-Founder/President, **Umbrella Journalists' International Network NGO** (Armenia)
  - **King Muriuki**, Producer, **The XYZ Show, Buni Media** (Kenya)
  - **Vahe Nersesian**, Cartoonist and Co-Founder, **Medialab.am** (Armenia)
  - **Juan Andrés Ravell**, Co-Founder, **El Chigüire Bipolar** (Venezuela)
  - **Isam Uraiqat**, Editor, **Alhudood** (Jordan)
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**King Muriuki:** Good morning, guys. My name is King Muriuki. And I am a director and producer of The XYZ Show, which is Africa's first political puppet satire show. We've been running since 2009. Done over 180 episodes. And yes, for those who are not familiar with the concept, we are similar to the British "Spitting Image" and the French "Les Guignols." Yes. So, I think we'll just show you a quick clip for you to get what we do, and then we can talk further.

*[Video plays of puppets of President Trump, , etc.]*

*President Trump: OK, Ivanka. Look, I got two cases in front of me, and I'm gonna use one of them to blow [bleep] to hell. Not the Kardashian [bleep]. Fine. I mean, North Korean Kim.*

*Ivanka: Let's not do that, Dad.*

*President Trump: You know, if I don't do this, the next thing you know there will be chemical weapons all over the place.*

*Chinese Cleaning Lady: [sing-song in Chinese language]*

*President Trump: I'm gonna kill them before they can kill themselves. It's the least I can do, trust me.*

*Ivanka: This is literally not the least you can do.*

*President Trump: Now listen, Ivanka, I've got nuclear. I've got atomic. I need you expert advice which one is better. Which do you think—nuclear or atomic? Nuclear/atomic? Nuclear/Atomic? They're both great. They're so great.*

*Ivanka: Dad, put those cases away right now!*

*President Trump: What was that? Did you say nuclear?*

*Ivanka: No!*

*President Trump: Because I like atomic. I'm gonna go with atomic.*

*Ivanka: No!*

*President Trump: It's the mother of all bombs. I think it's great. Everyone loves it. I'm gonna use that.*

*Ivanka: No, no, no! No!*

*Chinese cleaning lady: Hello. Mr. Kim, is that you? Is that you? OK. OK. Why you no tell me you were testing nuclear? Why? And China is your only friend. You know this. Why you always so stubborn and so stupid? OK. Because you're my one friend, I do you one favor. China do you one favor this last time, OK? OK? Run! Run and hide! Go home, pick up the wife, pick up the baby, take out all the money. Run and hide! The bomb is coming! The bomb is coming!*

*Man: Mr. President, we just received satellite imagery showing a group of school children at the nuclear facility in Pyongyang.*

*President Trump: You know, those kids will have a better chance of the afterlife than they do with having Kim as president. Trust me, I'm doing them a favor.*

*Man: Yeah, OK. Hang on, Mr. President. Just wait a minute. We now see a group of swimsuit models. Oh, oh, they're blondes, and wow, brunettes, emerging from that same nuclear facility. Should we abort the mission, Mr. President?*

*President Trump: You know what? Abort this mission immediately. We've got to abort it.*

*Man: Oh, damn! Look at that! They knew we were coming, sir. What are we—what are we—what are we gonna do now?*

*President Trump: Oh, it's the fake news. The media is selling information to North Korea. And this proves it. I'm going to build a wall around CNN, but first, show me those swimsuit models. I know for a fact that the satellite angle, it will give me a clear shot of those [bleep].*

*[End of video.]*

[Laughter.]

Thank you. Thank you. So, you can see we are clearly over the top. And the environment in which we work in is sometimes considered very conservative. But satire is an important and often untouchable tool where conversations that are deemed too sensitive or controversial should happen. And we take that very seriously. Our main avenue for broadcast usually is TV, but we get too much government interference. As many of you might know, the Korean government does not have a very good track record of freedom if its press, based on the media blackout earlier this year. But then also, we do have problems with self-censorship from the broadcasters who might find our content a bit too touch for the audience. But if we do not offend most of the time, we assume that we are not effective when it comes to satire. That's our kind of motto.

Yes. Five or two? [chuckles] Yes. So, we have found online distribution to be a very important avenue to reach our audiences. Most of the time when we can't get to our million-plus viewership per episode via TV, we turn to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to get our very loyal audiences. We have over 500,000 friends on Facebook, over 100,000 fans following us on Twitter, and I think up to now a total of 10.2-million views on YouTube. So, yeah, I don't know, if I go further than that, I will definitely go above five minutes. But thank you for your time.

[Applause.]

**Isam Uraiqat:** Very happy to be home here to talk about Alhudood, the political satire magazine of kind of the Middle East and North Africa. It's basically just The Onion for that region. I'm Isam Uraiqat. I'm the editor of it. We write from our perspective aiming at the whole of the Middle East. We have writers and readers all over the region. We have about 350,000 of them. We got nominated to One World Media Award three years in a row. And we were [nominated] the Drum Online Media award last year. We do satire, but we take it very seriously.

But contrary to what most people think, it's more people than the governments in the Middle East that don't want to hear satire. Satire is more of a liberal thing. conservatives don't appreciate it as much, because by the nature of it, it has more—like, they have more lines, satire tends to break lines.

So, satire in the Middle East, if we wanted to aim at the liberal Arab demographic there, we would have been talking to a tiny circle of people in our own tiny echo chamber. So, what we wanted to do was to create — it wasn't just to create satire or stand up to authority, it was about opening conversations.

So, one example of how we did that recently was when we created our chat bot last year. We get contacted a lot on Facebook. We got like hundreds of people every week. And they usually do that for the same reasons. Mostly, either they love our work and they want to tell us that, or they are like angry. [laughs] So, when someone starts chatting to us and opts for the second option—to express their

anger—our character asks them how they want to express that. They get to choose between the most popular ways people did before the app was created. It was either to call us liars or to swear at us. But we left out the quite popular option of sending us death threats, because we don't want to put ideas into people's heads. [laughter] We get that enough.

So at that point, if they choose to swear, and a large number does, the bot asks them what kind of an insult they want to send us—above the belt or below? We ask them why they choose that. We ask them what makes them angry about what we are doing. And in that process, we explain what we do and why it matters.

So obviously, someone who was coming to swear at us wasn't coming for a conversation, but we open the conversation despite that. And now these people, instead of swearing around aimlessly, they are commenting on our articles and arguing about what they think of them. We kind of force them to articulate their anger into actual conversations. So, and a chat bot can only take so much abuse. [laughs] So, these chats remain.... And these chats remain as closed conversations. To have a proper conversation, we need to have a more public one.

So, we created an online community and invited our readers to join us to write ideas, to propose—to talk to us about what they think of our work, and to discuss other people's work. So, we started it by doing a call to all of our readers, which said, like, "Whatever you are—a Muslim or a Christian, an atheist or Pastafarian, a Salafi or a vegetarian, as long as you're funny, you're comments—your contributions will be taken into account." And for those of you who don't know, a Salafi is a follower of a very conservative form of Islam, similar to the one in Saudi. It gets relevant in a bit.

Over the coming few months, over a thousand people joined us from over 40 countries. The community is so engaged that when we sent them a 50-question survey, 700 of them finished it to the last question. So, they are like really into it. But that wasn't the most interesting part. The group was very diverse. There's men and women, loads of refugees, journalists, students from all sorts of backgrounds. Some are pro-Assad, or anti-Iran, or pro-\_\_\_\_, anti-\_\_\_\_. Like that is a whole minefield of views. And all of them disagree with our perspective. They disagree with satire, some of them. And they all disagree with each other. But they all got in there in order to talk about that.

And that was great, but that wasn't the most interesting part. What truly fascinated me personally was that a Salafi did actually join us. For me, when we posted that post, like, the funniest part for me was that like was the Salafi. Like, we couldn't be that diverse. No one could be, it felt like. But then he came in, and he was like hitting right and left, all sorts of jokes, from politics to hypocritical religious leaders.

So, we thought anyone can embrace satire, because satire is not about irreverence and just making fun and breaking lines and challenging authorities. It's about being able to laugh at yourself. It's about being—to be able to see your own mistakes. It's about accepting criticism. And it's about not treating readers as untouchable

entities. It's taking things less seriously, but at the same [time], paradoxically, it's taking things a lot more seriously, because you engage people in topics that they've stopped caring about. So, we thought that is a way of thinking which could and should spread, especially in a region that is as hot and uncomfortable as the Middle East. So, what we thought was, satire is kind of the easy part. If you have an interesting angle or something like powerful to say, it just becomes — it goes down to sentence construction.

So, yes. So, we created an in-depth guide to satire, which guides people on how to write comedy on the one hand, but more importantly, how to use satire to say what they want to say. Then we asked the community which of them would like to take satire more seriously and join us on a more — and work with us directly. We've gotten masses of applications, and we've interviewed over 100 of them and started working with 16 now.

These interns were just as diverse as the group. Some of them have PhD's and some of them 18-year-old students. Each of the four in-house writers that we have is working hand-in-hand on a daily basis with all of them. And the aim is that after a year, these four will become editors themselves and train another four under them. And I don't think I'm too over-ambitious when I say that if we go at that rate, we will be able to create about 1.048-million Arab satirists. [laughter] Thank you.

[Applause.]

**Vahe Nersesian:** We publish cartoons every day in country with the absence of freedom of press, where almost all the media are controlled from one place—the residence of the president. The cartoons are very impressive way to send messages and to inform people about everything, but they also can be dangerous, especially for cartoonists.

We have experienced a lot of cases during these years. Our car was broken into and all the cartoons that we had printed for the exhibition were stolen. We and our family members have received death threats. When we try to organize an exhibition, nobody agreed to rent us a space, so we decide to go to the streets, and we organized an open exhibition.

When we tried to distribute our print newspaper, all the possible channels were blocked. We realized that our cartoons are important and have power. A country like Armenia is an unending source of inspiration for cartoonists, from a \_\_\_\_\_ that lives by stereotypes to the president that is enabled to leave his chair, and after being in power for ten years, wants to stay ten years more by changing the constitution.

Armenian courage is one of my favorite topics. [laughter] And let me give you a couple of examples of our cartoons, so you can understand the problems we are trying to speak about. When Pope visited Armenia, we imagined the situation when our arch bishop that likes to drive Bentley car in Kchoyan asked the Pope during

their formal dinner if hell really exists. Our capital streets are filled with complex of speed writers and road cameras, which look in all directions, cop to everything, and penalize everybody. [laughter] In our cartoon, they have even entered people's house and fined residents for speeding. According to publication in press, those speed writers belong to president's brother who pockets 17% of all the fine collected.

At the Armenian borders, our soldiers are often killed in shootouts. It appears that the soldiers are mostly from poor families, because sons of the rich and powerful are exempted from military service.

We are a small country, and coming from people from small countries, we are mainly interested in local news and problems, but there are still events and persons worldwide that can't be ignored. And then, a little bit Donald Trump. [laughter]

Thank you very much.

**Marianna Grigoryan:** Hello. My name is Marianna Grigoryan. I used to introduce myself as an investigative journalist, but recent years, our cartoon project turned me from investigative journalist into a cartoon lady. It shows the success of our project. We are proud very much. Political Cartoon Project, we started more than three years ago, and it helps us to tell the stories by cartoons and to send impressive messages and to help people to be informed and understand many things we could not say in other way.

At the end of January, I became — I was in spotlight of the media in local and national institutions, and the reason was one of our cartoons. It was a news that many media told about, but our cartoon brings very active discussions, and even we got death threats. It shows the corruption in our Ministry of Defense. This cartoon helped many people to understand the reality. And in general, cartoons help us to...

We are creating cartoons daily, on a daily basis, and we also help people to.... As a news cartoon, we are producing news cartoons, and this is the one of the examples. We saw very interesting news. In one month, National Security Service bought 70 tons of sugar. And our cartoonist used this information, and it became a very popular cartoon. And people started to share this, to this cause, and it was very interesting.

We used to tell the stories using cartoons. And every day our readers wait to see what will be our reaction to this or that event and what will be the next. And we have a huge army of readers and supporters. We are also starting our new project, and we are producing comic stories. And these [are] stories that show our life. It is all about our society. And these are also very impressive.

And also, we are using other ways to send messages, like street art, to raise important topics. We are the only media in Armenia that are producing cartoons. And this is not.... I'm sorry. We always get questions. "Are you—don't you afraid?"

Aren't you? Do you have children?" or something like that. And these are questions people always ask, and I think the answer is our work.

The influence we have with cartoons hardly can do without—with other ways. This is the protest when people used our cartoons, and now these protests are going [on] in Armenia. People went... Thousands of people went to streets against president, and we are very proud to see this situation. They are using our cartoons. And this is the answer of our work [that] we are very proud we could do.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

**Carlos Cortés:** Well, good morning, everybody. My name is Carlos Cortés. I'm developing an idea called La Mesa de Centro, which literally translates The Center Table, but it would be really more like The Coffee Table. It's an open-ed satire video blog with La Silla Vacía, which is akin to the Politico in Columbia, so it's an online independent blog which has been around for almost ten years. La Mesa de Centro is really a very young project. We started in May 2017, so we are going to be one year old in a couple of weeks. We are averaging about 250K users per episode. We're producing around three episodes per month, and we are starting to do some experiments with a shorter version.

La Mesa de Centro's episodes average six to seven minutes. And roughly 70% of the people are going until the end of the videos, which is a good indicator for us. We are currently being funded by Program on Independent Journalism of Open Society and starting to explore new avenues of funding. We're not really interested or really in the moment to monetize it in a different way.

So, what's our idea in very general terms? On the one hand, we want to engage people in politics. We don't want to alienate them. We've seen a lot of projects of political humor in the region and in Columbia, which have been very effective exploding indignation, and to me, at least, it might be not the best way to get people to be interested in politics and really becoming active citizens in politics. We want to explain policy issues. We're very aware about the limits of humor to explore some of those topics, but we are trying to take risks to be able to transmit difficult issues to our audience.

We are trying to use counter-narratives against misinformation. This is something that comes from another part of my work. I work on policy and internet media issues, so this is something that I'm quite interested in. So, we try to include that if not in all, in most of our episodes. And we want to build an internet culture. We like to use memes. We would like to use videos. [They] are becoming viral, and we want to in that way also communicate to a specific audience who reads La Silla Vacía.

So, I want to show you, like, three main issues that we are constantly addressing in the program. The first one is the media. It's no secret for anybody, and especially

in Latin America, where we don't have strong media outlets that are not tied to an economy group, where there is constant criticism against them. So, we try to take the word of those criticism and show people what we're seeing. Not tell them, but show them to them. And we try to do that with a heavy exercise of monitoring. We want to really show them the content that they are actually criticizing.

So, in this clip, you are going to see the introduction of the program and the header that we built, and a clip that we did around the very well-known journalist in Columbia, who is called Julio Sanchez, who is very close to the attorney general. And it was something that everybody said, but we went into the coverage to see exactly how that was happening.

*[Video plays in Spanish.]*

*Closed captioning:*

*-In times of despair, everyone seeks a hero. W Radio already has one:*

*-Mr. Martinez has a successful public and private career. Today he is one of the most important lawyers in the country.*

*-In "La Mesa de Centro," W Radio and the Attorney General: A never-ending love story. Part 1.*

*-If you are wondering who is going to save Columbia from this corruption morass, Julio Sanchez has the answer:*

*-Alberto, the Attorney General, still has lots to do, but I do see a light in the Attorney General. What else do we have?*

*-According to Julio, not only the Attorney General is the only [one] jailing corrupted politicians, he is also an easy going and hard working guy, and an excellent family member.*

*-He devotes all his time to this. And his personal life is his wife, children, grandchildren, and sister. Nothing else.*

*[End of video.]*

So, this became just quite critical. And we did two episodes about him, where he was basically saying that he was not only the best attorney general in history, but he was also a great husband, he was also a great guy. He was intelligent. He was simple. He was really the guy that you wanted to have with you. So, this was one of the things that we are exploring. We have done some other things with media. The biggest challenge that we have is getting to get the material. It's not easy to get the material. Not all the media are really putting that on their website, so we're trying to find new ways and innovative ways to make this monitoring work.



The second issue is policy. We want to explain, as I was telling you, some policy issues. I think the biggest issue that we're facing right now in Columbia is the transitional system, the Justice Peace System, where for those of you who don't know, we recently signed a peace agreement with FARC guerilla, which involved, as in many other countries, building a transitional justice system. This is falling right now in the specific timing of elections, so it became a big issue for the candidates, and we have seen these candidates using this to dis-inform and really confuse an electorate that is already very, very confused.

So, in this clip, you are going to see a fake news seal that we're trying to use, like, to pin down things that we believe are misinforming the public, and also another thing that I have introduced, which is using some characters, which was something that just came about after some episodes. In this one, you will see a taxi driver.

*[Video plays in Spanish.]*

*Closed Captioning:*

*-The Special Justice is only for crimes related to the armed conflict. It's only for that, and not for different things. This, for example, is a lie:*

*-The Peace Justice Tribunal, created to pardon those who were accused or condemned of atrocious crimes, cannot become now the organ of retaliation against political opponents, the productive sector, and, in general, against all Columbians, whose natural judge was changed.*

*-And those guys from the Peace Justice cannot pardon me a traffic ticket? The other day I got it. Not possible?*

*[End of video.]*

So, this is Germán Vargas Lleras, former Vice President of Columbia, who was using it at the beginning of the campaign, an issue to just scare people out. I just have one more clip, 30 seconds, and it's politicians. I wanted to show you former President Pastrana invented a meeting that he had with President Trump, which was very strange, because President Trump hasn't met yet with Juan Manuel Santos at that moment. You are going to see an over-acted journalist and a remix that we did with US media. And I finish there.

*[Video plays in Spanish.]*

*Closed captioning:*

*-Last April, former President Pastrana informed about a very high level meeting he had:*

*-"Thank you to President Trump for the amicable and sincere conversation about problems and perspectives for Columbia and the region."*

*-Sadly, according to five waiters, 40 CCTV cameras and a cat that was passing by, the meeting was just a "hello" in a hallway.*

*-These people are sick. These people are sick. It never happened. Never happened. It's a lie.*

[End of video.]

[Laughter.]

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

**Haris Dedović:** I'm Haris. I came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. If you don't know what the place is, it's the little country in the Balkans. We like to shoot at each other from time to time. [laughter] Ah, right, yeah. That's a little bit better. So, while you've probably worked on some news on it, right? Yeah, OK.

So, I run a satire magazine that is online, and I'm very frustrated by being here. Please, Rosental, sir, in the future, put us somewhere in front. Not because we are so important, but after all these numbers and so on and so on, we feel really, really, really depressed. Because, like, I have an audience of almost 20% of my population, and it's about a half of a video of a BuzzFeed. [laughter] Come on. It's depressing! I'm dying here, you know.

So basically, our platform is called Šatro Info. We are doing political satire, economical satire, media satire, and whatnot. We believe that we criticize the society in a way it should be criticized to true humor, and we also do a lot of fact checking through humor.

How can this happen when we are also branded as fake news sometimes? Well, for example, the other day there was big news in Bosnia. Hooters opened up in Sarajevo. Rock on! Hooters! Right? No, it's a gross place. But the point is that we didn't even get the chance to mock the sadistic propaganda and the business model of a place, but we had to correct the facts, because it wasn't real Hooters. It was a fake Hooters. [laughter] And all the media published it! And only us fact-checked it. Then a fact-checking organization did as well, but we were the first. And we published the news, because we were an "Onion" type — actually, we're a "Fusion," but now let's stick to this. We're "Onion" type of organization and we published an article in Sarajevo "Opened almost Hooters."

So, and we got different reactions, like, how we are the only media that got the information correctly, because it was really wide-spread. Even CNN affiliate published it.

So, basically, what we do is try to mock some things that are now in the mainstream media. And we try to—how to say—point in the right direction. And we believe so — we believe that we're doing so, especially with the young people.

All right. I will just show some numbers that I have. Like, we had... We are 16 months old. We are pretty young. We have almost 2,000 articles already. We have more than 600,000 visits, which is, as I said, more than 20% of our population. And we like to believe there is even more if you include the digits about internet usage of our population, but that's just us, you know, liking to be liked a bit more than it is.

So yeah, that's about it. I really want to finish it quickly and leave you to some questions and comments later. Thank you.

[Applause.]

### **Samm Farai Monro (aka Comrade Fatso)**

*[Video plays of Zambezi News.]*

*Reporter: Welcome to Zambezi News, where we bring you the news faster than it takes to get rid of two bungling imposters.*

*Reporter: We bring you the news as factual and indomitable as two veteran newscasters who aren't going anywhere anytime soon.*

*Reporter: We bring you the news reliable, like an authoritarian, yet loving and fatherly ruler.*

*Reporter: Irreplaceable! Irrevocable! Undisputable! Unperturbable!*

*Reporter: We put the swag in news wagon.*

*Reporter: Impeccable. Ungrateful. Impetuous. Infectious.*

*Reporter: The facts straight to your desk like the early boy who gets to his school desk early before the other kids get there later after him.*

*Reporter: Indivisible. Indestructible. Immovable. Inoculated innocent bystander. Bilateral. Bilingual. By local. By decree. For us. By us. FUBU. Or five.*

*[End of video.]*

[Laughter/applause.]

So, how do you resist the authoritarian regime of Robert Mugabe? Some take to the streets. Others write articles. We decided to take the sophisticated and intelligent

route of taking a piss out of the government. More specifically, taking a piss out of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, ZBC, which is state controlled and is the only TV station in the country. Zimbabwe... You can all hear me?

Audience: Yeah.

Yes? Zimbabwe, in Zimbabwe, we tend to like things in ones. One TV station, one president for life. [laughter] So, the clip you just saw was Zambezi News, where we have bungling newscasters who parody the ZBC, issuing out hilarious propaganda.

We started in 2011, at a time when social media and internet wasn't big in Zimbabwe, so we went old school, and we would produce tens of thousands of DVDs to distribute across the country. Because, for obvious reasons, the only TV station in the country wouldn't broadcast us.

So, we distributed over 10,000 DVDs of the first season. We got overwhelming feedback. Really positive feedback. But the best feedback we got was from one viewer who wrote in says, "I can't believe this is the state of our national broadcaster. I can't believe their standards have sunk so low." [laughter] And we turned to each other, like comrades, "We've achieved our dream. People think we are ZBC. We can quit." [laughter]

Zambezi News is now five seasons in. We've reached over 2.2-million households across southern Africa through satellite TV. We've been featured on CNN, The Guardian, Channel 4, and so on. And we believe that we've been at least part of inspiring a new political satire movement in Zimbabwe. Which in 2011, I guess for obvious reasons, you know, political satire wasn't exactly a thing, because of fear. Since then, internet and social media have become much more widespread in Zimbabwe. Out of a population of 13-million, we've got about 5-million Zimbabweans with some form of access to the internet.

So since then, we've also come up with a new program called The Week, which is kind of a political roundup of the weekly, kind of, burning political events that happen. And we've done this exclusively for the YouTube generation. So, this is—we distribute this on Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp. It's got us in a lot of trouble, but also it reaches a big youth audience in Zimbabwe. We've got over 1.5-million views on Facebook for 2017. That's our primary distribution platform. We reach up to 400,000 viewers per season.

I'm sure you're kind of saying, "Well, yeah, but how do you get away with this in Zimbabwe?" I'd like to categorically state that in Zimbabwe we have freedom of expression. We just don't have freedom *after* expression. [laughter/applause] Which means that we never know when the guys in dark glasses and suits are going to come after us. And 2017 was a beautiful example of that.

The year started with the City Council trying to come and demolish our offices. By middle of the year, the police were threatening to shut down our festival for performing political comedy. And by the end of the year, the state had arrested our

Magamba TV producer, Martha O'Donovan, who was in charge of all our political satire. They accused her of trying to overthrow the government. They locked her up in high security prison. And soon after that, they raided our offices and confiscated our laptops. And this was all happening at a time when tanks were rolling into the streets and a coup apparently was about to start.

We all went into safe houses, woke up the next morning, and on the TV was a general who had taken over the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation—long-time dream of ours—[laughs]—saying, “The situation has now gotten to another level, but this is not a coup. This is a military-assisted transition.” [laughter] And this is true. We do have probably the most helpful military in the world. They helped our previous president to retire. And we saw this. We saw this on the news. And we're in safe houses. And we're kind of like, “So, eh, I mean, eh, you know that charge of trying to overthrow constitutional government? I think the military beat us to it.”

And so, we rushed back to our offices to shoot a new episode of the week. There was so much fake news going on at the time. A coup had happened. Mugabe had been removed. And so, we went into shoot a new episode, a new episode of the week, which has become our most popular one to date. I'm going to show a short clip from it. We called it, “This is not a coup.” We tried to be patriotic and listen to our military.

*[Video plays.]*

*OK, comrades, I'd like to apologize for not being on your screens for some time now. The police, they confiscated our laptops, so we couldn't broadcast, but I've been reflecting, and I would like to apologize to you all. I think it was—it was ill advised of us not to give you the week. We are still young and growing, and we learn from our mistakes. So, we are back on your screens now. And please, also know I haven't been forced or coerced to make this statement by angry social media users. I've made it of my own volition. So, eh, we give you the week.*

*Ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends, welcome to The Week with me, Comrade Fatso. And this is the week when a coup did not happen. No, this is not a coup. This is a Koo. [Showing a can of beans—brand Koo.] You cool? I'm cool.*

*[Video ends.]*

So, yeah. [applause] Robert Mugabe is gone, and we've got a new president in power. We're criticizing the new government and we like to think that maybe we're having the last laugh. Thank you.

[Applause.]

**Juan Andrés Ravell:** So, I'm the co-founder/editor of El Chigüire Bipolar, which is a satirical news site from Venezuela. We're ten years old at the moment. And this is what we do—a satirical website that gives a comic twist on the real news that

happens in Venezuela. I'm going to walk you through how we have survived for these ten years.

I'm going to show you some headlines. And I hope you like them. The first rule to survive in a sort-of dictatorship or full-on dictatorship that we have, and the first protection that you have, is to actually be funny. If you're not funny, you're not gonna work.

This, for example, "Evading basic services like water and electricity, Amish family moves to Venezuela." [laughter/applause] And they're in the other side of the road, so they're not gonna last long. [laughter]

This is another example after our government were taking passports from people, "Government says that you don't need passport because reading is the best way to travel."

We also produce some shows, web shows, OTT shows, that also satirize reality. I'm going to show you three clips. One is from *Pero Tenemos Patria*, which is a web show with over one million viewers per episode. Then it's a clip of a kind of failed show. We tried to do broadcast style TV with the Chigüire language. And the other one is a clip in which we see some sort of us making fun of how the government takes food stamps in the form of food boxes to control the people.

*[Video plays.]*

*Closed captioning:*

*-We welcome you all to Pero Tenemos Patria, the show that... Hey. Give me a minute. Let me send this message and then continue with the show, ok?*

*-Let's read a few messages that are coming in. Here says, "You're a moron." To him I say, "God bless you."*

*-Amen, my President. Amen.*

*-And I assume the new "sity" concept used by -*

*-city-*

*-my fellow Mérida State Governor, Héctor Rodríguez, during his campaign, as my own.*

*-Sorry, Mr. President. Héctor Rodríguez is not Governor of Mérida.*

*-What did I say?*

*-You said 'Mérida,' Mr. President. You said 'Mérida.'*

*-And what is he?*

*-Mr. President, Héctor Rodríguez is the Mérida State Governor.*

*-And what did I say?*

*-Oh, give me a break!*

*[Next clip.]*

*-Welcome to Chigüire Bipolar News, the place where you're the news. Well, not exactly because the news are the news and you are the viewers. We are Tinedo Fígaro –*

*-and Ana Virginia Fuentes.*

*-Now let's read the teleprompter.*

*-Friends who are about to leave the country throw a farewell party for the only one of them who will stay in Venezuela. Carlos Gomez will officially be the last middle class young person left in Venezuela.*

*[Next clip.]*

*-Mummy Pig made a special box for Peppa.*

*-Peppa, I've got this CLAP box full of food for you.*

*-Thank you for the gift.*

*-It's not a gift. Now you have to support the Government.*

*-But I don't want to support the Government just because of this box.*

*-Well, that is why we've made you starve, so when we give you this box, you will think we are great!*

*-And could I cook a yummy risotto?*

*-No, no, it only contains pasta and black beans.*

*-Fine, I'll take it only because I have no food. But I'll never be pro Chavez.*

*[End of video.]*

*[Laughter.]*

One other thing that's very important for us is to be on top of the news, be on top of current events, and timing is important. And in social media, we've raised over two million followers on Twitter, and that's because of this—timing is very important. For example, we take this news, that the PSUV Municipal Council appointed a new authority in Maturin—that is a small city—after an arrest warrant [was] issued against an opposition elected mayor. So, they threw out a mayor, and we put in Attila the Hun. [laughter]

So, and this, it's very important for us because we basically not only take what's happening, but we also inform our audience on the news. When you read this article, you back-link to Efecto Cocuyo, which did the actual report, and so you have an informed laugh, so to say.

One thing that's very important for us and confuses the government a little bit is that we also make fun of the opposition, and they like that. For example, "In search of intelligent life, NASA sends probe to MUD Headquarters." [laughter] That's the opposition headquarters. Or, "Divided opposition undecided on how to reply [to] government's attempt to divide opposition." [laughter]

It's very important to do weird stuff. And it's important for us to praise the government and get into their language and kind of attack from their point of view. So, "Heroic Maduro releases mimes from imaginary box." [laughter] Or, "Government invests 75 billion in branches to cover holes in streets." [laughter]

It's important for us to make fun of ourselves, ourselves the Venezuelans, and the people who are reading us, and sometime the extremes in our own party. This is "Honest conversation about marriage equality interrupted by guy yelling, 'Ayyy parchiiiita!'" It's also a comment on the homophobic ambience in Venezuela. And "Venezuelan asks for price controls on everything except their own business," because it's very popular there.

It's important to have a great team. Did somebody notice we skipped six? OK, I'm not going to tell you six. It's important to have a great team to let them grow in the space we created. And for us, it's very important to find the best talented people, creatives in Venezuela and let them grow within our ecosystem. And I want to.... That they are very happy, as you can see. [Video of group sitting, all looking serious, and one holds up "help" sign. Laughter.] And they're all comedians. They maybe leave at five because they have a standup comedy set, and we let them. It's part of the way we do things.

One last clip if I can show you. OK. One last clip. This is from a series we did called [unintelligible]. And this is Chavez's reaction in which we sent the presidents of Latin America to a desert island to fend for themselves. [wrong clip] Oh, no. This is the weirdest thing we've done.

*[Video plays.]*

*Closed captioning:*



*-Completely in love, like drunken on who knows what, among the shadows of the tall trees.*

*-My son came the other day saying, "Dad, look at this cartoon. It shows all of you." We're all in it, Evo. So, there's a point where Evo is singing and I say, "Evo, there's no chorus."*

*-[♪♪♪] Love each other weeeeell....*

*-No, there is no chorus there, Evo!*

*-But there is, but....*

*-Shut up man. If you don't know how to sing, then don't sing!*

*-And they put our voices identical!*

*-They make fun of me in Presidential Island because I always say: "How pretty, how pretty, how beautiful."*

*-How pretty, how beautiful butterflies! I'm gonna put them in a jar forever, so they can freely fly to where I order.*

*-Besides, they represent me too stupid. I'm not so stupid. And too obese. They call me "the fat."*

*-How do you spell water well? Can I misspell in my mind?*

*-It's so hard to think!*

*-That's made by my son Ravell, Alberto Federico Ravell.*

*[End of video.]*

So...[applause/cheers]. OK, that's it. Thank you.

[Applause.]