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The portrayal of politics and christianity by the Zimbabwean print media during the socio-economic and political crisis (2008–2013)

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2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27250

Muromo, Beauty (2018) The portrayal of politics and Christianity by the Zimbabwean print media during the socio-economic and political crisis (2008-2013), University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27250

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Abstract

The use of Christian biblical discourses by the African ruling elite to negotiate hegemony remains a site of contention in African politics and the academic space. This study examines how the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government and politicians especially former president Robert Mugabe appropriated and deployed Christianity Biblical discourses to negotiate and renew a waning hegemony against a backdrop of rising political opposition, mainly from the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in the post-2000 epoch. While significant studies have examined intersections of religion and politics in post-colonial Africa at large, studies employing a media studies approach in contemporary Zimbabwe are few and far between. This study employs an eclectic approach, drawing insights from Gramscian hegemony, Althusserian Ideology and Bateson's framing theory to examine the nexus of ZANU PF political discourse and Christianity religion as reflected in selected media. The study is qualitative employing an interpretive approach. A total of 79 purposively selected newspaper articles from both state controlled and privately owned media organisations published from 2008-2013, were subjected to Discourse Analysis in an attempt to gain insights on the relationship between Christianity and ZANU PF politics in Zimbabwe. The study shows that to save a dwindling hegemony, former president Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF government at large turned to the pulpit for political 'salvation' and legitimacy. In essence, the state controlled media portrayed Mugabe as a 'God-ordained' leader and a Messiah to Zimbabwe's economic, social and political problems.