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Zimbabwe in the media : the coverage of the talks about the Zimbabwean 'unity' government in the Mail & Guardian, 2007-2009.

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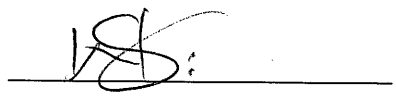
ABSTRACT

This research analyses the *Mail & Guardian*'s coverage of the 'historic' negotiations between Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party and the two MDC formations from 2007 to 2009. The talks were 'historic' in that they intended to negotiate an end to the partisan violence, human rights violations and create a framework for a 'power-sharing' government between the parties, thereby marking a possible shift in the Zimbabwean body politic. Drawing on cultural studies, critical political economy of the media and theories of news production, this study shows the form of the coverage and makes more visible the opaque aspects of the assumptions behind the *Mail & Guardian*'s coverage of the negotiations. Contrary to expectations that the coverage of the talks would mainly be issue-driven given that the *Mail & Guardian* is a newspaper of 'opinion and analysis', this study reveals that the coverage is largely personality-driven. In other words, the coverage primarily focuses on political figures and their power squabbles. This focus on personalities is detrimental to the needs, hopes and expectations of the Zimbabwean people whose future is placed in the hands of politicians. The study also reveals that throughout the entire coverage, there are only five articles that are issue-driven.

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The bibliography at the end of this report reveals my intellectual indebtedness to many works and scholars. In the bibliography I present books that I have indeed engaged. Needless to say, the analysis and interpretation put forth in this report is completely my responsibility.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ARVs	Antiretrovirals
AU	African Union
EU	European Union
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPA	Interparty Political Agreement
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-M	Movement for Democratic Change faction led by Arthur Mutambara
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change faction led by Morgan Tsvangirai
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR EVENTS

29 March 2007 SADC mandates South Africa President Thabo Mbeki to 'officially' mediate between ZANU-PF and the MDC formations (MDC-T and MDC-M) after Morgan Tsvangirai and other civic leaders were severely beaten in police custody after defying the ZANU-PF government directive banning a large intended gathering of opposition groups and civil society organisations.

November 2007 ZANU-PF and the MDC formations agree on a series of legislative reforms, including Constitutional Amendment No. 18, which significantly increases the number of seats in the Parliament and the Senate and provides that Parliament sits as an electoral college in the event that the President is no longer able to carry out his/her duties.

29 March 2008 'Harmonized' elections (local government, parliamentary, senatorial and presidential) are held simultaneously. MDC-T wins two seats more than ZANU-PF in the 210-seat Parliament. MDC-M holds the balance of power with ten seats.

02 May 2008 Results of the presidential election withheld under the guise of a recount, are finally released, with Morgan Tsvangirai shown as garnering 47.9 percent of the vote, Robert Mugabe 43.2 percent, Simba Makoni 8.3 percent and Langton Towungana 0.6 percent. As no candidate has an absolute majority, a run-off election is called to be held on 27 June 2008 between Morgan Tsvangirai and Robert Mugabe.

22 June 2008 Following a campaign of violence, which commences shortly after the March 2008 election, Morgan Tsvangirai withdraws from the presidential run-off poll. The withdrawal is not accepted by the ZEC.

27 June 2008	Presidential run-off goes ahead with Robert Mugabe as the only actively participating candidate although Morgan Tsvangirai's name remains on the ballot.
29 June 2008	Results are announced, giving Robert Mugabe 85 per cent of the vote. He is sworn into office immediately. The poll is almost universally discredited.
22 July 2008	ZANU-PF and the MDC formations sign a MoU to kick start the negotiating talks that are expected to last two weeks.
15 September 2008	ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-M officially sign a 'power sharing agreement' that is officially called an IPA but comes to be known as the GPA.
January 2009	Constitutional Amendment No.19, introducing the changes to the constitution necessary to give effect to the GPA, is passed in parliament.
11 February 2009	What is termed an 'inclusive' government, but comes to be called a 'unity' government or GNU, is formed, with the MDC-T, MDC-M and ZANU-PF sharing the ministries of government. Robert Mugabe is to 'continue' as President and Morgan Tsvangirai is appointed Prime Minister.

Adapted from Matyszak (2010: xviii-xix)

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