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GAME CHANGERS IN ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS: ZIMBABWEAN DIASPORA MEDIA REPORTING OF HOMELAND CONFLICT

Abstract:

The diaspora media are increasingly becoming influential players in homeland conflicts, to such an extent that domestic governments can ignore them at their own peril. However, their actual role, particularly in domestic conflicts is remains contentious with two perspectives dominating existing literature. On the one hand, diaspora media are constructed as “conflict mongers” on the basis of their accentuation of “disagreements, foregrounding confrontations and lending their airtime to forceful voices. On the other hand, they have been viewed as peace builders on account of their ability to shun “extremism, giving room for alternative voices and visualizing peaceful solutions” (Skjerdal 2012, 27). However, these assessments are mainly based on suppositions, thus leaving implicit questions about what role the diaspora media play in homeland conflicts and what their influence is and how exactly are they are implicated in these political conflicts. Moreover, this binary perspective masks the complexity of diaspora media, particularly given the diversity and dynamism of the diaspora media. This chapter combines Gadi Wolfsfeld (1991)’s transactional mode and Michel Foucault’s Discourse theory to explore the extent to which the diaspora media sought to equalise the balance of power in an unequal conflict, pitting the ruling party, Zanu PF and the main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) during the presidential run-off of 27 June 2008. Key questions addressed in this chapter are: How did the diaspora media represent the run-off election? To what extent did they attempt to play the “game-changer” in an unequal conflict? To what extent did the diaspora media accentuate external intervention in the Zimbabwean conflict? What lessons can be drawn for other African countries and beyond? The chapter presents an African, particularly Zimbabwean perspective on the role of the diaspora media in homeland affairs and broader ideological assumptions about the dominant discourses in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, of which the media are a key propagator.

Keywords:

Diaspora Media; Discourse Theory; Homeland Conflict; Liberalism; Transactional Model; Transactional Model; Zimbabwe