

State interference, para-politics and editorial control: The political economy of ‘Mirrorgate’ in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article explores the events leading to the closure of the Zimbabwe Mirror Newspapers Group (ZMNG) in 2007. It narrates how the state in Zimbabwe, through its intelligence arm, the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), covertly took over the privately owned newspaper stable, publishers of the Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror, leading to the organization’s demise. The article is informed by critical political economy theory, particularly the Propaganda Model and the concept of Social Control in the newsroom, linking Mirrorgate to the narrative of media control by the state in Zimbabwe. Interviews were conducted with key personnel – former Mirror staff members – to collect data. Archival newspaper reports were also analysed to trace the development of Mirrorgate and its consequences on the Mirror’s performance as a media entity. The article also benefits from experiential data accumulated through observation by the author as a former Mirror employee. The article shows that the Mirror takeover by the state had debilitating consequences on the organization’s performance, and can be attributed as the major reason behind the newspaper stable’s eventual collapse. The article also speculates on the possible reasons why the state could have taken over the newspaper company, particularly to manipulate public opinion during a time of political strife.