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*'Framing of MDC-T Power Struggles: Tsvangirai Legacy, Zimbabwe*  
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### Abstract

*Since the death of the party's founding president, Morgan Tsvangirai on 14 February 2018, the Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai (MDC-T) has been shaped by the political succession struggle. The internal war to succeed Tsvangirai pitted Chamisa who was controversially endorsed by MDC-T national council and national executive as the acting president, and Khupe who insisted that constitutionally she was the party's leader. The power struggle between these two and their respective factions came four months before crucial 2018 harmonised elections, causing confusion in Zimbabwe's main opposition party. After Chamisa's efforts to negotiate with Khupe collapsed, the national council, which is the opposition party's supreme body in-between congresses, convened to seal her fate together with her allies. The MDC-T national council eventually expelled co-vice president Thokozani Khupe, party spokesperson Obert Gutu and organizing secretary Abednico Bhebhe while also accepting the pre-emptive resignation of national chairperson Lovemore Moyo. This article examines the role of the local press in framing this struggle, arguing that the state-controlled Herald, took a position to sympathise with Thokozani Khupe while negatively portraying Nelson Chamisa. The Herald largely depicts the MDC-T as a violent party, and its reportage foments conflict in the main opposition party. In contrast, privately-owned News Day and Zimbabwe independent project Chamisa positively while negatively framing Khupe and her allies. This article widens scholarship on factionalism in Zimbabwean opposition politics, while emphasizing how tribal and gender dimensions can reinforce national politics.*

## 1. Introduction

MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who died in South Africa on 14 February 2018, joined politics at a time when heavyweights that had challenged former President Robert Mugabe in the past had failed. After failed attempts to dislodge Mugabe by political luminaries who included former ZANU leader Ndabaningi Sithole, PF-ZAPU leader and late vice-president Joshua Nkomo and Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) president Edgar Tekere, there emerged a political nonentity to stage the biggest challenge Mugabe had ever faced in post-independence Zimbabwe.

Right from the beginning, the charismatic Tsvangirai, whose background was that of trade unionism, showed courage. Mugabe mocked Tsvangirai and his party deputy Gibson Sibanda (now late), describing them as greenhorns who knew nothing about politics. But Tsvangirai showed great mobilization skills. He had the bravery to confront what certainly was a fierce and ruthless political operator in form of Mugabe, who had accumulated imperial power and consolidated it over a period of two decades. That Tsvangirai contributed immensely to fighting Mugabe's authoritarian regime is beyond reasonable doubt. He was brave and determined to confront an entrenched and fierce despotic system at a time many would choose to keep quiet, collaborate with or be co-opted to preserve their personal or business interest.

Tsvangirai, together with his late colleague Gibson Sibanda did not choose the easy way out. He chose to take the bull by the horns to struggle for democracy and change, mainly using mass mobilization and peaceful means.

As part of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), Tsvangirai mobilized people and led a broad constitutional movement which demanded constitutional reform that culminated in Mugabe setting up a constitutional commission to draft a new constitutional. When Mugabe refused to make meaningful concessions in the constitution making process, Tsvangirai led a broad movement to oppose the draft constitution which allowed Mugabe to run only for two terms. He defeated a government-led process, working together with NCA and the MDC, which had been formed in February 1999.

Tsvangirai immediately hit the ground running. In his first attempt he almost swept ZANU PF out of power by winning 57 of the electable 120 seats. During that time he braved violence, which was to be the political norm until 2008 - the burning down of property and the assault of opposition supporters. In 2002, with only two years' experience, he almost defeated Mugabe. He only lost because his supporters were prevented from voting through a systematic manipulation of the process. Mugabe had reduced the number of polling stations in urban areas, his party's stronghold. The victory was incredible because Tsvangirai won in almost all urban areas and confined Mugabe and ZANU PF to rural areas. Tsvangirai put up a good fight even in 2005, amid violence and intimidation. However, it was in 2008 when he put up his biggest political fight. He clearly defeated Mugabe in the first round of elections with 47, 9% to 43, 2% of the vote. He, however, failed to garner the 50% plus one vote required then by the constitution to take the presidency (Tendi, 2016).

However, there is untold story that Tsvangirai actually won a clear victory but was denied through manipulation. (Results were withheld for six weeks amid claims his outright victory was fraudulently manipulated). Mugabe made a "Freudian slip" in 2014 when he said Tsvangirai garnered 73% of the vote. ZANU PF launched a campaign of brutality during the runoff election period as Tsvangirai fled the country to Botswana. Tsvangirai was forced to drop out of the runoff through a sustained campaign of intimidation, violence and brutality. Tsvangirai was severely beaten twice and three times charged with treason - in which he was later acquitted.

He was then co-opted into Government of National Unity (GNU) between 2009 & 2013 as the country's Prime Minister under pressure from the then South African president Thabo Mbeki. This was the beginning of his decline. Tsvangirai was then contained from within. Mugabe gave him the Highlands mansion, which was bought and renovated at a cost of over US\$ 3 million. He also received millions of United States dollars (*Zimbabwe Independent*, February 16 to 22, 2018).

From that time it was downhill for Tsvangirai and his MDC-T party. A combination of losing political ground through a number of splits in his party, sex scandals and health problems marked his decline. MDC-T split twice, in 2005 and 2014. The first split was over whether to contest the senate election and the other over Tsvangirai's succession after 2013 controversial loss to ZANU PF (See Mungwari (2017)). In addition, during the unity government he started listening more to Mugabe than his party. Tsvangirai also made grave mistakes. Arguably, his biggest failures were not making critical decisions, one of which was dealing with his succession and not stopping the splits, which saw the party losing founding key members who included Welshman Ncube and Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga (in 2005 split); Tendai Biti and Elton Mangoma (in 2014 split).

Tsvangirai was nominated by majority opposition parties to be the president of MDC Alliance (a coalition of seven opposition parties) for 2018 election. In 2017, before MDC Alliance was mooted, Tsvangirai had again been endorsed by opposition political parties under the National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA) to lead the grand coalition (Mungwari & Vhutuza, 2017).

However, some key MDC-T top members who include one of the Vice Presidents, Thokozani Khupe, Lovemore Moyo (National Chairperson), Abednico Bhebhe (Organizing Secretary) among others were against MDC Alliance. This was manifested by the said members particularly Khupe, who boycotted all eight meetings. The relationship between Tsvangirai and Khupe was strained due to her perspective of disliking MDC Alliance. It can be noted that Khupe defied a living Tsvangirai himself, showing that she had always been intransigent and rebellious.

Tsvangirai eventually lost his battle to cancer of the colon on 14 February 2018 at Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa. However, there is a belief that Tsvangirai could have been a victim of imported poisons from Israel, which he was given during GNU\*.

This article examines state-controlled daily *The Herald* and privately owned *News Day* and *Zimbabwe Independent* newspapers on how they framed MDC-T intra party power struggles from the time Tsvangirai was ill in South Africa and post his death. Newspaper articles from January to March 2018 from selected local newspapers were analyzed. Therefore, secondary data analysis and observation through the lenses of qualitative approach, of the intra party power struggles in MDC-T was done. One on one interview was also carried with MDC-T Secretary General, Douglas Mwonzora on 16 March 2018 in Harare.

## 2. MDC-T Succession Struggles: Before Tsvangirai's Death

Although there had been power struggles and infighting in Zimbabwe's biggest opposition political party, it became worse when the party's iconic leader, Morgan Tsvangirai got admitted in a South African hospital for cancer of the colon treatment in January 2018. His absence created a leadership vortex and left the party without cohesion and direction. His subordinates got involved in a nasty fight which has since threatened to tear the party apart. It is arguably the worst crisis the party has faced in years and unless it is resolved amicably, it threatens to damage the party's prospects in this year (2018) general elections and even its long term viability (Magaisa, 2018).

In an effort to douse deep-seated factional clashes, which were threatening to tear the party apart, Tsvangirai played his game well - for a while - by having the three acting presidents. By so doing, he managed to forge a modicum of unity by balancing competing factions and interests among the top three leaders. This

paper argues that Tsvangirai could have used such an opportunity to call for a congress to facilitate leadership succession. But cosmetic efforts to balancing factional politics through rotational leadership did not hide deeper issues over succession.

Prior to Tsvangirai's death, some of the party's top leadership and grassroots membership alike had hinted that they would resist any move by him to appoint or anoint a successor.

It is important to note that Tsvangirai's long absence due to illness created a leadership void. "Internal party conflicts will take a long time to resolve", argued Gift Mwonozora (cited in *Newsday Weekender*, Saturday, February 17, 2018). The crisis has also been evident in a game of ping – pong between Tsvangirai's spokesperson, Luke Tamborinyoka and party's spokesperson, Obert Gutu, with statements that contradicted the other. In February, Tsvangirai appointed Chamisa as the acting vice president. But, in a dramatic change of events, Obert Gutu disputed the appointment, creating more confusion over who was in charge. The latest manifestation of lack of cohesion and apparent confusion in the party is the drama over the identity of the Acting President (Magaisa, 2018). The party has three Vice Presidents, Thokozani Khupe, Nelson Chamisa and Elias Mudzuri. Khupe was elected at the 2014 congress while Chamisa and Mudzuri were appointed by Tsvangirai in July 2016, a decision that came with huge controversy and whose repercussions are now being felt. If the party had one Vice President, the situation would have been very simple since constitutionally, that person would have taken the reins in the President's absence. With three VPs, however, the ingredients for succession battles such as being currently witnessed were always present.

Magaisa (ibid) argues that things would have been easier if the MDC constitution had been amended to provide clarity on issues of the acting presidency and succession after the appointment of two extra VPs. That this did not happen is a major failing of the party and its leadership who are the custodians of the constitution. Magaisa further argues that it is a severe indictment on the leadership that a party which provided leadership to the national constitution-making process (in 2011-2013) has such a weak and incomplete constitution. This is why at present; there is no clarity as to the identity of the Acting President. As alluded to earlier, Tsvangirai's spokesperson Luke Tamborinyoka announced the appointment of Nelson Chamisa as Acting President until Tsvangirai's return. The reason given was that both Mudzuri and Khupe were in Cape Town, South Africa where they were attending a workshop. Arguably, there were some disagreements over the attendance of Khupe and Mudzuri at the Cape Town event since the principals of the MDC Alliance which was led by Tsvangirai boycotted it.

Confusion arose when party spokesperson, Gutu, disputed Tamborinyoka's statement and stated that Mudzuri was still the Acting President. Two days later, Mudzuri claimed that he had met Tsvangirai and was still the Acting President. Meanwhile, Chamisa had been executing duties as Acting President and asserting his role as such. Khupe, on the other hand, was insisting that the party must go to the constitution which recognizes the role of officials (implying that she is the only legitimate Acting President since she was elected by congress in 2014). Khupe argued that she was the legitimate Vice-President by virtue of being elected at the last party congress held in 2014. All these factors have led to vicious leadership succession conundrum and power struggle that seem set to continue. Smear campaigns, conflicting messaging, counter claims and mudslinging have become the order of the day within the once formidable MDC-T (*Mwonozora Gift in News Day the Weekender*, Saturday February 17, 2018).

This article argues that the friction that was between Tsvangirai and Khupe suggests that she was not his favourite candidate for succession. Her supporters believe she has a superior claim against her co-vice Presidents because she is the only VP who was elected by congress. This is why in recent tweets she made reference to the elected officers, to clearly distinguish herself from her counterparts. Despite Khupe being the most senior VP, she appears to be in limbo and floating without a real mandate in terms of duties. This article argues that Khupe and other MDC-T officials should not listen to media, particularly state-controlled press which arguably has an agenda to foment conflict within opposition parties. MDC-T members' negotiations or talks to resolve their differences should not be influenced by the media.

Even the debate in MDC-T has conveniently ignored her in the succession matrix, choosing instead to put Chamisa and Mudzuri, who were both 'hand-picked' by Tsvangirai to neutralize Khupe (*The Herald*, 10 January, 2018). Arguably, the appointment of Chamisa and Mudzuri was the first cause of friction between Tsvangirai and Khupe. Khupe felt that the move undermined her authority as the elected VP. She would have been the natural choice to act as the leader in the absence of Tsvangirai if she had been the sole VP. The inclusion of Chamisa and Mudzuri complicated the position because it meant she no longer had an automatic claim to act in Tsvangirai's absence.

This article argues that Tsvangirai's move showed that he did not have confidence in his deputy. Naturally, Khupe found it hard to accept the appointment of two extra VPs but she gritted her teeth and carried on. This article draws a distinction between congress elected VP and unilateral appointments by Tsvangirai. Things would have been easier if the MDC constitution had been amended to provide clarity on issues of the acting presidency and succession after the appointment of two extra VPs.

However, as this article will demonstrate, the second cause of tension between Tsvangirai and Khupe was the formation of the MDC Alliance, an electoral coalition which brought back former colleagues who had previously led breakaway parties. I have argued elsewhere and in my thesis reasons for MDC splits in 2005

and 2014 (Mungwari, 2017). Back in the fold were Welshman Ncube and Tendai Biti, both former senior leaders in the party who had left in 2005 and 2014 respectively. Khupe, Lovemore Moyo, Abednico Bhebhe among others were not happy with the terms of parliamentary seats between members of the coalition. Khupe and others felt the allocation formula gave away too much to parties that had a little following, especially in the so-called strongholds in the Matabeleland region (see Mungwari and Vhutuza (2017)) "Opposition political parties' coalition in Zimbabwe: Challenges and possibilities". This conflict soon escalated when Khupe and her allies boycotted the launch of the MDC Alliance and they became victims of violence which they blamed on their leader. The result is that Khupe has generally boycotted the MDC Alliance activities. I argue in this article that Khupe has always felt insecure about the 'return' of Welshman Ncube and Tendai Biti who threatened her position as the deputy president.

This article argues that Khupe will find it complicated in winning grassroots support, let alone within MDC Alliance partners. She should have resolved her acrimonious relationship with Tsvangirai before his health deteriorated; perhaps they could have forged common ground.

This article draws attention to gender, sexuality and tribal/ethnic issues. Khupe's situation has gender and ethnic dimensions, with concerns that her treatment does not bode well for the treatment of women and ethnic minorities from the Matabeleland region (Magaisa, 2018). These issues were raised in 2016 when Tsvangirai brought in two male VPs from Masvingo province. Some people interpreted it as yet another snub directed at women and politicians from Matabeleland provinces who feel marginalized in national politics. In this article, I argue that political parties should be sensitive when it comes to issues of gender, tribe or ethnicity. However, The Herald stories fuel these issues so as to foment conflict within MDC-T.

In 2014 former Vice President Joice Mujuru was accused of plotting to assassinate Robert Mugabe, accusations which were never attested to this day. According to Blessing - Miles Tendai, 2016:

Their descriptions were interwoven with explicit accounts about surveillance proof of Mujuru's alleged sexual encounters with male members of her faction, which, it is said; she engaged in to guarantee their loyalty. Claims that Mujuru used sex to ensure political loyalty are at worst misogynistic, implying that women cannot advance themselves without employing their bodies and sexuality; or at best highly gendered and patriarchal, implying that there is something perverse or immoral about female sexuality. Ultimately the gendered nature of surveillance fortifies a patriarchal national politics in which women can be degraded and ostracized through sexualized accounts... However, when writing about gender, politics and surveillance we must be wary of reproducing 'gender as a binary system' that depicts women as passive actors or even simply as victim...

Nevertheless, Khupe's opposition to the MDC Alliance complicated matters. The coalition is one of the key strategies for the next elections in July 2018. Would Tsvangirai have entrusted her with leadership in his absence when she is opposed to and not participating in one of the party's flagship strategies for the elections?

### 3. Press Representation of MDC-T Leadership Struggles

This section examines how *The Herald*, *News Day* and *Zimbabwe Independent* framed MDC-T leadership and succession battles when Tsvangirai was still in hospital in South Africa.

*The Herald* published stories with the following headlines: 'Tsvangirai hints at retirement', 'MDC-T's succession cesspool', 'Tsvangirai statement strokes tensions in MDC-T', 'Mudzuri ready to take over MDC-T party', 9, 10, 11, 13 January respectively. 'MDC-T on fire, heads for implosion', 'Mudzuri barred from Harvest House', 'Race to succeed Tsvangirai is on', 'MDC-T technically splits', 9, 13, 13 and 14 February 2018 respectively.

*News Day* carried stories with the following headlines: 'Zimbabwe's top opposition party hit by power struggles', 'MDC-T succession battles: Chamisa lays gauntlet', 'MDC-T succession: Khupe dumped by her province', 'MDC-T meets to anoint true Tsvangirai's successor', 'Chamisa ups stakes', 8, 12, 12, 12 and 14 February 2018 respectively.

*Zimbabwe Independent* published stories with the following headlines: 'Claims and counter claims to power in MDC-T', 21 January 2018, 'Violence fears as MDC-T wars escalate', 'Movement for Democratic Confusion', 11 to 17 February 2018 respectively.

In the study of media discourses, headlines are particularly interesting. Brooks cited in Willems (2004) asserts that readers often tend to focus on the headlines of articles rather than on the content. Headlines serve as summaries of news articles and emphasize what the journalist considers to be the most important or most remarkable points of an article. Headlines also include the issues that reporters wish their readers to remember. Headlines often appear to be only partial summaries of the news text. Since headlines are usually read more frequently than the articles themselves, they are a powerful way to convey a particular ideological view. Headlines activate and reproduce the knowledge readers already have on the subject and may as a result also reconfirm readers' prejudices. Headlines may also serve a commercial purpose or value to sell the newspaper, especially through sensational or screaming headlines.

Willems (2004) asserts that the choice of vocabulary (diction) also constructs particular ideological representation of events. I also posit that “words” are the “garments” in which we “dress” thoughts. Apart from their descriptive function words express views and attitudes. The selection of particular words rather than others has clear ideological implications because it often reveals the underlying beliefs of journalists about actors and events. This article analyses headlines, content of the text and vocabulary in order to examine press representation of conflict in MDC-T.

‘Tsvangirai hints at retirement,’ *The Herald*, 9 January 2018. The newspaper reported that Tsvangirai was thinking about his future and the possibility of handing over “the levers of leadership” to the “young generation.” This article argues that the narrative of youth because they constitute about 65% of the demography of the country is clear. This explains why the young generation identifies with Nelson Chamisa as their possible President. *The Herald* of 9 January depicted tensions in MDC-T caused by contrasting statements between Tsvangirai’s spokesperson Obert Gutu. What comes out clearly is that Tsvangirai’s intimation of a possible imminent retirement from active politics due to his deteriorating healthy then caused leadership and succession struggles within the party.

*The Herald*, 13 January 2018 headline ‘Mudzuri ready to take over MDC-T party,’ projects the state-controlled newspaper’s agenda, that of taking a position to support one faction of opposition party. Where many hoped they were going to find an equal placing of candidates set for the MDC-T top post, Chamisa and Mudzuri, but the elderly Mudzuri was given preferential headline accolades with a naked declaration that he is ready ‘to take over the party’. All throughout the MDC’s 19 year life, no opposition has ever obtained such treatment which has been the preserve of ZANU-PF strongmen – Robert Mugabe and Emmerson Mnangagwa. I have explained earlier in this section the implications of headlines and vocabulary employed by reporters.

*The Herald* reporters like Tendai Mugabe is predicable on his agenda to portray MDC-T or any opposition party in negative derogatory remarks. Many times, the lead paragraph has no relationship with content or text. He employs sensationalism intended to advance ideology of ZANU PF which generally perceives opposition negatively. ‘MDC-T on fire, heads for implosion’ was a heading in *The Herald* of 9 February 2018. In the story, Tendai Mugabe employs scathing diction which exacerbates and foments conflict within MDC-T members. He is devoid of conflict resolution vocabulary.

‘Mudzuri barred from the Harvest House’ and ‘MDC-T technically splits’ were headlines of the *Herald* stories on 13 and 14 February 2018. The two stories highlighted the infighting in MDC-T with clear agenda of fuelling the conflicts than providing citizens with basic information. The state-controlled newspaper said, ‘MDC-T... inched closer to a monumental split with co-vice precedents Eng. Elias Mudzuri and Thokozani Khupe boycotting the party’ standing meeting conveyed by their counterpart... Nelson Chamisa.’ It is important to note that *The Herald* agenda of backing Mudzuri is sustained by placement of his photograph and deliberate omission of Chamisa’s photograph except emphasising that Chamisa had ‘captured Harvest House.’

Contrary to *The Herald* backing Mudzuri, *News Day* allegedly framed Nelson Chamisa as the most credible VP to take levers of power in acting capacity ahead of the other two VPs. The lead paragraph of 12 February 2018 demonstrate this: ‘Acting MDC-T and MDC Alliance president Nelson Chamisa has upped the stakes in the race to succeed ailing party leader Morgan Tsvangirai and lined up countrywide campaign rallies to build his political profile ahead of this year elections.’ *News Day* carries Nelson Chamisa’s photograph as well as a health picture of Tsvangirai. What comes out as a bone of contention is that leadership struggle threatens stability of the party.

Addressing thousands of supporters at an MDC-T Alliance rally on 11 February 2018 in Masvingo Province, Chamisa assured his supporters that the internal fight in MDC would be solved. Of interest to note is that Mudzuri, who also attended the Masvingo rally was not given the platform to address the meeting, although he claimed that he was still acting MDC- T president while Khupe also insisted that she was the legitimate party leader in the absence of Tsvangirai by virtue of election at the party’ congress in 2014. However, MDC Alliance spokesperson Welshman Ncube told supporters that Chamisa had been endorsed by Tsvangirai and therefore, there was no question over his credibility.

The article further notes that MDC-T Bulawayo province on 10 February turned its back on deputy president Thokozani Khupe, and declared its allegiance to Nelson Chamisa as internal fighting over Morgan Tsvangirai succession escalates. Intra-party struggles were exacerbated when Khupe and Mudzuri refused to recognize Chamisa’s recent appointment as acting President. According to Khupe’s personnel assistant, Witness Dube:

Khupe’s views on the ongoing misunderstandings on the MDC-T that are now playing in the public are very clear and consistent, the party must return to a strict constitutional operational basis. Constitutions are made for posterity, and must not be overtaken by events and individual interests.

(*News Day*, February 12, 2018: ‘MDC-T Byo dumps Khupe’).

It is important to note that the infighting over the MDC-T leadership dispute comes at a time when the party was divided over the formation of the MDC Alliance. Khupe and allies were opposed to the MDC

Alliance, a grouping of seven opposition parties that was already campaigning in preparation of general election set for 2018.

*News Day* of 12 February 2018 carries an article titled, 'MDC-T... when things fall apart' which was authored by Alex Magaisa, MDC-T former advisor. Magaisa pointed out that, "things are falling apart in the country's leading opposition party, the MDC-T." Considering what is playing out in the public domain, succession war is devouring MDC-T after nearly two decades of political existence, MDC-T allowed itself to fall into the same trap, which has destroyed many political parties over the past centuries. The idea of creating a political god out of supposedly elected official is what has brought chaos in the opposition party. This article argues that if MDC-T constitution had allowed term limits for the party's presidency the party would not be in the current struggle. All of the three vice-presidents want to be president. Under such circumstances blackmail, lies, violence, intimidation, assaults and other vices like what is obtaining in MDC-T take centre stage.

From the foregoing discussion, the factional fights would jeopardize coalition arrangements. So far, MDC-T is the leader of the MDC Alliance, the only serious coalition on the political terrain by numbers. It goes without saying that the MDC-T is the biggest opposition in the country and recent rallies have demonstrated and reaffirmed its pulling power. However, some leaders in the MDC-T have decided to fight the MDC Alliance. They are failing to read the political winds, especially if instead of working with former allies, they choose to align themselves with former ZANU PF groups. Magaisa (2018) asserts that the MDC Alliance provides the nucleus of a bigger coalition and while it might have weaknesses, these must be ironed out rather than cause collapse.

#### **4. Tsvangirai's Death Fuels Internal Turmoil**

The death of Morgan Tsvangirai on 14 February 2018, the iconic leader of the Movement for Democratic Change for nearly two decades, has shaken its foundation to the core. One of the party's vice presidents, Nelson Chamisa quickly moved to seize control through the national council which endorsed him as acting president for the next 12 months (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 to 22 February, 2018).

However, Chamisa's move triggered an immediate backlash from party secretary-general, Douglas Mwonozora who challenged the legality of the national council decision. Mwonozora warned he would call for the extraordinary congress instantly after Tsvangirai's burial. This article argues that the MDC-T is locked in a succession battle – similar to that of the ruling ZANU PF which culminated in a military intervention in November 2018. The factional fight has become intense as it has seen the camps banning each other from the party offices and the Tsvangirai family residence. The intra-party political intrigue has divided not only MDC-T leaders but also Tsvangirai family members.

Addressing journalists on 15 February 2018 at MDC-T headquarters, Harvest House (now renamed Morgan Tsvangirai House), shortly after convening an urgent meeting of the national council, the supreme decision making body in between congresses, MDC-T deputy chairperson Morgan Komichi declared the party had resolved to appoint Chamisa as the acting president for the next 12 months. However, Khupe and Mudzuri were apparently angered by Chamisa's move to call MDC-T national council members because it took place at a time other top party officials were seized with funeral arrangements at Tsvangirai's Highlands residence (*News Days, The Herald, Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 February 2018).

To demonstrate the escalating infighting, the meeting was boycotted by Khupe and Mudzuri. Nonetheless, Chamisa told journalists that Tsvangirai's death had created a leadership void which demanded urgent attention. *Zimbabwe Independent* quotes Chamisa arguing:

We are in a crisis; there must be leadership in the cockpit. We do not have a crisis of generals in the party...Mudzuri was aware (of the meeting). He could not avail himself...Madam Khupe was on her way...

This article contends that Chamisa, who appears to be having an upper hand in the succession battle, is being backed by senior officials, including Komichi, Paurina Mupariwa, Muri Zwizai, Thabitha Khumalo, Chalton Hwande, Ian Makone, Theresa Makone, Luke Tamborinyoka and Happymore Chidziva. Tsvangirai's widow Elizabeth Macheke also supports Chamisa. This is one factional camp. Chamisa also controls Harvest House.

On the other hand, Khupe, who enjoys massive support from Matabeleland Province, is reportedly working with MDC-T national chairperson Lovemore Moyo, national secretary Douglas Mwonozora, party spokesperson Obert Gutu and organizing secretary Abednico Bhebhe, among other officials. Khupe was elected MDC-T vice-president at the party congress in 2014, but in July 2016 Tsvangirai diluted her power by parachuting in Chamisa and Mudzuri as co-vice presidents, as earlier stated.

This article notes that despite having legitimacy on her side, Khupe faces a major challenge given that Zimbabwe is a patriarchal and ethnocentric society in which gender, tribe and region are important dynamics in politics. Khupe had a frosty relationship with Tsvangirai after his unilateral appointment of Chamisa and Mudzuri. Her allies have openly complained that the party leader appointed Mudzuri and Chamisa to thwart her ascendancy. In his 2018 New Year message, Tsvangirai, however, said the appointments were made with succession in consideration as he wanted the younger generation to take over (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 to 22

February, 2018). However, Khupe drew the attention of the gender and tribal dynamics of MDC-T politics. 'I want to stop that notion of saying a Ndebele person cannot be a President, of saying a woman cannot be a President. I want to tell them this very minute that even though I am a Ndebele girl, even though I am a woman, I can be a President' (*The Herald*, 24 February 2018). It is important to point out that *The Herald* (ibid) article titled: 'A dead man, a rebel leader and a Ndebele girl,' authored by faceless columnist only identified as "RADAR", had only one agenda – to exacerbate sexism and ethnicity in MDC-T. *The Herald* Saturday columnist replaced "Nathaniel Manheru" which used to be authored by Presidential spokesperson, George Charamba; who stopped writing the column after he was warned by former First Lady, Grace Mugabe.

Following the national council's endorsement of Chamisa as acting president, MDC-T deputy president Thokozani Khupe accused her co- deputy Nelson Chamisa of shamelessly staging a coup and usurping power at a time the opposition party was mourning its late leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. Khupe accused Chamisa of being insensitive and power-hungry. *News Day* of February 16, 2018, quotes Khupe fuming:

You can't even wait for two days to have Tsvangirai buried so that you can do your shenanigans to get power? You are power-hungry and your conduct leaves a lot to be desired. Even in our culture, even if there is a wedding and someone dies, the wedding is called off... Tsvangirai dies and you go on with a meeting to appoint yourself as leader. How shameful! All we were supposed to do was to suspend everything expect funeral arrangements.

The foregoing illustrates the intra-party power struggles and leadership crisis in the main opposition party. Chamisa argued that there was no way the party was going to skip the issue and leave it hanging "...we have to provide leadership direction, and that direction was provided after robust debate in terms of what is good for the party..."

Besides Chamisa's appointment, the council also resolved to suspend all party programmes until Tsvangirai's burial and handed over party spokesperson Obert Gutu's duties to the president's office "... to manage communications during this period of hard times". This article reckons that the lack of a succession plan has left Morgan Tsvangirai's party in disarray.

## 5. Tsvangirai – A People's Hero

This section focuses on Morgan Tsvangirai's burial and political violence skirmishes which occurred at the funeral and after. That Tsvangirai contributed immensely to fighting Mugabe's authoritarian regime is beyond reasonable doubt. He was brave and determined to confront an entrenched and fierce despotic system. Tsvangirai has been described as a hero, a liberator, a doyen of democracy, a victim of ZANU PF violence – to honour him not to play on people's emotions. Since Zimbabwe's independence, Tsvangirai emerged as one of the strongest opposition leaders against ZANU PF government. Although Tsvangirai had stood out as one of the sternest critics of the ZANU PF regime, Mnangagwa said they decided to honour him for the role he played in pushing for democracy.

It is against this background that President Emmerson Mnangagwa on 15 February granted a state – assisted funeral to opposition MDC-T leader and former Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, turning down public calls to accord him national hero status. A state-assisted funeral is an honour usually given to the level of provincial heroes (*The Herald*, *News Day*, 16 February 2018: 'State funeral for Tsvangirai' and 'Tsvangirai gets State funeral' respectively). Mnangagwa described Tsvangirai as a strong trade unionist and selfless opposition leader to be always remembered for his readiness to stretch and reach out across the political divide for a Government of National Unity (GNU) after the polarizing 2008 elections. Both newspapers quote Mnangagwa saying:

Both in and after the GNU, he remained a national figure who obdurately insisted on free, fair, credible and non-violent elections as a way of strengthening our democracy and our overall re-engagement with the rest of the world.

Vice-President Constantino Chiwenga took to micro-blogging site *Twitter* to describe Tsvangirai as a "Great son of the soil". There was also an out pouring of condolence message from the International Community. United Kingdom Foreign secretary Boris Johnson said: "Morgan Tsvangirai represented courage and determination in the face of oppression, and gave ordinary Zimbabweans faith to believe in the future. He was one of the bravest political leaders of his time and will be sadly missed".

The United State embassy in Harare also joined the country in mourning Tsvangirai, describing him as a courageous leader, who tirelessly fought for peace and democratic principles. Exiled former Higher Education Minister Jonathan Moyo also tweeted: "A people's hero inspires supporters and challenges detractors to make a better society. As such a hero, Morgan Tsvangirai enabled deeply-divided Zimbabweans to see the link and difference between hard-won independence and democracy, based on free, fair and credible elections ..."

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) described Tsvangirai as a dedicated champion of social justice, human rights, human dignity and democracy not only locally, but even beyond borders whose

legacy the people of Zimbabwe should seek to perpetuate. Tsvangirai distinguished himself as a tenacious human rights defender in his own rights (*News Day*, 16 February 2018).

In the same vein, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) in its condolence message said the former trade unionist was a towering and brave political giant:

A towering, brave political giant, Comrade Tsvangirai epitomized the ordinary Zimbabweans' aspirations and desire for democracy, freedom and prosperity... Against all odds, the former Premier fought against the Robert Mugabe dictatorship, risking his life in the process. Indeed, he was a victim of wanton arrest, beatings and torture at the hands of a brutal dictator... (*News Day*, 16 February 2018).

Alpha Media Holdings Chairman Trevor Ncube said that while the nation mourns the passing of a brave compatriot, it was now a moment to reflect and take stock of the nature of our national politics and national discourse. Ncube appealed to Mnangagwa to help bring the nation together by granting Tsvangirai a hero's burial at the National Heroes Acre:

Perhaps one of the best ways of remembering Tsvangirai is to say: Never again will our political differences mean that we are mortal enemies as citizens. Instead, our political differences must be seen as a healthy and necessary difference of opinion on the direction and future of our beloved Zimbabwe ... This single gesture, while not a magic wand towards nation building, healing and reconciliation, would certainly go a long way in signalling our commitment to a new era in our national politics. It would also be a strong signal that the national hero status in not a preserve of one political party. It would be a strong signal that the Heroes' Acre is a place for all Zimbabweans befitting their status (*News Day*, 16 February 2018).

Against this background, Tsvangirai is a people's hero, whether President Mnangagwa government decided to bury him at the National Heroes' Acre or not (which they denied him). Throughout Zimbabweans and opinion leaders had suggested in the interest of reconciliation, unity and cohesion government must have declared him a hero but authorities were uninterested. However, this article argues that Tsvangirai's hero status was not in dispute. It was not a product of ZANU PF benevolence. He earned his stripes. Tsvangirai will forever remain a national hero in people's hearts and minds.

*Zimbabwe Independent Newspaper's* column writer, Mucracker argues:

Mucracker is not impressed by the charade of ZANU PF leaders who wants to extract cheap political capital out of Tsvangirai's death. You cannot try to kill a man today and tomorrow you jostle to lead mourners at his funeral. Political opportunists must chill and stop exposing themselves... ZANU PF leaders cannot pontificate on Tsvangirai being a hero without sounding insincere or hypocritical. Tsvangirai's relatives, supporters and analysts cannot miss the obvious irony that the same regime still in power without Mugabe launched a fierce campaign of vilification, intimidation, arrests, detention, brutality and several charges of treason against the late MDC-T leader. They also killed hundreds of his supporters. If you vilify someone as a "puppet," "running dog of imperialism" and "sell out," you cannot overnight suddenly change and say oh well; he was a hero after all. That does not sound serious or sincere (*Zimbabwe Independence*, February 16 to 22, 2018).

*News Day* of 16 February also published an article titled "Tsvangirai: The President Zimbabwe never had" it is important to point out that Tsvangirai's arch-political enemy former President Robert Mugabe retained power by hook and crook denying Tsvangirai electoral victories at every turn from 2002. The military was accused of helping ZANU PF rig elections after seconding some of its staff to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), but Mugabe denied the charges claiming he always won because of his "popularity." In 2002, Tsvangirai was denied victory by the combination of military elite and an establishment that connived to give Mugabe a fraudulent victory when his popularity was at its lowest in the country. Critics argued that maybe the margin of victory was not big enough but when Mugabe was left with an electoral blood loose in 2008 first round, again Zimbabweans were denied their President after the securocrats denied Tsvangirai the path to power. [Amnesty International \(2013\)](#) noted that in the run up to the June 2008 election at least 200 people were killed, while thousands were tortured and beaten in a wave of political violence that engulfed the country from April to June 2008 with the acquiescence and in some cases with active involvement of the state security services.

Former intelligent minister Didymus Mutasa in 2015 revealed that Mugabe lost the 2008 elections to Tsvangirai with enough votes to assume the leadership, but the MDC-T leader had then 'developed cold feet and fled to Botswana' (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 to 22 February 2018; *News Day*, 16 February 2018). It was also reported that Mugabe was ready to cede power until then Justice Minister and now President Emmerson

Mnangagwa triggered a constitutional clause that required presidential contestants to get 50% plus one vote in order to take power (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2013). The disputed official results were released after six weeks to the public... 'Casting some doubt on whether this official count was a true reflection of the poll outcome. Certainly, many ZANU PF politicians have in private admitted to me that they believe Mugabe lost the first round to Tsvangirai by a wider margin...Mugabe 'won' in June (re-run), relying mainly on a nationwide campaign of violence, intimidation and the displacement of opposition supporters, which forced Tsvangirai to withdraw his candidature' (Blessing - Miles Tendai, 2016). After regional mediation led by South African President Thabo Mbeki, Mugabe entered a power-sharing government (GNU) with Tsvangirai as a means of addressing his re-election's lack of legitimacy. In the GNU Mugabe retained the presidency, Tsvangirai became the Prime Minister, and Mutambara became deputy Prime Minister (International Crisis Group, 2013).

The forgoing discussion illustrates that Tsvangirai left 'footprints in the sands of history'. Morgan Tsvangirai was the 'nearly man' for Zimbabwe. This article notes that the entire *News Day* of 16 February 2018 carried positive stories and photographs of the late Tsvangirai.

On the contrary, the state-controlled daily, *The Herald* of 16 February 2018 published a story titled "Morgan Tsvangirai: The life and times" which largely focused on his shortcomings. Nevertheless, the story also highlighted Tsvangirai's positive attributes. Despite all his shortcomings and controversies, the veteran opposition leader will be best remembered as one man who helped shape the country's post independence politics.

Tsvangirai, who died at the age of 65 in South Africa, was without doubt one of the most influential politicians ever to emerge after independence in 1980. Love him or hate, he was one man who defied and shaped the country's opposition politics in the post-independence era. He will be remembered for his ambition to dislodge ZANU PF. On many occasions, Tsvangirai saw himself as a man on a mission to bring about a stable democratic and peaceful Zimbabwe (*The Herald*, 16 February, 2018).

Indeed, Tsvangirai was the face of opposition politics. However, like any mortal, Tsvangirai had his faults, like the regrettable MDC splits of 2005, which all but ensured that he would never win the country's Presidency. There were other splits to follow such as the 2014; and his private life was sometimes the fodder of tabloids and mainstream newspapers. The failure to unite MDC in 2008 put paid to any chances of an opposition victory. But the good far outweighs the bad and the country has been robbed of a democratic champion who fought doggedly for what he believed in. That tributes have been flowing from all sides of the political divide; and internationally, is testament to Tsvangirai's giant status; he was an irrepressible figure and his opponents cannot afford to ignore him in life and in death.

Thus, the baton has been passed to those who are still alive and the only way to honour Tsvangirai's legacy is to ensure that the struggle and fight for democracy does not die with him. The road to democracy is long, winding and treacherous, but Tsvangirai had the wisdom to realize that this was a path that had to be taken and now the onus is on his colleagues to finish the journey. Like the Biblical Moses, Tsvangirai did not see the Promised Land, but there is need for a Joshua to continue with the great trek and certainly, one day, Zimbabwe shall have an enviable democracy (*News Day*, February 16, 2018).

This article argues that the absence of a party leader and a clear succession path often leads to political parties losing direction. This is exemplified by Zimbabwe's main opposition party, MDC-T led by Morgan Tsvangirai, who died at 65, and leadership struggles began when he was still in South Africa. In the absence of a unifying father figure like Tsvangirai, the prospects and stability of the party now stands in question. This comes at a time when the party, more than ever, needs to consolidate his vision of a united opposition party that will one day unseat ZANU PF, particularly in this year's general elections when ZANU PF is arguably at its lowest ebb under Mnangagwa.

## 6. Press Coverage of Tsvangirai's Burial and Violent Skirmishes

I argue in this article that Tsvangirai family members, particularly the mother Lydia Zvaipa Chibwe, should not meddle or interfere in MDC-T politics. This was exemplified by Tsvangirai's mother who boycotted funeral church service because Chamisa and Elizabeth had to attend. She caused a scene at Robert Mugabe Square in Harare on 19 February when she refused to disembark from the hearse carrying Tsvangirai's body at a send off ceremony for party supporters. She insisted she did not want her daughter-in-law Elizabeth Macheke and disputed acting party leader Nelson Chamisa at the funeral (*The Herald, News Day*, 20 February 2018).

It is significant to point out that Chamisa was the only one given a platform to speak, effectively shutting out the other two vice-presidents, Khupe and Mudzuri, a move that the multitudes seemed to approve of, but which drew the ire of other MDC senior leaders, who accused the master of ceremonies of trying to prop up Chamisa. In his address, Chamisa, who had since assumed the MDC-T presidency on an acting basis, said despite obvious fissures, he would ensure that the party does not split. Chamisa described Tsvangirai as a visionary leader, who was persecuted but remained resolute in advancing democracy in Zimbabwe.

Chamisa said the only tribute that can be given to Tsvangirai is through voting ZANU PF out of power in 2018 elections. He defended the national council's decision in choosing him as an acting president for 12 months arguing:

We have done what is necessary to make sure that there is no leadership vacuum ...What we did is perfectly constitutional and after that we will go to the next phase which is going back to the council and make sure that we do all the processes required internally. What we are not going to allow is a leadership crisis, where everyone does as he or she pleases (*New Day*, 20 February 2018).

On a different note, Chamisa accused the government of shedding crocodile tears for Tsvangirai with the assistance they were giving to the MDC-T leader's family. He argued that when Tsvangirai was alive, he was tormented and abused yet they now wanted to pretend they cared when he was dead.

'Violence mars Tsvangirai burial,' 'Chamisa dares Mnangagwa 'were headlines of stories in *The Herald* and *News Day* of 21 February, 2018 respectively. The choice of headlines clearly indicates the agenda of the two newspapers. *The Herald* senior writer Zvamaida Murwira has been writing stories on MDC-T, particularly from the time Tsvangirai was ill in South Africa. This article argues that the state-controlled newspaper has a sustained agenda to depict MDC-T or any opposition party for that matter, as a 'violent' party. Arguably, some of the youths who instigate and fuel violence belong to the ruling party though they may be wearing MDC-T regalia so as to smear the opposition as violent. This is how usually ZANU PF infiltrates opposition parties so as to weaken them by capitalizing on intra-party conflicts. This is believed to be what might have happened in Buhera and Bulawayo violent skirmishes.

However, *News Day* covered the violent skirmishes in a story titled: 'MDC-T trio survives mob attack' but was not on front page. Both newspapers captured the violent incident in which MDC-T deputy president, Thokozani Khupe, party secretary-general Douglas Mwonzora and national organizing secretary Abednico Bhebhe survived an attempt on their lives at the burial of Tsvangirai after a mob of activists attacked them on arrival at former Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's funeral in Buhera. The mob threatened to burn down the hut the trio had sought refuge in, but the police and other activists worked hard to protect them\*.

Addressing mourners at the funeral of Tsvangirai, Chamisa, whose leadership was under contestation, insisted on uniting the party to face off with Mnangagwa. He declared he would quit politics "if Mnangagwa wins the next election. " Chamisa asserted: "We are ready to form the next government and in September we will" (*News Day & The Herald*, 21 February, 2018). Speaking at the same occasion, ZANU PF national chairperson, Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri described Tsvangirai as a good leader. "Good works speak for themselves and this is evidenced by the huge crowd in attendance here." But the crowd booed her before Chamisa intervened to control and calm them. However, Oppah continued with her speech. Critics, however, argue that Chamisa should also have dissuaded the youths from attacking MDC-T leaders in the same way he protected Oppah.

Other people who spoke at Tsvangirai's funeral included prominent Kenyan opposition leader, Mr Raila Odinga, National Peoples Party Dr Joice Mujuru and former Deputy Prime Minister in the Inclusive Government Professor Arthur Mutambara. Several diplomats from Western countries also attended the funeral (*The Herald and News Day*, February 21, 2018).

It is important to consider Arthur Mutambara's funeral remarks; he was blunt in his speech, accusing ZANU PF of having brutalized and killed Tsvangirai:

We are mourning a great Zimbabwean, a great African. He had courage, he walked a hard road. He was arrested, harassed and brutalized by the former President Robert Mugabe's administration. There are ZANU PF people here; they killed Tsvangirai ... (*News Day*, February 21, 2018).

Mutambara's speech had the effect of whipping people's emotions as images of Mugabe regime callous brutality were evoked.

It is interesting to note that *The Herald* deliberately omitted former Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Mutambara's speech. Downplaying and ignoring issues which projects MDC-T favourably is an agenda of state-controlled media in general, be it print or electronic. Willems (2004) argues that state-controlled media ignore or downplay issues which are against their editorial policy. As Fowler (1991) explains, all news is socially constructed. The events that a certain newspaper reports do not reflect the significance of those events but rather reveal the selection criteria of a newspaper. Newspapers decide which events they regard as important enough to report. A large number of events are not even referred to. Events are not newsworthy in themselves but only become "news" when they are selected for inclusion in news reports. News is not simply that which happens but that which is regarded and presented by the media as newsworthy. As Foucault (1978) has pointed out, silence is very much part of any discourse:

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers - is less the absolute limits of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict

boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies.

Applying this to news production, Van Dijk (1991) argues that the analysis of the “unsaid” is sometimes more revealing than the study of what is actually expressed in text. By choice, information is both excluded and included.

However, selection and silence in news construction of reality used to matter most when state-owned media used to hold a monopoly in newspapers or print media. With the advent of a plethora of privately owned newspapers, as well as social media platforms, readers have a wide choice of information sources than rely on arguably biased information from certain houses.

After Tsvangirai’s burial, MDC succession battles continued and newspapers reported on the leadership struggles.

*The Herald* published the following stories : ‘I’m the MDC-T boss: Khupe’, ‘Khupe rejects Chamisa’, ‘A dead man , a rebel leader and a Ndebele girl, ’ ‘...Mwonzora defiant,’ ‘Populism: The MDC leadership albatross?’ ‘Tsvangirai ordained me ,say Khupe’, ‘Violence tears MDC-T apart,’ ‘President welcomes Chamisa to poll race,’ ‘MDC-T elders fail to unite party,’ ‘Chamisa tells bemused MDC-T supporters of flying elephants’, ‘Khupe loses MDC-T property’, ‘Suspension, what suspension? – Gutu’, ‘Khupe’s faction breaks rank’ and ‘MDC-T fires Khupe, Gutu’: 23, 23, 24, 24, 26, 27, 27 February 2018; 1, 5, 10, 17, 17, 19 & 24 March respectively.

*News Day* carried the following articles : ‘MDC-T vows to descend on party hooligans’, ‘Khupe attack draws fire’, ‘Chamisa outfoxes Mudzuri, Khupe’, ‘MDC-T must exercise demon of violence’, ‘MDC-T violence : Let’s call a spade a spade’, ‘I’m the MDC-T leader: Khupe’, ‘MDC-T youth urged to desist from violence’, ‘I fear for my life: Khupe’, ‘The day after Tsvangirai’, ‘Khupe appeals to Guardian Council,’ ‘Tsvangirai championed a cause many were too afraid to’, ‘Chamisa reaches out to Khupe’, ‘Dialogue can rescue MDC-T : Khupe ... as Bulawayo endorses Chamisa’, ‘I’m ready for Mnangagwa : Chamisa’, ‘Bloody clashes rock MDC-T’, ‘Chamisa threatens election boycott’, ‘Ethnicity will fuel conflict in Zim : Bhebhe’, ‘MDC-T intra-party violence worrisome’, ‘Khupe scoffs at Chamisa ultimatum’, ‘Khupe’s aide to quit MDC-T’, ‘With or without Khupe , red army will march on’, ‘MDC-T’s resorting to political violence uncalled for’, ‘It’s time to fire Khupe – MDC-T youths’, ‘Court orders Khupe, allies to vacate MDC-T Byo offices’, ‘Khupe faces axe’, ‘MDC-T to seal Khupe’s fate tomorrow’, ‘Khupe created her drama, now she deserves her karma’ and ‘MDC-T fires Khupe,, seeks divine guidance’: 22, 22, 23, 23, 23, 23, 23, 26, 26, 27, 27 February 2018; 1, 1, 2, 2, 5, 5, 5, 5, 6, 8, 9, 9, 17, 17, 19, 22, 22 & 24 March 2018 respectively .

*Zimbabwe Independent* published the following stories : ‘Tsvangirai’s death fractures MDC-T’, ‘MDC-T leadership fight : Chamisa digs in’, ‘Re-imagining Zim opposition politics’, ‘MDC-T succession war, violence and tribalism’, 23 to 1 March , 2018.

For some time now the MDC-T has been embroiled in intra-party conflict concerning the MDC Alliance and most recently about who is supposed to takeover after the death of leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The point of departure has been whether the party should proceed to congress to elect a new leader or go by the decision of the national council which appointed Chamisa acting President soon after Tsvangirai’s death. Khupe and Mwonzora have been insisting that due process should be followed. They are calling for a congress that will give MDC leaders a fresh mandate. They allege that there are some elements within the party who are trying to avoid the congress. In an interview, Douglas Mwonzora insisted that the extraordinary congress of the party would take place before the next elections but this was in contrast to Chamisa who gave himself a year at the helm. Mwonzora disclosed to this researcher that they had agreed as a party to go for congress to endorse Chamisa and that Khupe and Mwonzora himself will be the Vice Presidents.\*

It is against this background that Chamisa argues that his appointment is above board and insists that reservations being raised by his political rivals are personal. Politically, it does not really matter who is right or wrong among the three MDC-T vice - presidents, but what is important is how they resolve the dispute. This article argues that the survival of the party, its strategic objectives and electoral imperatives should guide them on how to settle the issue, and focus on the bigger picture-elections and beyond.

*Zimbabwe Independent* of February 23 to 1 March, 2018 quotes Dumisan Muleya asserting:

The MDC-T must learn a thing or two from older and more institutionalized parties like South Africa’s ANC. After a bruising elective conference last December (2017) and the recent removal of former President Jacob Zuma...the new President Cyril Ramaphosa held a gala dinner for his predecessor in a jovial and good-humoured atmosphere as the party regrouped . This is how mature, serious and progressive leaders behave. The MDC-T cannot behave like ZANU PF which resolves its internal succession problems through tanks, armoured personnel carriers and machine guns.

It should be noted that the last statement in the above quote refers to November 2017 events in which the military staged a coup to remove Mugabe from power, despite their denial and prefer to call it ‘military intervention...’

According to a policy document titled: “Issue-Based Politics vs. Personality-Based Politics: A Tale of Two Nations,” (2015) written by Janelle Mangwanda and Beatriz Lacombe, heads of state often rely on the weight of their personality –intellect and stature – to persuade gatherings to support their national positions. It states that contrary to issue –based politics, personality-based politics is dominated by personality and patronage. In an issue-based political environment, values, principles, ideologies, policies and issues of the day rather than personalities are the main focal points.

Considering the foregoing views, it is a question of debate to consider which category MDC-T fits in. Nevertheless, the power struggles are largely personality clashes rather than policy issues.

University of Zimbabwe political science professor, Eldred Masunungure argued that failure by the MDC-T to address the succession issue could also have fuelled the current intra-party fights. Tsvangirai had been at the helm of the party since its formation in 1999. The personalization or privatization of the party is seen by the name itself post-2005. Naming a party after an individual for whatever reason is evidence of personalization. Another de-institutionalization process that took place is the removal of the presidential term limits. If the party stuck to the two term limits, there would not be these challenges but they let the post be open-ended. Masunungure further said that the lack of rules of succession led to the challenges MDC-T is facing now. In this regard, it can be argued that MDC-T is not sufficiently institutionalized. According to Masunungure the appointment of Chamisa and Mudzuri to the posts of vice-presidents in addition to an elected Khupe, is a sign of de-institutionalization (*Zimbabwe Independent*, February 23 to 1 March, 2018).

However, this article posits that since Tsvangirai is now late, the name MDC-T is no longer personalization but an honour to him in the same way Harvest House has been renamed Morgan Tsvangirai House. In the same vein, the party will consider to have an annual Tsvangirai Day on 14 February, the day he passed on.

This article notes that in all *The Herald* stories, the framing is intended to foment and fuel the intra party conflict in MDC-T. All its reporters’ agenda is to depict Chamisa negatively while sanitizing Khupe and her allies. One typical story which exacerbates the internal strife is entitled: “Violence tears MDC-T apart”, (*The Herald*, 5 March 2018). The state-controlled newspaper declares “MDC-T has effectively split following political violence that rocked in Bulawayo province...” How can a journalist ask a leading question on party split; instead of employing peace journalism principles? This only demonstrates that state-controlled journalists have one agenda - foment conflict in opposition parties, particularly the MDC-T.

On the contrary, *News Day* articles are arguably meant to solve disputes in MDC-T, as exemplified in the headlines of the stories outlined earlier. One typical example: ‘Chamisa reaches out to Khupe’ (*News Day*, 1 March 2018). The content of the stories also illustrate effort to encourage unity and solving conflict within the party.

This article observes the deliberate omission and exclusion by *The Herald* on 12 March 2018 of a story that was covered by *News Day*, ‘Chamisa, Khupe in talks.’ The newspaper could not cover a story in which opposition members negotiate peaceful settlement.

*News Day* of 22 March quoted Nqaba Matshazi who argued that Khupe created her drama and now she deserves her karma. It is critical to point out that in 2008, a few months before the elections, opposition party supporters waited with bated breath on a meeting that could decide the country’s future, as the two factions of the MDC – anti-Senate and pro-Senate – met well into the night, trying to conjure a unity deal. The talks between the two formations – as they were known then, collapsed and they went for elections as different entities and this cost the opposition because of divided votes. There was almost consensus among observers that the two parties which had split in 2005 would unite under the late Morgan Tsvangirai, as there were no ideological or fundamental differences between them. It was argued that the talks between the two groups had collapsed because members from Matabeleland - particularly Thokozani Khupe and the late Thamsaqa Mahlangu – were fiercely opposed to any unity arrangement. Khupe, many thought, was insecure and the return of the late Gibson Sibanda and Welshman Ncube threatened her position as the deputy of the MDC anti-Senate formation. Mahlangu was eyeing the seat held by Sibanda and he had a lot to lose if the later returned to the fold.

From the foregoing observation, the animosity between the two formations grew and eventually MDC anti-Senate went it alone, while the pro-Senate group had an ill-fated romance with Arthur Mutambara. This article argues that had the two MDC formations reunited, they would have won the 2008 election with a wide margin against ZANU PF. Fast forward 10 years later and Khupe is again at the centre of what could be a sapping split for MDC-T. Khupe may have a case to argue that she was the only elected deputy to Tsvangirai, as pointed out earlier. On the other hand, her critics can argue that by appointing two more deputies, Tsvangirai effectively passed a vote of no confidence in her and he was only hamstrung by the party’s constitution from firing her. When the sun was shining for her, Khupe was happy to endorse one centre of power concept in the MDC-T, which put all the power in Tsvangirai and proved her undoing.

This article argues that ‘one centre of power’ doctrine should serve as a lesson to others that in a democracy, power should never be vested in one person, but should be devolved as much as possible. It is intriguing to hear Khupe arguing she was a victim of violence and that she was pulling away from people who resort to force when they are politically defeated. Khupe benefitted from that violence and was happy to keep

quiet when it served her ends. The 2005 MDC split was very violent and it paved the way for Khupe's ascendancy to the deputy presidency. While sticking to constitutionalism is paramount, Khupe's calls are disingenuous and self-serving as she is a direct beneficiary of flouting of the very document she purports to be upholding today.

Nonetheless, there are legitimate concerns that she raises about sexism and tribalism that affects how far she can go. This article argues that we cannot escape from those, there is a glass ceiling for women and people from minority tribes and by belonging to both, and Khupe suffers a double whammy. While Khupe has legitimate concerns, they can only be ironed out within the broader collective, instead of the scenario where she denounces the party leadership during unsanctioned rallies, declaring herself 'going away with the party'. In 2008 she failed to see the bigger picture; she knows why MDC-T failed to win the election and she should have worked to ensure that the events of 2008 do not repeat themselves.

It is against this background that the entire nation arguably had been waiting for 'talks' between Chamisa and Khupe to result in unity for the MDC-T but newspaper reports could possibly have disappointed the main opposition electorate.

'MDC-T fires Khupe, seeks divine guidance,' and 'MDC-T fires Khupe, Gutu' (*News Day & The Herald*, 24 March 2018, respectively). It is important to note that the privately owned newspaper story was placed on page 2 at the bottom, while the state-controlled *Herald* was the lead story on front page. However, both newspapers reported that the MDC-T national council expelled co-vice president Thokozani Khupe, party spokesperson Obert Gutu and organizing secretary Abednico Bhebhe, while accepting the resignation of national chairperson Lovemore Moyo. The national council also decided to recall two of the affected legislators, Khupe (Makokoba) and Bhebhe (Nkayi South), from Parliament. Both newspapers quote national deputy chairman, Morgan Komichi's statement:

On the VP Khupe, the national council noted the efforts for engagement made by the party's President and the fact that VP Khupe remained stubborn, obdurate, intransigent and spurned all party efforts to address her grievances as she continued to hold illegal meetings and partake in unconstitutional activities, putting the party into disrepute and undermining the constitutional organs of the party.

Similarly, Bhebhe was expelled on allegations of "unconstitutional behaviour" and "putting the party into disrepute". Gutu, who was on suspension, met the same fate, while Lovemore Moyo had pre-emptively resigned a day before national council convened to fire his allies. It is important to note that the party further resolved to communicate these latest developments to all stakeholders including but not limited to, the Government of Zimbabwe, the parliament of Zimbabwe, civic society, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, the diplomatic community and all party organs and structures.

In view of the foregoing, the expulsion of the four senior officials from the opposition party is a culmination of heightened succession fights among the former co-vice presidents – Khupe, Chamisa and, at one point Elias Mudzuri – which began before the death of founding leader Morgan Tsvangirai in February. However, Mudzuri has seemingly opted out of the race, leaving his fellow peers to fight it out for the leadership of the country's biggest opposition party (*The Herald*, 24 March, 2018).

## **7. Conclusion**

Since the death of the party's founding president, Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC-T has been rocked by a power struggle pitting Chamisa and Khupe. The differences have resulted in violent skirmishes and court challenges. After efforts of negotiation between Khupe and Chamisa collapsed, the national council resolved to expel Khupe, Gutu and Bhebhe from the MDC-T party. The party also accepted the pre-emptive resignation of Lovemore Moyo. Important to note also is that the MDC factional wars have no foundation in ideological or policy differences. They are predominantly personality clashes. One can only hope that national interests will prevail over personal egos and ambitions.

This article concludes that if the MDC-T has to win the forthcoming general elections, it should now focus on the MDC Alliance and iron out parliamentary seats allocation in order to concentrate on campaigns. There is need to re-imagining Zimbabwe opposition politics. The MDC-T, the core of the MDC Alliance, the biggest opposition coalition for elections, must first put its house in order. There are other coalitions around National People's Party leader Joice Mujuru who leads the People's Rainbow Coalition. These two groups must come together for elections if they are to have a fighting chance of winning the elections. The challenges, however, are that they fight for leadership positions. Now that Khupe's outfit wants to join the People's Rainbow Coalition, it increasingly becomes almost impossible for MDC Alliance to come together with the former. The chances of splitting votes are high thereby giving ZANU PF chance to 'steal' the election. If Zimbabwe opposition parties were to unite before the 2018 general elections, their chances of outright win was clear given the fact that ZANU PF is at its weakest under Mnangagwa who came at the back of military coup in November 2017.

The article also concludes that if the demands by MDC Alliance for President Emmerson Mnangagwa government to implement electoral reforms ahead of the 2018 general elections are met, it would usher in

level playing field for the opposition parties. The 2018 harmonised election should produce an uncontested results, as opposed to all elections presided over by former President Robert Mugabe over the last 37 years.

It can be concluded that the press was polarized along ideological and editorial lines. *The Herald* representation of the MDC-T arguably exacerbated the internal conflict. The state-controlled newspaper's agenda was to foment the intra party succession struggles with a glimmer of sympathy on Khupe and her faction. On the other hand, both *News Day* and *Zimbabwe Independent* projected Chamisa faction positively while consistently blaming Khupe and her allies for causing confusion in the party.

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