

Chapter 2: ZANU-PF: A party in transition?

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Introduction

The majority of Zimbabweans are generally agreed that the current crisis their nation is experiencing is essentially one of leadership. It is felt that President Mugabe and his cabinet colleagues have been in office for far too long to govern in a transparent and accountable manner. They seem to have run out of ideas for the resolution of the many economic, social and political problems that confront Zimbabwe. On this view, therefore, they should make way for younger Zimbabweans who comprehend the basic workings of a modern state in a globalising world.

The socio-economic constraints that the country is experiencing are a function of problems at the political level. Government's reluctance to liberalise the political system by adopting a democratic constitution has effectively compelled the people to adopt a confrontational approach. The emergence in 1999 of a credible opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which has nation-wide support, set the stage for the intended ousting from office of Mugabe's ZANU-PF through the ballot box.

The almost instant and widespread support that the MDC was able to attract in a very short time frightened Mugabe and his party to such an extent that they realised that the land issue, racism, violence and intimidation were the only effective weapons that could be used against political rivals, whom Mugabe referred to once as "enemies of the state". The public display of red cards by MDC supporters and elements within civil society infuriated Mugabe himself to such a degree that now it is an act for which an individual or a group of individuals can be prosecuted.

Mugabe and his loyal subordinates were greatly angered by the popular rejection of the government-sponsored and manipulated draft constitution in February 2000. This victory of the people against a beleaguered regime served as a belated warning to the incumbents. The majority "No" vote also gave the ordinary people of Zimbabwe tremendous hope that the untenable political and socio-economic situation could be changed. For the first time since 1980, the people had rejected ZANU-PF's proposals and exercised their democratic choices at the ballot. That victory further signalled to Mugabe's party that unless drastic measures were taken to arrest the situation, its stranglehold on political power was going end inauspiciously; hence the resort to violence, racism and public intimidation. The land question was the perfect way of accommodating all of the above issues, because in the two decades since the attainment of national independence, the government had done precious little to resolve the land problem, which remained a cardinal grievance for the majority of black Zimbabweans.

Conceptual considerations

African political systems in the pre-colonial era were neither democratic nor did they have political parties as these are defined by most contemporary scholars. Indeed, political parties can be argued to be as foreign to Africa as were the former colonial masters of most African countries. Michael Curtis notes that political parties are the "major bodies through which political action occurs in developed and in most undeveloped systems"⁴². Apart from Uganda, which claims to have a no-party political system, virtually all African countries have political parties in one form or another.

This paper does not intend to devote any significant space to the controversies surrounding the various definitions of political parties, but will adopt some of the generally accepted notions of this concept as functional for the purpose of this study.

Chambers broadly defines a political party in the modern sense as:

A relatively durable social formation which seeks offices or power in government, exhibits a structure or organization which links leaders at the centres of government to a popular following in the political arena and its local enclaves, and generates in-group perspectives or at least symbols of identification or loyalty.⁴³

Although most African political parties would fit this definition, there is merit in arguing that many other factors contribute to the durability of political parties in an African state. The origins of a political grouping, for example, have the tendency to impact either negatively or positively on its durability. In a neo-colonial setting such as that of Zimbabwe, political parties that were formed during the colonial era have tended to have more staying power than those that emerged after the advent of national independence. President Mugabe's ZANU-PF has made considerable political mileage out of the claim that it prosecuted the liberation struggle against the British colonial-settler regime.

The other features of Chambers' definition of political parties are also increasingly being tested in the case of Zimbabwe. For example, the link to "a popular following" can arguably be said to have significantly diminished for ZANU-PF whereas it has not for the labour-based MDC. As will be demonstrated in this study, a governing political party facing loss of popular support tends to resort to undemocratic means of coercing the public to support it, or at least conform to its claims of popularity and legitimacy so that it may continue in office.

Hartmut Hess⁴⁴ defines political parties as groups of people that have joined forces to pursue their common political and social goals. Political parties, therefore, enable party members to articulate their political will and strive for the realisation of their political aims. Economic interests also play a significant part in political party formation. The extent to which the shared goals and values remain valid and collectively acceptable is debatable in many an African country. Frequently, the goals and objectives of the strongman of the political party and his inner circle tend to eventually overshadow those of the majority of the party's supporters and sympathisers.

Decrying the fact that in many African studies of political parties the tendency has often been to treat "the views of one man as if they were the belief system of an entire party", Bienen writes:

It is crucial to differentiate the kinds of issues, for examples, foreign/domestic, ethnic/economic, and the various combinations thereof that parties and elements of parties concern themselves with, and it is crucial to distinguish between styles of rule and commitments to policies.⁴⁵

This paper argues that as the strongman in ZANU-PF, President Mugabe has displayed authoritarian and dictatorial tendencies and a despotic style of leadership that have not necessarily been endorsed by the majority of party members in the society at large. Indeed, the resort to violence perpetrated by former liberation war guerrillas during the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2000 and 2002 respectively reflects this strongman tactic that Mugabe and his small clique of adherents have employed in order to secure victory on both occasions. At the time of the elections regular party structures could no longer be relied upon to confirm ZANU-PF as the governing party in Zimbabwe. For example, the majority of the party's women and youth wings had defected to the currently popular MDC. Thus, rather than move forward in a transition to democracy, the former liberation movement, faced with a serious loss of popular support, retreated to its previous tactics of demanding public support by force.

Peter Merkl points out that "political parties can be studied empirically as social groups, vehicles for political conflict, devices of representation and integration or as channels of

political communications"⁴⁶. The majority of African political parties fit comfortably into this mould, although it could be argued that they perform some functions that could be viewed as of a personal nature. The preponderance of personal rule in Africa during the 1990s was clearly a manifestation of how political parties can be abused for personal benefit, especially by their senior leadership. This paper contends that President Mugabe has, to a very significant degree, abused ZANU-PF for his own private and personal advantage. Merkl, however, continues:

From the beginnings of party theory, political parties have been described as gatherings of politically like-minded people, a social group with common goals, and a division of roles, communication channels, and a hierarchic authority structure. A party is a polity which recruits and socialises new members, selects leaders through internal processes of representations and elections, resolves internal disputes, and makes decisions regarding its policies toward the outside world.⁴⁷

As shall be demonstrated later in this paper, both the MDC and ZANU-PF perform most of these functions, although the degree to which democratic procedures are followed varies from one party to the other. For example, it is generally believed that in the handling of internal disputes, the MDC tends to be more democratic than ZANU-PF. Several people have been expelled from the ranks of the ruling party in the past few years, but only one member is known to have been expelled from the MDC during the same period. Both political parties, however, claim to be democratic. Both of them hold primary elections to determine which of their members will stand as their candidates in national and local government elections. ZANU-PF primary elections have in the past been fraught with all kinds of irregularities, however. In a study of the 1995 parliamentary elections, and with reference to ZANU-PF's primaries, Makumbe and Compagnon note:

Obviously ZANU-PF will, nevertheless, claim that its primary elections were democratic... although President Mugabe himself admitted at a Central Committee meeting that there were very many irregularities and even corruption in these elections. Vice-President Nkomo deplored the 'chaotic situation' that arose from primaries and 'the seeds of hatred' sowed between party members during the process.⁴⁸

It may be too early for similar behaviour patterns to be observed in the MDC, though the ZANU-PF political culture of deceit, vote buying and blatant corruption may, indeed, be pervasive enough to have contaminated most players in the Zimbabwe body politic.

Political parties do not only seek governmental power and authority. Often the quest for government positions is ultimately aimed at facilitating access to socio-economic power and privilege. Political parties, therefore, can be seen as crucial vehicles for the articulation of economic interests of a group or coalition of groups in a given polity. In discussing this factor, Merkl utilises the concepts of interest articulation and aggregation of interests:

The interests are generally articulated prior to or for the purpose of their linkage with politics via a party. It is to their advantage to seek expression and influence through a party, sometimes through several parties.⁴⁹

While it would require a considerable stretch of the imagination to argue that any of the Zimbabwe political parties were formed partly for the purpose of performing this function, it is nonetheless correct to argue that over time both ZANU-PF and the MDC have been known to accommodate clearly definable coalitions and sub-coalitions with distinct socio-economic interests. During the 2000 parliamentary elections, for example, ZANU-PF commonly accused the MDC of seeking to protect and promote the economic interests of white commercial farmers and white businesspeople at the expense of economic indigenisation. In reply the MDC accused the governing party of neglecting the interests of the workers.

Chambers, while discussing the concept of political development, identifies three key aspects of the concept:

- the establishment and growth of a capacity in the political system to maintain itself and its legitimacy;
- an increasing measure of differentiation and organisation and therefore a complexity in political structures and political activity; and
- the evolution and maintenance of the capacity of the political system to meet or adjust to the problems and tensions of social change.⁵⁰

The two concepts - political and development - also need to be defined to some extent. Without delving into the usual controversies, this paper accepts Easton's definition of political as "the authoritative allocation of values for a society".⁵¹ Merkl describes political development as a *state-building process*, which is aimed at a particular kind of state. The process takes place in five basic phases that are "not necessarily everywhere equally complete, separate, consecutive or even in the same order"⁵². According to Merkl these phases are as follows:

1. the unification and external autonomy of a common territory;
2. the development and differentiation of political institutions and roles;
3. the transfer of power from ascriptive elites to individuals and groups chosen by criteria of achievement;
4. an enormous growth and interpretation of organised social interests and governmental functions, which could also be called democratisation, accompanied by both social integration and further institutional and political role differentiation; and
5. the enormous rise of governmental capability in moulding the human environment, extracting resources, and marshalling power in dealing with other nations (*Ibid.*).⁵³

This paper will not discuss these phases in any detail, but it is necessary to note that these steps are all related to a certain amount of simultaneous social development and yet are also the object and goal of deliberate political action. Perhaps the questions we need to ask for the purposes of this study are: to what extent can these phases or steps be interfered with by political gladiators in the interest of their own political survival; and does ZANU-PF conform to this route of political development?

With regard to the development and differentiation of political institutions, however, ZANU-PF has been very thorough in ensuring that it dominates virtually every political institution in Zimbabwe. This has had the effect of stifling all political actors that are not part of that political party. The end result has obviously been seriously to inhibit political development and democracy. Further, the transfer of power from ascriptive elites has been discouraged, if not totally avoided. Individuals and groups chosen by the people on the basis of merit or achievement generally have been frustrated politically as the old guard has held on to power for more than two decades.

Democratisation essentially has been viewed with suspicion by the top echelons of ZANU-PF. Attempts have been made to ensure that organised social and economic interests either conform to the dictates of the ruling party or, at least, organise themselves within its ideological framework.

In other words, such interest groups are expected to affiliate with ZANU-PF or to register officially under the laws promulgated by the government, many times without any consultations with the groups affected by such laws. ZANU-PF, therefore, cannot be viewed accurately as a political party in transition to democracy but rather as one that is becoming even more authoritarian and dictatorial. Evidence abounds that on entering the corridors of power, the former liberation movement failed to transform itself into a democratic political party. The guerrillas have still not taken off their uniforms; they have not yet laid down their guns.

ZANU-PF: From liberation movement to the corridors of power

ZANU-PF was formed in 1963 as ZANU, after a split in the then dominant African political party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by "Father Zimbabwe", Joshua Nkomo. Conflicts between ZANU and ZAPU were manifest in street fights in Zimbabwe's main cities and urban centres. The colonial regime of the time responded by banning both African political parties in 1964, which forced these parties to immediately go underground or into exile. Many leaders of both these political parties were also arrested and imprisoned by the vicious colonial regime for periods averaging ten years.

The decision to undertake military training and prosecute a liberation war was taken by the nationalist leaders who were in prison and in exile. The initial intention, however, was to motivate the British government, the colonial power, to resolve the Rhodesian problem and facilitate the attainment of African majority rule in Zimbabwe. Thus, supposedly democratic political parties, formed for the twin purposes of putting an end to colonialism and creating a democratic dispensation in Zimbabwe, were forced to become militant and militaristic liberation movements. The Rhodesian regime was perceived as an offspring of the colonial West, and the socialist bloc was viewed as a useful ally against the Rhodesian regime. Both ZANU and ZAPU received military support in various forms from such countries as the Soviet Union, China, Bulgaria and Romania during the Cold War period.

The political organisation of ZANU, therefore, assumed the eastern bloc format, complete with a central committee and politburo. As a movement engaged in armed struggle against a strong colonial state, ZANU effectively became commandist and regimentalist rather than democratic in its operations and management style. Thus, although the various party structures claimed to engage in and encourage participation and active involvement of party members in decision-making processes, the militarist approach tended to brook no dissent. It was therefore obvious that the party would become vulnerable to tendencies of authoritarianism and personalised rule. Besides, practically all Eastern bloc countries had socialist one-party political systems. In its pronouncements and propaganda during the liberation struggle ZANU consistently stated that it wanted to create a one-party socialist state in Zimbabwe. It is the view of this author that to this day, ZANU-PF continues to pursue this dubious and obsolete objective. Indeed, President Mugabe once publicly claimed that he was a disciple of the one-party state.

The attainment of national independence in 1980, after protracted talks at London's Lancaster House, meant that a compromise agreement had been reached between the colonial/settler regime and the liberation forces of both ZANU and ZAPU. The two liberation movements had forged a loose alliance called "the Patriotic Front" after Frontline States in Southern Africa had applied extreme pressure against them. The Lancaster House Agreement, forged as it was by the British government, essentially meant that considerable measures had been taken to tone down most of the more radical preferences of the socialist-oriented liberation movements for independent Zimbabwe. The hope was that the guerrilla movements would successfully transform themselves into *bona fide* democratic political parties on assuming power. It is the contention of this paper that ZANU-PF has largely failed to achieve this democratic objective. It would, indeed, be fair to argue that the party's adherence to socialist party organisational structures and systems of operational management have resulted in its failure to transform itself into a democratic political party. It would also be fair to contend that President Mugabe's continued tenure of office rests on his ability to exploit this historical factor in the political development of ZANU-PF.

Consistent with its primary objective of creating a socialist one-party state in Zimbabwe, in 1980 ZANU, having won the first democratic elections, extended an olive branch to both the major losing parties, Ian Smith's Rhodesia Front and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU. These two parties agreed to be part of a Government of National Unity (GNU). The idea of a GNU was widely applauded and expected to facilitate national unity for the war-weary former British colony. Mugabe capped this seemingly magnanimous move by articulating a policy of national reconciliation and the integration of the various military forces into one national police force,

army and air force. There were no retributions, no trial of prisoners of war or identification of war criminals. Neither was there a truth and reconciliation commission, however.

ZAPU was later kicked out of the GNU a few months later when arms of war were allegedly found on some farms and properties that allegedly belonged to the liberation war movement. The leadership was accused of plotting to overthrow the Mugabe regime, a charge they vehemently denied. This development resulted in some of Joshua Nkomo's supporters and former members of the military wing of ZAPU, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), returning to the bush to prosecute a five-year war that devastated the Matabeleland provinces and parts of the Midlands. The Mugabe regime reacted to this dissident war in such a vicious manner that to this day there are many demands for compensation to be paid to the victims of the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade and Central Intelligence Organisation. As many as 20 000 people may have lost their lives in this war.

The dissident war ended after Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe had signed the so-called 'Unity Accord' on 22 December 1987. The Unity Accord resulted in the merging of the two parties into one party, ZANU-PF. Most Zimbabweans viewed this move by Mugabe as not only consolidating his power and facilitating the formation of the one-party state, but also realised that Mugabe had effectively destroyed the only viable opposition that had remained after the attainment of national independence in 1980. Although Joshua Nkomo was appointed second Vice President of Zimbabwe, real power resided with Robert Mugabe. This elimination of all credible opposition has had several negative implications for the democratic development of Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe must, however, be credited with the dubious honour of having skilfully schemed to eliminate all his political rivals in the name of nation building and national unity. The emergence of the MDC in 1999, however, posed a rather different type of problem for the aged nationalist currently battling for political survival.

Consequences of the Mugabe survival strategy

There is no disputing the fact that the unleashing of war veterans onto the general populace, white commercial farmers and supporters of the MDC has caused untold damage to the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe. Without going into too much detail, we note the following grave consequences of this action on the part of the Mugabe government:

- breakdown of the rule of law resulting in many cases of human rights abuse and denial of access to justice for the victims;
- promotion of the political culture of fear and the negation of the democratic ethic, which have in turn resulted in increased levels of apathy on the part of the majority of the people;
- humanitarian disasters of various kinds, such as the displacement of more than six thousand people from their rural homes during the 2000 election campaign, and well over 70 000 during and after the presidential elections of 2002;
- a collapsing social sector with health and education institutions failing to measure up to the expected standards of service delivery (for example, the shortage of essential drugs currently inflicting most hospitals and clinics that is seriously and negatively impacting on the health of the people in a country that is devastated by the HIV/Aids pandemic);
- a chronic shortage of foreign currency, fuel and many other imports that are necessary for the manufacturing industry, the mining industry, commerce and agriculture - the commanding heights of the economy;
- capital flight, withdrawal of official development assistance and the drying up of foreign direct investment resulting in the rapid shrinking of the economy; and,
- soaring unemployment currently estimated to be higher than 70%, which contributes to an already unfortunate and unacceptable level of poverty with some 80% of the population living below the poverty datum line.

The list above is far from being comprehensive, but it serves to highlight the fact that Zimbabwe has effectively been driven into a political and socio-economic crisis from which it

will struggle to extricate itself. Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of this crisis is that it is basically self-inflicted. The governing political party's fear of defeat at the polls in 2000 and 2002 is the primary cause of the crisis. It must, however, be cautioned that more negative developments are likely still to come given the severe shortage of food and other essentials.

Recent developments

The South African and Nigerian initiative that sought to get ZANU-PF and the MDC to talk about resolving the current Zimbabwe crisis collapsed prematurely. South Africa's so-called "quiet diplomacy" has failed to get Mugabe to undertake any measures to resolve the political quagmire that he finds himself in. Smart sanctions imposed on Mugabe and his underlings have not resulted in any positive developments leading to the restoration of political sanity in Zimbabwe. The efforts of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have been too feeble and insincere to bring about any change in Zimbabwe.

It would appear to this author that the only likely option that may pay dividends will have to be taken by Zimbabweans themselves. Churches and civil society in Zimbabwe are making efforts to bring together both ZANU-PF and the MDC to a new round of talks aimed at resolving the crisis. With the economy declining at an alarming rate, food becoming more and more scarce, it is likely that the church and civil society may succeed in getting the two major political parties to agree to form a transitional government to run the country from the time of agreement to the time of the next parliamentary elections in 2005. For it to succeed, such a transitional arrangement will have to exclude Robert Mugabe – the leader who has become such a heavy liability to the nation of Zimbabwe.

Mugabe obviously will not agree to such an arrangement without some form of guarantees for his safety after leaving office. It is quite likely that considering the numerous crimes that Mugabe is alleged to have committed against many Zimbabweans, he would demand that some form of immunity from prosecution be extended to him after his departure from presidential office. The view of this author is that granting Mugabe this kind of immunity would be wrong since it would set a dangerous precedent indicating that African dictators can get away with gross abuses of power and then be granted permanent immunity from prosecution. This would be a serious negation of democracy and democratic development for Africa.

Conclusion: Lessons for African political parties

The Zimbabwe case seems to demonstrate that there is an unfortunate misconception of the notion of political power among the majority of African leaders. It appears that political power is perceived as something that is so sweet that only a fool would agree to relinquish it without a bitter fight, even at the cost of one's life. It is difficult to imagine that at age 78, and after 22 years at the helm, Mugabe would want a further six years as President of Zimbabwe. But perhaps, the fact that many African leaders commit serious crimes of corruption and human rights violation is one of the major reasons for their deep desire to, as it were, die in office. That way they cannot be punished for their crimes.

It is evident that when an incumbent African political party becomes unpopular with the electorate it resorts to violence, intimidation and rigging in order to win elections. The rigging of elections takes many forms, including the passing of draconian legislation aimed at frustrating opposition political parties. In the case of Zimbabwe, some of the newly passed legislation are more oppressive than colonial laws. To ensure that the ruling party retains political power, such pillars of the state as the judiciary are reformed and refashioned to make them comply with the dictates of the executive. This, obviously, plays havoc with such cardinal principles of democracy as the separation of powers, public accountability and checks and balances.

The genesis of a political party seems to have a bearing on that party's future development. The Zimbabwe case seems to illustrate that liberation movements struggle to transform

themselves into democratic political parties when their countries become liberated or independent. Indeed, whenever they are threatened with loss of political power, former liberation movements tend to resuscitate their original achievements as liberators as a license to continued tenure of office. They also harness their wartime tactics of instilling fear in the electorate in order to win elections. During both parliamentary and presidential elections in Zimbabwe, it was commonly stated by Mugabe's supporters that if the MDC won the election the former freedom fighters would go back to the bush and re-start war. Indeed, a few weeks before the presidential elections, the chiefs of staff (army, police, CIO, air force and prison service) warned the nation that they would not co-operate with or salute a presidential candidate whose liberation war credentials were questionable.

Political parties seeking to unseat former liberation war movements do seem to have an uphill task. They are usually short of funds for election campaigns, they struggle to get access to state-owned media, and they become victims of some of the most unjustified consequences of the politics of incumbency. One of the shocks that Zimbabweans witnessed during the presidential election campaign of 2002? was that President Mugabe addressed no less than 52 political rallies throughout the country compared to Morgan Tsvangirai's eight. As noted earlier, Mugabe had three state helicopters at his disposal while Tsvangirai was denied access to the same privilege. The Zimbabwe case further demonstrates that African dictators are rarely ever deposed through democratic means. Indeed, it would be conceptually inconsistent for Mugabe to have been defeated at the polls. It takes undemocratic means to oust fully fledged dictators.