



ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE: A RECIPE FOR TENSION OR A REMEDY FOR RECONCILIATION?

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Introduction

The idea of competitive elections occupies a central place in liberal conceptions of democracy and in post-Cold-War neo-liberal notions of good governance. Within liberal thinking, the usual approach to elections is premised on models and theories of rational choice (Blais 2000). This approach emphasises the agency of the electorate as a core determinant of the success of the system. The basic assumption is that elections are an arena in which national issues are specified, opened up to rational debate, and that political actors then have an opportunity to sell their ideas and policies to voters. The electorate is assumed to be able to make free and rational choices about who they would like to occupy leadership positions. Whether these assumptions always hold is arguable, even in the established democracies of Europe and America where electoral systems have been deeply entrenched since the liberal revolutions of late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In Africa, electoral democracy is not yet well entrenched in the political culture or practice of governance. It was only in the 1990s that an apparent wave of democratisation swept across sub-Saharan Africa, generating dramatic changes in the political map of a continent that had been dominated by one-party authoritarian regimes since the 1970s and 1980s (Bratton and Van der Walle 1997; Diamond 1999; Huntington 1991). Thus, one-party-state psychologies and mentalities, as well as hereditary notions of power, have not yet been completely transformed even within those African regimes where elections are held every five years.

In Zimbabwe, elections have become little more than empty rituals, with the system of electoral democracy being used to mask the nakedness of the one-party mentality and authoritarianism of the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led by President Robert Mugabe. ZANU-PF and Mugabe have been in power since 1980, and elections have been held periodically without resulting in any regime change.¹ Over the years, ZANU-PF has approached elections as mere rituals rather than as the main source of the party's political legitimacy and mandate to run the country. Instead, it conceives its political legitimacy as deriving from the party's liberation credentials. In fact, ZANU-PF, as a former liberation movement, claims to be the progenitor of the state of Zimbabwe on the basis of having liberated the country from settler colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya 2011).

¹ Formed in 1961, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) was ZANU-PF's first main political rival and contested the 1980 election as PF-ZAPU. 'PF' as used by both ZANU and ZAPU stands for 'Patriotic Front' and derives from 1976 when a loose form of strategic unity was forged between the two liberation movements. As the first elections approached in 1980, both ZAPU and ZANU wanted to retain the nomenclature PF while campaigning as separate political entities. For this reason, ZANU was renamed ZANU-PF and ZAPU became PF-ZAPU. Led by Joshua Nkomo, PF-ZAPU was heavily repressed and discredited by Mugabe after 1980, and the organisation was eventually beaten into surrender and swallowed up by ZANU-PF through the Unity Accord of December 1987.

Wendy Willems (2010) interprets the ballot as an ‘embedded ritual’ in postcolonial Africa, the politics of which, she argues, are more easily explained through an analysis of specific local contexts. Willems’ analysis resonates with that of Bennett (1983) who argues that liberal democracy is based on an assumption that elections are arenas in which national issues can be specified and resolved. In the case of Zimbabwe, however, policy issues do not dominate election campaigns. Rather, political actors take advantage of elections to remind the electorate who liberated the country from colonialism, and which political actors have no struggle credentials and are therefore a threat to the state and the nation.

This is very true of the terms of the contest between the entrenched ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In this context, elections have assumed the character of rituals and functioned to promote the myth that they provide arenas for specifying and resolving issues. Past election campaigns have seen melodramatic displays, with some politicians boasting about having ‘degrees in violence’ and being capable of disciplining any political force that attempts to remove them from power. Completing the picture of Zimbabwean elections as rituals has been the actual sacrificing of the lives of members of the opposition. In essence, ZANU-PF has, since 1980, presided over a pseudo-democracy. Larry Diamond defines pseudo-democracies as consisting of regimes that ‘have legal opposition parties and perhaps many other features of electoral democracy, but fail to meet one of its crucial requirements: a sufficiently fair arena of contestation to allow the ruling party to be turned out of power’ (Diamond 1996: 22).

In this paper I seek to provide an in-depth analysis of Zimbabwe’s elections from 1980 to 2008, with a view to establishing whether they have been a recipe for deepening tension and conflict, or a remedy for reconciliation and a source of political stability and democracy. The study is divided into seven sections. The first is this introduction. The second section provides the historical and political background necessary for a deeper understanding of the macro-context within which Zimbabwe’s elections have been conceived, understood and conducted. The third section briefly analyses the elections that took place between 1980 and 2005, exposing how they have all been marred by violence that compromised the extent to which they were free and fair. The fourth section examines the controversial 2008 Zimbabwe polls that culminated in a political logjam. The fifth section analyses the core provisions of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) that relate to the convening of the next poll as a remedy to the crisis of legitimacy generated by the failure of the 2008 polls. The sixth section engages the question of the political future of Zimbabwe, focusing on: the prospects of Zimbabwe holding elections in 2012 or 2013; the country’s readiness for free and fair elections; and the potential that elections have for promoting reconciliation and national healing. Section seven is the conclusion; it draws broader arguments and argues that electoral democracy in Zimbabwe has remained compromised by violence and lack of respect for the will of the people.

Building on the works of, among others, Bennett (1983), Huat (2007) and Willems (2010), I argue that Zimbabwe’s elections can be better understood as embedded phenomena whose meanings, interpretations and significance have been shaped by the local histories, politics, sociologies and ideologies that have, in turn, bred particular conceptions of power and political practice. As Chua Beng Huat (2007: 3) explains: ‘The modes and reasons of electioneering practices are never random but inevitably embedded in and hewed from the local cultural milieu.’ The Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a non-governmental organisation promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe, articulates this further in its report on Zimbabwe’s 29 March 2008 harmonised elections² and 27 June presidential run-off, ZESN states that:

Elections do not occur in a social vacuum. They take place within specific historical

² Presidential and parliamentary elections were held separately in Zimbabwe until 2008 when, for the first time, parliamentary, presidential and local elections were held concurrently in what have been termed ‘harmonised elections’.

and political contexts. Unfolding historical and political developments directly and indirectly influence the electoral processes of the country. In fact, they constitute the macro-environmental contexts within which elections are conducted. Political and historical contexts define the playing field, determine the rules and the play of the game as well as the policy issues that inform and underpin election campaigns. Electoral processes and practices at a given time, mirror political scenarios afoot. Where the political climate is tense, agitated, and polarized, election campaigns have generally been marred with violence. Understanding the politics and history of the country is therefore critical in unravelling the political behaviour of election contenders. (ZESN 2008: 10)

Therefore it is important for any study of elections in Zimbabwe to analyse the historical and political context within which the meanings, perceptions, definitions and interpretations of the notion of elections were developed, stage-managed, articulated and disseminated.

Historical and political context

Zimbabwe is a product of three undemocratic historical processes and cultures. First was the country's patriarchal and often violent pre-colonial history, where political cultures and practices seem to have been permeated by ideologies of heredity and kinship rather than competitive politics as we know it today (Beumers and Koloss 1992; Bhebe and Ranger 2001; McCaskie 1995; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a; Vansina 1991). Second was colonialism, which ushered in another undemocratic tradition, this time based on white settlerism that was equally violent, patriarchal and authoritarian, as well as racist, and excluded black people from voting. Third, the rise of African nationalism, together with armed and violent liberation struggles, was dominated by cultures of authoritarianism, commandism, regimentalism and intolerance.

Achille Mbembe (2011) has argued that history and anthropology indicate that elections were unknown in Africa during the pre-colonial period. Instead, pre-colonial Africans had various other systems of legitimating authority and measures for ensuring representivity. Mbembe notes, however, that the issue of succession has haunted Africans since pre-colonial times, and he emphasises that succession disputes, which plunged pre-colonial kingdoms and chiefdoms into chaos and violence, remain an unresolved problem in much of post-colonial Africa.

Colonialists never used elections to test the consent of the dominated black peoples. Instead, indigenous Africans were denied citizenship. Colonial governments were at best quasi-military authoritarian political systems, where violence was the main mode of governing the colonised peoples. This is a point well captured by Stefan Mair and Masipula Sithole who argue that:

Colonial authoritarianism, far from deepening a commitment to democratic norms and practices in the African nationalist elite, merely consolidated an incipient authoritarian psyche in the nationalist leadership. The authoritarianism of the colonial era reproduced itself within the nationalist political movements. The war of liberation, too, reinforced rather than undermined this authoritarian culture. (Mair and Sithole 2002: 22)

African nationalism thus unfolded as a deeply interpellated phenomenon. Kuan-Hsing Chen (1998) argues that third-world nationalism was shaped by the immanent logic of colonialism, making it susceptible to the reproduction not only of racial and ethnic discriminations but

also of cultures of intolerance, authoritarianism and dictatorship. Chen (1998: 14) concludes that the consequences of these undemocratic cultures constituted 'a price to be paid by the colonizer as well as the colonized selves'. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) elaborates on how colonialism created bifurcated colonial states wherein black people (natives) were confined to rural decentralised despotism under the leadership of African chiefly authorities. Under decentralised despotism, invented traditions rather than civil and political rights informed governance of the subjects. This is how Mamdani puts it:

Direct rule was the form of urban civil power. It was about the exclusion of natives from civil freedoms guaranteed to citizens in civil society. Indirect rule, however, signified a rural tribal authority. It was about incorporating natives into a state-enforced customary order. Reformulated, direct and indirect rule are better understood as variants of despotism: the former centralized, the latter decentralized. As they learned from experience – of both the ongoing resistance of the colonized and of earlier and parallel colonial encounters – colonial powers generalized decentralized despotism as their answer to the native question. (Mamdani 1996: 18)

White settlers enjoyed civil and political rights that were denied to Africans. Democracy was the preserve of white settlers who considered themselves 'civilised'. Blacks, on the other hand, were considered 'barbarians' who had to be denied the franchise until they achieved 'western civilisation' (Ahluwalia 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2001; Samkange 1982; Weitzer 1990). No wonder that one of the key demands of African nationalist struggles became the right to vote, informed by the principle of 'one man one vote.' The use of the term 'man' reflects the patriarchal nature of both colonialism and African nationalism, which subjected women to domesticity of various kinds. Elizabeth Schmidt (1996) argues that women experienced double-patriarchal control, which she terms an 'unholy alliance' involving African male authorities working in cahoots with the colonial state to confine women to the domestic sphere and rural areas (see also Barnes 1999).

But liberation-struggle cultures and practices had other significant impacts on post-colonial politics and on conceptions and perceptions of elections and power. Many scholars – such as Ngwabi Bhebe (1999), David Lan (1985), David Martin and Phyllis Johnson (1981) and Terence Ranger (1985) – have understood and interpreted nationalist struggles as popular phenomena in which peasants, workers, women, men, youth, as well as various classes and social groups have enlisted voluntarily and freely supported.

The work of Norma J Kriger (1992), in contrast, questions the popularity of these nationalist struggles, and suggests that coercion and violence have occurred more often than persuasion and consent. It was only in the late 1990s and early 2000s that numerous fresh studies re-evaluated the nationalist liberation struggle and revealed its serious 'dark' aspects. Ranger, for instance, became very critical of nationalism and national liberation struggles, and began to search for possible explanations for the authoritarianism and violence of the ZANU-PF government in the ontology of African nationalism itself. This is how he puts it:

Perhaps post-independence authoritarianism was the result of the liberation wars themselves, when disagreement could mean death. It was difficult to escape the legacy of such a war. Maybe it sprang from the adoption by so many nationalists and especially liberation movements, of Marxist-Leninist ideologies. These implied 'democratic centralism,' the domination of civil society by the state and top-down modernizing 'development'. (Ranger 2003: 1-2)

Ranger goes on to argue that:

perhaps there was something inherent in nationalism itself, even before the wars and the adoption of socialism, which gave rise to authoritarianism. Maybe nationalism's emphasis on unity at all costs – its subordination of trade unions and churches and all other African organizations to its imperatives – gave rise to a post-colonial cult of personality. Maybe nationalism's commitment to modernization, whether socialist or not, inevitably implied a 'commandist' state. (Ranger 2003: 1–2)

Indeed, participation in the armed liberation struggle may well have encouraged Zimbabwe's nationalist movements to soak up not only militaristic, regimentalist and commandist tendencies, but also authoritarianism, intolerance of dissent and a celebration of violence. This notion led John Makumbe (2003: 34) to argue that the '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 closeness of ZANU and ZAPU to the socialist bloc, led by the now-defunct Soviet Union, also had several far-reaching consequences for the development of Zimbabwe's political culture, political practices and perceptions of power. In the first place, imbibing Marxist-Leninist-Maoist-Castroist ideologies endeared nationalists to the notion of democratic centralism, which provides a neat justification for stifling internal debates, disciplining dissenting voices and denying the value of pluralism and diversity in political opinion. The second impact of socialist thought also manifested itself in the organisational structures of the liberation movements, which came complete with central committees, commissariats and politburos (Makumbe 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011).

The third effect of socialist-bloc influence was that nationalist leaders within Zimbabwe's liberation movement were accorded prominence in the same manner in which revolutionary leaders such as Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin, Mao Zedong and Fidel Castro became prominent within their parties and societies. The seeds of the personality cult are traceable to this stage of the armed liberation struggle, when leaders such as Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo assumed military and political responsibilities and masqueraded as commanders-in-chief of Zimbabwe African Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) respectively. Fourth, the closeness of Zimbabwe's liberation movements to the communist world also encouraged acceptance of the idea of the one-party-state as these were the norm in eastern and central Europe until the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent implosion of communist regimes after 1989.

It is also the case that Zimbabwe was born as a sovereign state at a unique time in both African and global political history. Zimbabwe was neither one of the 'early-decolonisers' of the 1960s nor part of the 'late-decolonisers' of the 1990s. Rather, it gained political independence in 1980 – a time in which the socialist world was still alive and strong and when the neo-liberal world was still emerging (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009b). Zimbabwe's nationalist ideology thus reflected its attempts to benefit and belong to both the socialist and capitalist worlds. This explains why its political rhetoric was intensely socialist while its economic practice was neo-liberal and capitalist. It also explains why ZANU-PF pushed for a one-party system at a time when the forces of democratisation and calls for multi-party systems were gaining strength (Mandaza and Sachikonye 1991; Shaw 1986).

Zimbabwe's election history is deeply tainted by the legacy of its liberation struggle. As far back as 1976, Mugabe articulated his conception of elections in these worrying words:

Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote we shall have, shall have been the product of the gun. The gun which produces the vote should remain its security officer – its guarantor. The peoples' votes and the peoples' guns are always inseparable twins. (Mugabe 1981: 100; see also Meredith 2002)

This revealing statement reflects Mugabe's failure to separate voting and violence. Masipula Sithole and John Makumbe (1997: 132) wrote about what they termed 'the *Gukurahundi* policy'³ to explain ZANU-PF's conception of every election as another round of the liberation struggle, thus necessarily involving the annihilation of opposition parties. They argued that ZANU-PF's *Gukurahundi* policy was 'adopted during the later part of the liberation war - in 1979 to be precise - and was continued until the 1990s' (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 133). Sithole and Makumbe then went on to define the *Gukurahundi* policy as an 'undisguised, intolerant, commandist, and deliberately violent policy towards the opposition.' This is how they describe the history of the policy:

Based in neighbouring Mozambique (1975-79), ZANU (PF) 'officially' adopted Marxism-Leninism as its ideology in 1977. It declared the year 1979 'Gore re-Gukurahundi' (The Year of the Storm) - the revolutionary storm that would finally destroy the white settler regime; the 'internal settlement puppets'; and finally, the capitalist system. A new socio-economic and political order guided by Marxist-Leninist principles was to replace the 'old order', Gukurahundi was a policy of annihilation; annihilating the opposition (black and white). Accordingly, an 'enemies list' was published in mid-1979 in which ranking personalities of the 'internal settlement' parties were singled out for liquidation. (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 133)

Sithole and Makumbe explain that the use of violence against any form of opposition was part of ZANU-PF policy during the 1970s war of liberation. This philosophy of annihilation swept ZANU-PF and Mugabe to power in 1980. Indeed, the party approached the 1980 elections as a pursuance of war by other means. Hence a coterie of armed ZANLA forces, who violated the ceasefire agreement by remaining outside the designated assembly points, were deemed indispensable to winning the election. During the build-up to the 1980 elections, ZANLA forces were used to intimidate and eliminate those who dared stand in the way of ZANU-PF's ascendance to state power (Sithole and Makumbe 1997).

However, when ZANLA was absorbed into the national army and professionalised under British tutelage after 1980, ZANU-PF lost confidence in using ex-ZANLA soldiers as political storm troopers in subsequent elections. Instead ZANU-PF relied increasingly on its youth brigade and women's league. Faced with PF-ZAPU opposition, ZANU-PF then created the notorious Fifth Brigade to implement its *Gukurahundi* policy in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions between 1982 and 1987 (Sithole and Makumbe 1997). The Fifth Brigade committed atrocities and killed over 20 000 Ndebele civilians, while ZANU-PF sidelined these regions politically and economically in an attempt to force PF-ZAPU supporters to support ZANU-PF instead.

The political philosophy of the annihilation of enemies has underpinned ZANU-PF's attitude to state power not only during the liberation struggle and the 1980 election; it has been consistently deployed at every subsequent election as a means of dealing with political opposition. The party's historical and political background is therefore very useful in understanding Zimbabwe's election history, and helps to explain why violence has been a constant feature of the country's elections from 1980 up to the present day.

3 *Gukurahundi* is a Shona term referring to a whirlwind and storm that clears the chaff. The term has a long history in ZANU. It was first used in the 1970s to refer to a ZANLA that suppressed a rebellion within ZANU led by Thomas Nhari. In 1979 it was used to describe the year as that of the people's storm. After 1980, the term was used to refer to the work of the Fifth Brigade, which was deployed to suppress so-called dissidents in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions.

Elections, tensions and violence, 1980 to 2005

Elections have never been happy moments for Zimbabwe because, since the country's first elections in 1980, election campaigns and post-election politics have gone hand in glove with violence and death. Zimbabwe's elections have elicited numerous studies, beginning with the 1980 elections that ushered in political independence (see, for example, Cliffe et al. 1980; Gregory 1981; Kriger 2005; Laakso 1999; Lemon 1988; Makumbe and Compagnon 2000; Masunungure 2009; Moyo 1992; Rich 1982; Sachikonye 1990; Sithole 1986; Sylvester 1986; Tevera 1989). Kriger, who has analysed ZANU-PF's election strategies since 1980, has revealed how the discourse of the liberation struggle, together with coercion, has been used consistently in each and every election (Kriger 2005).

The discourse and use of coercion has intensified or relaxed depending on the context of each election. What is consistent is that political opponents have been dismissed as dissidents, puppets and reactionaries, supposedly working in cahoots with Zimbabwe's external enemies. This discourse is then coupled with intimidation and threats as well actual violence and murder. A brief look at how ZANU-PF has conducted itself in each election since 1980 is helpful in understanding the controversies that developed around the 2008 polls. This exercise also exposes as myth the idea that ZANU-PF has adhered to the principles of multi-party democracy prior to 2000.

Critical studies of how ZANU-PF won the 1980 elections reveal that violence and intimidation played a major role (Kriger 2005). This is not to dismiss the fact that ZANU-PF appealed to its pivotal role in the liberation struggle, effectively mobilised guerrilla forces and organised popular support (Cliffe et al. 1980: 44-67). What Kriger points to, however, is the widespread use of armed ZANLA cadres who stayed out of assembly points and violated ceasefire regulations so as to intimidate and force people to vote for ZANU-PF. True to its *Gukurahundi* policy, and the Maoist conception of political power as coming from the barrel of a gun (which led Mugabe to link voting with guns), intimidation, threats and outright violence were seen as legitimate parts of a political strategy aimed at propelling ZANU-PF to power in 1980. And, as already mentioned, the same strategy has also been used to safeguard regime security ever since (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 122-139).

PF-ZAPU posed a serious challenge to ZANU-PF in the 1980 elections, and was prevented from campaigning in places such as Mutare and the Mashonaland provinces by ZANU-PF violence. This was clearly documented in the reports by the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG 1980) and the Group of Independent British Observers (GIBO 1980). But PF-ZAPU, as a former liberation movement, was also intolerant of any political formation that sought to gain votes in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions. The key difference between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU was that the latter adhered to the ceasefire agreement and confined its armed ZIPRA forces to the designated assembly points. ZANU-PF, on the other hand, kept the bulk of its armed forces outside the assembly points and used them to prevent other political formations from campaigning and to coerce people into voting for ZANU-PF in areas they operated in.

Many studies of the elections written in the 1980s were produced within the context of independence euphoria, and tended to downplay the ways in which ZANU-PF was using violence and to emphasise the popularity of the party. For instance, Tony Rich (1982) argued that it had been necessary for ZANLA cadres to stay out of the assembly points to protect their supporters. What is poignant about most of these studies is how much of ZANU-PF's official narrative of how it won elections was accepted, and how this (mis)informed interpretations of electoral politics. ZANU-PF emphasised that its popularity was rooted in it having been the most active political formation in the struggle for independence. There is evidence, however, that ZANLA cadres who remained outside the assembly points threatened to

continue the war if ZANU-PF lost the elections. According to Rice (1990) they continued to organise wartime *pungwes* (night vigils) during which they killed those who were considered to be opposed to ZANU-PF and exerted psychological pressure on the electorate, such as writing down voters' names for unspecified reasons and claiming that ZANU-PF possessed machines that could reveal how individuals had voted.

The 1985 elections took place within a context of increasing violence. ZANU-PF had unleashed the Fifth Brigade on the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands regions over the previous three years. In the first six months of 1983, the Fifth Brigade killed over 2 000 civilians in Matabeleland North alone (CJP and LRF 1997: 46–47). By the time the 1985 elections took place, virtually every urban and rural PF-ZAPU office had been closed or burned down (Kriger 2005). PF-ZAPU also experienced serious problems in campaigning as permission for rallies was often denied and, if ZANU-PF supporters went on rampages to disrupt such rallies, the police were not allowed to protect the opposition party's supporters (Kriger 2005; Sithole 1997).

Even after winning the 1985 election, Mugabe unleashed his violent supporters on PF-ZAPU again, urging them to 'strike the bushes in the fields with your clubs' and 'take the rotten pumpkins out of the patch' (cited in Kriger 2005: 10). Mugabe's supporters understood this to mean that they should attack anyone considered to be a PF-ZAPU supporter, and three days of violence ensued that included killings and evictions of people identified as PF-ZAPU supporters, and the houses they occupied were declared ZANU-PF property (Kriger 2005). In another instance, Mugabe likened Zimbabwe to a ZANU-PF field or farm, and supporters of PF-ZAPU to weeds that needed to be uprooted and destroyed (CCJP and LRF 1997). This was another call by Mugabe for violence against those sympathetic to PF-ZAPU.

The 1990 elections were equally violent. The target this time was the newly formed Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) led by Edgar Tekere (former Secretary-General of ZANU-PF) who had been fired for speaking out against corruption. The climax of the violence was the assassination of popular businessman and politician Patrick Kombayi of Gweru in broad daylight for challenging ZANU-PF member and the country's vice-president, Simon Muzenda (Moyo 1992). ZUM's alliance with the white-dominated Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe (CAZ) meant that it was easily framed as a front for white settler interests and therefore as a party of sell-outs – an accusation that has since been used to denigrate the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

By 1995, the opposition was at its weakest (Makumbe and Compagnon 2000), and the 1995 elections were less violent as a result. Several opposition parties, such as the United Parties (UP) led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, ZUM led by Tekere and the Democratic Party (DP) led by Emmanuel Magoche boycotted the elections. They cited an unfair playing field, engendered by such factors as excessive presidential powers, lack of media access and biased funding that went to ZANU-PF (Darnoff 1997). The two main opposition parties that participated in the elections were the FORUM Party of Zimbabwe (FPZ), led by former Chief Justice Enoch Dumbutshena, and ZANU-Ndonga, led by Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole. The boycott led analysts such as Sylvester (1995: 426) to ignore the violence and other factors that had weakened the opposition parties, and to simply blame the opposition parties for their 'self-inflicted weakness'. Others even entertained the fantasy that Zimbabwe was a democracy, with Laakso (1999) celebrating how the ZANU-PF government allowed local civil-society organisations (CSOs) to engage in voter education and electoral monitoring.

Given the extreme weakness of the opposition, ZANU-PF became complacent and took it for granted that future elections would easily be won. However, in 2000, ZANU-PF witnessed very stiff opposition and competition from the newly formed MDC under the leadership of veteran trade unionists Gibson Sibanda and Morgan Tsvangirai. The June 2000 elections also came after a ZANU-PF backed draft constitution had been rejected in a referendum. This loss shocked ZANU-PF and, as part of its recovery from this defeat, the party intensified

violence and mobilised war veterans as its 'storm troopers' (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2001).

The *Gukurahundi* policy was reactivated and every member of the MDC was defined as an enemy to be liquidated. The unprecedented support that the MDC received, including from white commercial farmers, incensed ZANU-PF, which had never managed to attract the votes of white citizens. One explanation for the popularity of the MDC within the white electorate was that it was seen as a liberal political formation that had fully embraced the post-Cold-War values of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, and that it could help reverse the fast-tracked land-reform programme being pushed by ZANU-PF. The association of the MDC with the white electorate gave ZANU-PF an opportunity to frame the opposition party as a Trojan horse of imperialism and neo-colonialism, opposed to black economic empowerment and bent on reversing the gains of the liberation struggle.

The MDC was thus framed as a legitimate target for ZANU-PF violence. Some members of the MDC, such as electoral agents Talent Mabika and Tichaona Chiminya were petrol-bombed and killed by a known member of the notorious secret service, the Central Intelligence Organization (Amani Trust 2002). By the first half of 2000, over 200 000 incidents of political violence had been recorded by human rights organisations (Network of Independent Monitors 2000). Because it was framed as a political formation that worked to facilitate the recolonisation of Zimbabwe, the MDC became the number-one enemy not only of ZANU-PF but also of the state of Zimbabwe. This is how Mugabe described the MDC:

The MDC should never be judged or characterized by its black trade union face; by the youthful student face; by its salaried black suburban junior professionals; never by its rough and violent high-density lumpen elements. It is much deeper than these human superficialities; for it is immovably and implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces wittingly the repulsive ideology of return to white rule. MDC is as old and as strong as the forces that control it; that converge on it and control it; that drive and direct it; indeed that support, sponsor and spot it. It is a counter revolutionary Trojan horse contrived and nurtured by the very inimical forces that enslaved and oppressed our people yesterday. (Mugabe 2001: 88)

Since the time of PF-ZAPU in the 1980s, no political party has generated more opprobrium from ZANU-PF than the MDC. Since its birth, the MDC has operated within a terribly hostile political environment: ZANU-PF's popular support had waned and it was trying to revive it through an intensification of its *Gukurahundi* strategy. The fact that the MDC managed to win 57 seats in the 2000 parliamentary elections, and that Tsvangirai had offered Mugabe the stiffest competition in the presidential elections of 2002, had almost nothing to do with availability of democratic space in Zimbabwe. It had everything to do with the fortitude and resilience of the electorate, which voted for the MDC against all odds, including threats by commanders of the security forces to stage a military coup if Mugabe was defeated in the elections (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2006).

On the general elections of 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000, Kriger (2005: 31) concludes that:

Despite their profoundly different contexts, the four general elections since 1980 expose startling similarities in the ruling party's discourse and coercive mechanisms. Opponents were cast as reactionary enemies of the state, often - in 1990, 1995, and 2000 - as mere puppets of whites... Importantly, ZANU (PF)'s practices in the 1980 election show strong continuities with its subsequent strategies as the ruling party: the widespread use of organized coercion; the role of youth violence; the threats to return to war; the claims to be an innocent victim rather than perpetrator of

violence; and the post-election appeal to reconciliation... Particularly striking is the role of veterans in party violence in both 1980 and 2000. There is further continuity in the use of pardons and amnesties.

By the time of the 2002 presidential elections, restrictive measures such as the Public Order and Security Act were already crippling the MDC's political activities. Added to this was the violence that spilled over from the 2000 parliamentary elections into the presidential elections. With the securocrats having publicly vowed not to accept any leader other than Mugabe, Tsvangirai's campaign was affected as was the people's interest in voting. Mugabe won the 2002 elections, securing over 56 per cent of the vote.

The 2005 elections took place in a complex political environment. The Public Order and Security Act was again used to prohibit and shut down the MDC's rallies and public meetings, and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act restricted press freedom, an essential pre-requisite for freedom of expression and free political activity. On the other hand, ZANU-PF was under pressure to implement the *SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections*.⁴ These principles require SADC member states to ensure: the full participation of citizens in the political process; freedom of association and political tolerance; the equal access of political actors to media coverage; the independence of the judiciary; an impartial electoral system; and the provision of voter education (Kagwanja 2005). The 2005 elections were expected to help resolve the tensions and political deadlock that had prevailed since the controversial 2002 presidential elections. There was a general feeling among opposition and civil-society circles that ZANU-PF's victories in the 2000 and 2002 elections were nothing but the product of rigging, and that ZANU-PF had stolen the MDC's victory.

For the MDC, the 2005 elections provided an opportunity to regain the victory that they believed had been stolen from them. However, at about this time, the party split into two formations due to a number of internal disagreements, including whether or not to participate in the elections that year. Tsvangirai led the faction that opposed participating in the elections, while the party's former secretary general, Professor Welshman Ncube, led the group that advocated participation. Tsvangirai's group became known as MDC-T (for Tsvangirai). Officially, the Ncube faction is simply called the MDC, but when leadership of this group was taken over by Professor Arthur Mutambara, it became popularly known as MDC-M (for Mutambara). At the time of writing, Ncube had again resumed leadership of the faction, and the group is now known as MDC-N. The split did little to enhance their performance in the 2005 elections.

For ZANU-PF, a credible win in 2005 offered a viable strategy for 'self-rehabilitation' and an opportunity to 'come-in from the political cold' of isolation and sanctions (Kagwanja 2005: 1). It was not surprising, then, when the ZANU-PF government introduced cosmetic electoral reforms intended to hoodwink the international community. These included the 2004 announcement that Zimbabwe was going to fully adhere to the SADC principles and guidelines on elections. ZANU-PF clearly wanted to prevent the MDC from boycotting the elections because this would deprive the state of the legitimacy it desperately needed. Indeed, Peter Kagwanja (2005) correctly depicts the 2005 elections as a mixture of 'dangers and opportunities'. In the end, ZANU-PF emerged as the outright winner of the 2005 elections and the MDC lost some of its seats.

Under what circumstances did ZANU-PF win the 2005 elections? In the first place, a dated and shambolic voters' register was used which facilitated rigging. Second, the ZANU-PF government gerrymandered constituency borders, reducing the number of urban constituencies where the MDC was popular and multiplying rural ones where ZANU-PF still had some support. Third, there was a selective increase in the number of polling stations in

4 A copy of these guidelines can be downloaded from <http://www.eisa.org.za/PDF/sadcguidelines.pdf>

constituencies where ZANU-PF was popular and a reduction of these where the MDC was considered strong (Bryan 2005). There were also allegations of ballot boxes being stuffed with votes in favour in the ruling party as domestic observers were prevented from monitoring the counting of votes (Bryan 2005). These factors and others (such as the use of land and food to buy votes and to threaten hungry people) enabled ZANU-PF to win the 2005 elections, but meant that the results were highly questionable. Yet, despite protests from opposition groups inside and outside Zimbabwe, SADC monitors endorsed the elections as free and fair.

The controversial 2008 elections

In March and June 2008, Zimbabwe experienced two controversial election processes (Alexander and Tendi 2008). The first was a harmonised parliamentary and presidential election. The MDC-T emerged victorious from the parliamentary elections but, in the presidential elections, Tsvangirai obtained 47.9 per cent of the votes and Mugabe obtained 43.2 per cent. Since neither candidate had reached the required 51+ per cent threshold required for victory under Zimbabwe's electoral laws, a presidential run-off was held in June 2008.

Overall, the harmonised elections that took place in March 2008 were deemed to be generally free and fair. The outcome was recognised as 'representing the genuine expression of the voluntary will of the people' (Masunungure 2009: 79). And because the results of the March elections were seen as legitimate, they were later 'adopted as the benchmark and formula for the allocation of executive power under the 15 September 2008 power-sharing agreement' (Masunungure 2009: 79). Comparing and contrasting the March elections with the June run-off, Eldred V Masunungure made the following observations:

It can thus be fairly asserted that the march to the 29 March elections was a political march and not a military march. The campaign was a political campaign; though the military/security may have lurked rather menacingly in the background, their claws remained sheathed.

Unlike the pre-29 March, the campaign afterwards was a visibly militarized one. The security forces, rather than the ruling party, were in the forefront, spearheading the march to the 27 June run-off. (Masunungure 2009: 83)

In short, on 29 March Zimbabweans participated in an election, and between April and June they experienced violence and civil war – with battle lines drawn between those who support the ballot and those who favour the bullet. Mugabe articulated the imperatives and terms of the war that took place between April and June when he said 'We fought for this country, and a lot of blood was shed. We are not going to give up our country, because of a mere X. How can a ballpoint fight the gun?' (Mugabe 2008).

It is important to underscore the significance of the 2008 polls for Zimbabweans. The March 2008 election took place at a time of record inflation (above 1 000 per cent). Life for ordinary Zimbabweans was unbearable. Basic commodities were scarce. The ruling ZANU-PF party had proven, beyond doubt, its failure to rescue the country from a fast-declining economy, with all the humanitarian consequences that follow from this. The election took place in the middle of SADC-brokered talks, facilitated by Thabo Mbeki (then president of South Africa). The talks came after ZANU-PF had brutally beaten civil-society leaders, and MDC members including Tsvangirai, on 11 March 2007 for attending a prayer meeting (Mutandiri 2009).

In many senses the March 2008 harmonised elections were historic. They came after a decade of political and civic opposition to a once popular former liberation movement whose legitimacy had been failing since the 1990s. For the first time in ZANU-PF's three-decade rule over Zimbabwe, it lost its parliamentary majority and Mugabe lost the presidential election

to Tsvangirai. Although Tsvangirai did not attain the requisite outright majority, the fact that he beat Mugabe in the first round was significant. Having braved a decade of violence and militarised politics, Zimbabweans showed that they continued to believe in elections as a means of changing governments. They acted in defiance of ZANU-PF's threat to go 'back to the bush' and resume armed struggle, thus indicating their determination to be agents of change in Zimbabwe (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a).

While the March 2008 elections clearly indicated that, when the people of Zimbabwe were given democratic opportunity, they were able to say no to continued authoritarian rule, conditions leading up to the 27 June run-off demonstrated that violence would continue to be used to deny the people of Zimbabwe a choice. Anasi Willard Chiwewe, resident minister and governor of Masvingo province, made it clear that Zimbabweans had no choice but to vote for ZANU-PF if they wanted to avoid violence and death. This is how he put it: 'This is a choice with no choice. It's either you vote for war or peace' (*Financial Gazette*, 19 June 2008). Between April and June 2008, ZANU-PF demonstrated its violent colours, showing that they were prepared to destroy the whole nation if their power was threatened. Those parts of Zimbabwe that had not experienced *Gukurahundi* in the 1980s, particularly the Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West provinces, had a taste of this between April and June 2008, witnessing a combination of coercion, intimidation, beating and displacement, punctuated by rape, torture and murder (*Washington Post*, 5 July 2008).

Key lessons can be drawn from Zimbabwe's 2008 elections in relation to how committed Zimbabwean leaders are to the core tenets of liberal democracy. Mugabe and ZANU-PF have openly expressed their antipathy towards democracy and their disdain for human rights, claiming that both are aspects of western cultural imperialism. They have demonstrated that they ardently and faithfully worship at the altar of power for power's sake. The unleashing of militias, central intelligence officers, regular army officers, war veterans and ZANU-PF youth on citizens under the code-name Operation *Mavhoterapapi* (Operation Who Did You Vote For?) was a shameless continuation of *Gukurahundi* policy adopted in 1979, and underpinned by the philosophy of the annihilation of political opposition. Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure (2008: 51) have described the two Mashonaland provinces as the epicentres of the strategy of 'election cleansing', that is, of the liquidation of all those suspected of having voted for the MDC.

If ZANU-PF is willing to use violence to remain in power, and openly declares that it believes in the Maoist notion of power coming from the barrel of a gun, how can such a political formation be removed from power? The 2008 elections demonstrated that entrenched dictatorships like ZANU-PF, which have colonised every state institution including the security sector, cannot be removed from power through elections. A peaceful transfer of power proved impossible in 2008, as ZANU-PF successfully demonstrated 'how to lose an election and stay in power' (Matyszak 2010). Their strategy included minimising the value of the ballot box and privileging the centrality of the bullet in deciding who would hold political power. This mentality was clearly expressed by Major-General Engelbert Rugeje who told a rally in Masvingo: 'This country came through the bullet, not the pencil. Therefore, it will not go by your X of the pencil' (*Financial Gazette*, 19 June 2008).

Linked to the conception of elections was war. ZANU-PF has developed a dangerous sense of political indispensability and entitlement to rule Zimbabwe forever because it liberated the country from colonial rule. Having played a leading role in the liberation struggle is peddled by ZANU-PF as the primary source of political legitimacy in Zimbabwe. This mentality is well summarised by Masunungure (2009: 92):

The top ZANU (PF) political generation and its allies in the military/security establishment have an 'end of history' perspective to the liberation struggle and the achievement of independence in 1980. The attainment of Uhuru through a protracted

liberation struggle against settler colonialism marked the end of all struggles, and the triumph of ZANU (PF) was the last triumph. 1980 marked the victory of light over darkness, and in this line of thinking any other struggle in Zimbabwe would be tantamount to an attempt to bring back darkness. This thinking leads ZANU (PF) to brag that it delivered democracy and therefore there cannot be any other democratic struggle. In short, retaining power in ZANU (PF) is a historical imperative. In effect then, by posing a real challenge to take power from the anointed ruling party, the MDC was not only trying to 'reverse the gains of the revolution,' but was also challenging history by doing so.

The 2008 elections, and ZANU-PF's response to their results, raises fundamental questions about the extent to which liberal electoral democracy has been accepted and domesticated in Zimbabwe. When one reads some of the statements from ZANU-PF political actors uttered before and after the botched elections of 2008, including those by Mugabe, it becomes clear that liberation credentials, rather than elections, are considered the main source of political legitimacy. In this context, the elections were easily derided, mocked and reduced to a useless exercise of putting a mere X on a paper (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010). To ZANU-PF, elections matter only if they legitimise and rubberstamp the perpetual political dominance of the former liberation movement. Mugabe did not mince his words prior to the 29 March 2008 polls, saying that people who planned to vote for the MDC were wasting their time. This is how he put it:

You can vote for them [MDC], but that would be a wasted vote. I am telling you. You would be cheating yourselves. There is no way we can allow them to rule this country. Never, ever. We have a job to do, to protect our heritage. The MDC will not rule this country. It will never, ever happen. We will never allow it. (cited in *Solidarity Peace Trust Weekly* 2008b)

What Mugabe and members of the security establishment were expressing was that Zimbabwe was a 'choiceless quasi-democracy', to borrow Thandika Mkandawire's term (1997). In the face of ZANU-PF's arrogance and refusal to respect the people's choice, the electorate was rendered helpless, powerless and bereft of choices. ZANU-PF arrogance is derived from Maoist vanguardist notions of a former liberation movement that considers itself to have been thrust into existence by oracular providence issuing from Shona spirit mediums (Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chaminuka) to carry out a historical mission, if not a messianic agenda, that no other political formation can complete.⁵

This political formation considers itself to be so enlightened as to know what is good and bad for the masses without consulting them, as well as to have a mandate to thoroughly discipline the masses if they deviate from the good path and vote against it (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2011). This mentality has dominated ZANU-PF's perceptions of elections and of their own power. The core danger of this thinking is that it has blinded the party to the forward movement of history and time. The psychology of indispensability and invincibility had led to some bizarre attempts to stop inevitable generational processes, and people's will to change state governance, through the forcible inculcation (if not outright indoctrination of the youth) of ideas and views from yesteryear (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010).

The immediate aftermath of the March 2008 elections destroyed the little that was left of ZANU-PF's pretences of adhering to tenets of liberal democracy and to elections as a mode of building legitimacy and/or transferring power.

5 David Lan's 1985 book, *Guns and Rains: Guerrillas and Spirit Medium in Zimbabwe*, details the role of Shona religion and spirit mediums in the liberation struggle, and reveals how ZANU and ZANLA used this to mobilise support among farmworkers and subsistence farmers.

Ultimately, the African Union and SADC had to intervene to try to bring political sanity to the disputants. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) of 15 September 2008 gave birth to the inclusive government that assumed office in February 2009. This was meant to enable Zimbabwe to transcend the political logjam created by the refusal of ZANU-PF to play the political game according to usual rules of elections, as well as the failure of the MDC-T to translate its electoral victory into an ascendance to political power.

All this jostling for power among ZANU-PF, the MDC-T and the MDC-N took place in a country where the national economy had collapsed and a humanitarian crisis was consuming the lives of ordinary people. The security sector intervened on behalf of ZANU-PF to force the party on the electorate by violence, rendering their electoral choice useless (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya 2011). In essence, the GPA and the concept of inclusive government was meant to enable Zimbabwe to return to a degree of normality, after a decade of political madness punctuated by bifurcation of the nation into 'patriots and puppets', the militarisation of state institutions, as well as governance by military operations and the use of violence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009c).

The Global Political Agreement and elections

As mentioned earlier, SADC mediation began after the brutal beating of opposition leaders and civil-society activists by the Zimbabwe police for attending a prayer meeting organised by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign on 11 March 2007. Tsvangirai's appearance on various TV channels with a big wound on his head alarmed the world about the gravity of the violence in Zimbabwe, and ignited regional and continental concern about the need for mediation. Prior to this (in fact, since 2004, following the disputed 2000 and 2002 electoral results), Thabo Mbeki and Olusegun Obasanjo (then respective presidents of South Africa and Nigeria) had made various informal attempts at mediation.

However, the military-style violence that followed the March 2008 election, and the disastrous run-off in June of that year, prompted SADC to embark on new mediation efforts with the blessing of the African Union. According to IDASA (2008), the publicly proclaimed objective of the SADC-mandated mediation was to create the political conditions for another round of elections. The inclusive government ushered in by the GPA in September 2008 was supposed to be a transitional authority with a mandate to spearhead the institutional reform that would create a peaceful environment for the holding of free and fair elections.

However, it is now clear that both the GPA and the inclusive government have been nothing more than subjects of intense disputes among the contending parties. In the first place, the GPA has been subject to various partisan-motivated interpretations by ZANU-PF and the MDC. The GPA has not been fully implemented, and has instead been haunted by what have been termed 'outstanding issues'. In the second place, the contending political elites within the inclusive government have found it difficult to work together, and this has made it virtually impossible for them to return the country to democratic normality – psychologically, socially, politically or economically (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010). As Zimbabwean human-rights lawyer Dzimbabwe Chimbga has noted:

Beyond doubt, the GPA remains a veritable analogy of the attempt to condense diametrically opposed political views and ideologies. As such, there is a clear and consistent dichotomy in its various provisions, symptomatic of this 'give and take' that the negotiators had to go through... There can be little doubt that such a scheme would require massive political will and consistent shows of good faith from all three political parties that appended their signatures to the agreement. (Chimbga n.d: 18)

In terms of provisions for elections, the GPA contains no specific provisions on when elections should be held in Zimbabwe following the botched 2008 elections. The only reference to elections is in Article 21, which refers to the filling of 'electoral vacancies' and stipulates that, for a period of twelve months from the signing of the GPA, 'should any electoral vacancy arise in respect of a local authority or parliamentary seat, for whatever reason, only the party holding that seat prior to the vacancy shall be entitled to nominate and field a candidate to fill the seat subject to that party complying with the rules governing its internal democracy'.

The reasoning behind this provision was to enable national healing to take place, and to minimise the chances of new theatres of violence opening up too soon after the brutal period that followed the March 2008 election. But some political analysts, such as Jonathan Moyo of ZANU-PF, seem to read Article 21 differently. This is how he interprets or misinterprets it: 'Article 21 of the GPA foresaw and endorsed the possibility of elections, including by-elections, after 12 months of its implementation. Therefore, only scoundrels will oppose the holding of a harmonised general election this year under the false cover of the GPA' (Moyo 2011). A closer look at Article 21 of the GPA provisions indicates that they speak mainly to the need for reforms that could form the basis for 'resolving once and for all the current political and economic situation and charting a new political direction for the country', rather than to the issue of elections and associated timelines (GPA 2008).

The GPA stipulates no lifespan for the inclusive government. Repeated utterances by Mugabe indicate his view that that the inclusive government would have a lifespan of just two years. But MDC-T spokesperson Nelson Chamisa has made it clear that:

The GPA does not have a sunset clause. Neither a single page nor clause of the GPA speaks to the gestation period of the GPA being two years...As a matter of fact, instead of the termination clause, we have two review mechanisms. One is done annually to review the functioning of the inclusive government. The other ... is supposed to be done to review the relationship of the [inclusive government] upon the conclusion of the constitution-making process. (Chamisa 2011)

The issue of elections and the need to end the inclusive government have been prioritised by Mugabe and his party. This was announced during ZANU-PF's annual congress in December 2011. Such utterances by the president, along with those by ZANU-PF spokesperson George Charamba and politburo member Jonathan Moyo, have provoked debates about the need for the completion of reforms, the full implementation of the GPA, and the conclusion of the constitution-making process prior to holding of new elections.

Article 20.1.3(q) of the GPA stipulates that the president 'may, acting in consultation with the Prime Minister, dissolve Parliament'. Nelson Chamisa (2011) reads this clause as giving the president and the prime minister the prerogative to act in consultation to dissolve parliament and then call for new elections. Again, the issue of elections is not directly mentioned here; but it is implicit. Nowhere does the GPA state that elections should be held before or after the constitution-making process has been finalised. Instead, interpreters have to use logic to suggest that elections should be held after the finalisation of the new constitution, since the constitution is one of the inclusive government's key deliverables, and because the new constitution is expected to create the kind of political atmosphere that would be conducive to free and fair elections. This has caused ZANU-PF members such as Jonathan Moyo to forcefully argue that 'there is no necessary connection between the ongoing constitution-making process and the timing and conduct of the next harmonized general elections' (Moyo 2011).

Analysts sympathetic to ZANU-PF (including Jonathan Moyo and George Charamba) have on many occasions argued that the GPA's provisions do not override those of Zimbabwe's existing constitution, which cascaded from the Lancaster House Agreement and has been amended on numerous occasions. This argument creates the impression that the GPA is

quite separate from the national constitution, but Amendment 19 of 2009 included the GPA in Zimbabwe's constitution.

On the other hand, Tsvangirai and others in MDC-T circles have emphasised the need for what they have termed 'a roadmap' towards new elections in Zimbabwe. In other words, they expect SADC to work with the various parties to map out a process leading to a free and fair plebiscite. A meeting of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation (also known as the Troika) in Windhoek in 2010 was hailed by the MDC-T as the beginning of the development of such a roadmap, but the idea of a roadmap is not actually mentioned anywhere in the GPA. Delivering the 'New Zimbabwe Lectures', Tsvangirai argued that:

So the main agenda for 2011 is to support the roadmap to a free and fair election; a roadmap with clear benchmarks and timelines that will put in place mechanisms to ensure a legitimate and credible poll. Join me in a national campaign, a regional campaign, and indeed global campaign, to ensure that Zimbabwe holds a free and fair election. (Tsvangirai 2011)

For Tsvangirai, the core ingredient of the 'roadmap' is to define the conditions under which new elections could be held, and he has identified the key milestones as follows:

Key to achieving this is a new, biometric voter's roll, a stable and secure environment, a credible electoral body with a non-partisan secretariat, a non-partisan public media, security-sector reform and a referendum on a new constitution. We cannot have an election before we achieve these key milestones. (Tsvangirai 2011)

The MDC is also demanding that observers and monitors of any new elections in Zimbabwe be allowed to enter the country six months before and remain in the country for six months after the elections (Chamisa 2011).

Meanwhile, ZANU-PF is dismissive of the notion of any roadmap towards holding new elections. Jonathan Moyo has argued that 'the only "roadmaps" for the next harmonized general election are the GPA and the Constitution of Zimbabwe' (Moyo 2011).

The SADC meeting held in Livingstone (Zambia) at the end of March 2011 and attended by the Harare disputants - ZANU-PF, MDC-T and MDC-N - endorsed the idea of an 'election roadmap' for Zimbabwe. At the meeting, ZANU-PF and Mugabe were openly criticised for stalling the implementation of the GPA and for perpetrating violence on MDC supporters. For the first time, ZANU-PF and Mugabe were told to be serious about resolving the Zimbabwe crisis (SADC Communiqué 2011). SADC leaders also made it clear that Zimbabwe was not ready for new elections, and that more reforms were needed before a date for any new elections could be contemplated.

Looking into the future

What is clear is that, during its two-year tenure, the inclusive government has not worked smoothly at all. While it has brought a level of normality to the economy, contained the unprecedented inflation levels and facilitated a de-escalation of violence, it has not succeeded in creating an atmosphere conducive to free and fair elections. Ibbo Mandaza, a respected Zimbabwean academic who keeps a close eye on dynamics in ZANU-PF and has studied the Zimbabwean state since its birth in 1980, has analysed three core issues affecting the life of the inclusive government (Mandaza 2011). These are: (i) dynamics within the Zimbabwean state, and the particular role played by the securocrats; (ii) the state of the MDC and its inability to assume power; (iii) shifts taking place among international role-players given the

worldwide economic downturn. Each of these issues is analysed in some detail below.

In terms of dynamics within the Zimbabwean state, Mandaza argues that a 'securocracy' has taken over the state and has become obtrusive in the political affairs of the country. Defined as including the commanders of the armed forces, the directors of central intelligence, the commissioners of the police, and heads of prisons, the securocrats have arrogated to themselves the position of 'custodians' of ZANU-PF, the liberation tradition and the state itself (Mandaza 2011).

Arguing that the survival of ZANU-PF hinges on its functional relationship with the securocrats, Mandaza explains that since the botched 2008 elections this grouping has been planning how to 'reproduce themselves in 2011 and beyond' (Mandaza 2011: 1). He continues:

So, the onerous task of trying to sustain the Party of the old is left to those who have so much to lose in a State which has survived so far on the twin pillars of violence (or the threat of it) and patronage. In reality, what remains of ZANU-PF is that which has survived only through its conflation with the securocrat state. Securocracy describes the unique way in which the former guerrilla leaders have, in the name of ZANU-PF, established their hegemony over the Zimbabwe State and appear intent on doing so *sine die*. (Mandaza 2011: 2)

What are the implications of the ubiquitousness of securocracy in Zimbabwean politics for future elections? Securocracies by their very ontology and culture are merchants of violence. Violence is in their DNA. To them elections are a form of warfare. They have a monopoly over the means of violence, and their survival is based on their ability to unleash violence on their opponents. The democratisation of the state, which implies the demilitarisation of state institutions, threatens their survival. In short, as long as they remain an active force in Zimbabwe's political affairs, there is no way there can be fair elections, free of violence.

Thus the securocrats have staged a silent coup. They have openly declared that they will salute no winner other their own preferred candidate. At the time of writing, Mugabe was their candidate and they seem set to do everything possible to make sure he wins any future election – as they did during the presidential run-off in June 2008. To them, any new election must simply legitimatise their silent coup. In other words, the winner of the next elections, if endorsed by the securocrats, will literally be held hostage by them as kingmakers.

The second issue identified by Mandaza is the state of the MDC-T. In the first place Mandaza indicates that the popular view is that the opposition party has won four elections so far (2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008), but has been 'denied victory by the securocrat state' (Mandaza 2011: 3). The key challenge facing the MDC-T is how to translate electoral victory into state power. The MDC-T seems clueless about how to deal with this problem. What the MDC-T has tried to do since the formation of the inclusive government has been to create an alternative centre of power within the prime minister's office as a way of sustaining 'an oppositional stance against the securocrats' state' (Mandaza 2011: 4). This strategy has been ineffective in terms of weakening the nationalist-military alliance rooted in the tradition of the liberation war.

In a presentation during the launch of the Pan-African Policy Dialogue in Harare held on 12 May 2011, Tsvangirai emphasised the need to address the needs and concerns of the victims of violence as well as the fears of the perpetrators. He stated that: 'We have to have an accommodation mentality of both the concerns of victims and fears of perpetrators' (Tsvangirai 2011). This was read as part of Tsvangirai's attempt to reassure security chiefs that an MDC-T government would pursue a policy of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of violence rather than one that involves prosecuting perpetrators.

At the same meeting, Tsvangirai extended his idea of an 'accommodation mentality' to embrace war veterans as well, saying: 'Like all nations which respect veterans, they must do

everything to make sure they don't suffer the indignities that go with liberating this country for the second time ... it is very important to look after veterans for the sake of the future. We owe it to those who are still alive; we must provide them with the necessary support' (Tsvangirai 2011). The war veterans are a key cog in ZANU-PF and Mugabe's political survival and they constitute part of the bulwark against transition to democracy.

It would seem, therefore, that Tsvangirai's strategy is to try to allay the fears of those who have perpetrated violence, including the security chiefs and war veterans, in the hope that they will allow his party to form a government in the event of winning future elections. It is yet to be seen whether this strategy will work. Indeed one of the challenges faced by Zimbabwe relates to the lack of trust among key political actors, and fears of economic and political change by the incumbents who are implicated in violence.

Tsvangirai's strategy is a delicate one. Since 1980, Zimbabwe has consistently chosen the path of allaying the fears of perpetrators of violence at the expense of ensuring justice for victims. Some perpetrators of violence have even been rewarded – Perence Shiri who played a central role in the *Gukurahundi* atrocities, for example, has been made head of Zimbabwe's airforce. There is a danger that, in accommodating the concerns of victims and the fears of perpetrators, justice and accountability will be lost. There is also a danger that, as long as perpetrators of violence are not made accountable, they may use violence again in future. But at the same time, without guarantees for the security chiefs (and all those who have perpetrated violence) they are likely to dig in and do all they can to prevent change from taking place. This is the central dilemma that the Zimbabwean transition is locked into.

Lessons from the transformation of the South African apartheid system indicate the need to accommodate the fears of perpetrators in order for change to take place. The MDC-T occupies an invidious place in this, because its constituencies have mainly been on the receiving end of violence. There are cases that date back to the 1980s that have not yet been addressed, and victims who have pinned their hopes on a new government to deal with these human-rights violations.

However, as long as the 'securocrat state' exists, and ex-army officers occupy key levers of state, it would be naïve for the MDC to talk about how it will deal with perpetrators of violence. The 'secrocrat' wings of the state control the means of violence, and could easily unleash these on their opponents. The securocrats thus have to be taken seriously. The GPA negotiations should have included more representatives of this group. While Mugabe, as their commander-in-chief, represents the armed forces, he is not fully in control of them. Direct negotiations with the security chiefs might yield a better result. It would seem that Mugabe too is held hostage by the securocrats – they spearheaded his 're-election' in June 2008 when ZANU-PF seemed lost as to how to deal with the MDC-T's victory in the March election.

The other strategy chosen by MDC-T as well as MDC-N has been to try to outperform ZANU-PF within the ministries allocated to them so as to maintain their support across the electorate. ZANU-PF is determined to prevent this, and has therefore taken a number of initiatives. These include arresting MDC members of parliament and Cabinet ministers, thus demonstrating where real power lies in the inclusive government. ZANU-PF has also continued to support farm invasions and to threaten white farmers. Again, the aim is to demonstrate where the real power lies, and to ensure that the MDC political formations cannot deliver on their promises to stabilise the agricultural sector. The third strategy employed by the MDC-T was to try to work with so-called moderates in ZANU-PF who were considered reform-oriented. The problem is that the so-called moderates are not yet willing to openly abandon ZANU-PF.

It is not very clear whether the MDC-T's participation in the inclusive government has strengthened or weakened the organisation. What is clear, though, is that ZANU-PF is feeling the impact of its presence; hence its frenzied calls for new elections as a way of dealing once and for all with MDC-T and the power-sharing formula. It is also clear that Minister Tendai

Biti's control over the Ministry of Finance has made it difficult for ZANU-PF to appropriate the state finances necessary to maintain its patronage network. ZANU-PF has attempted to provoke the MDC formations into disengaging from the inclusive government many times, with Mugabe's unjustified refusal to swear-in Welshman Ncube as Deputy Prime Minister in place of Arthur Mutambara being just one example.

The third issue analysed by Mandaza is the role of external factors and actors in relation to the crisis in Zimbabwe. He notes that SADC and the AU have failed to mobilise the requisite moral authority to deal with the crisis, and argues that Zimbabweans cannot expect much from SADC (Mandaza 2011). South Africa, as the key mediator, is constrained by its own domestic challenges. Beyond the African continent, there are indications that western powers, including the European Union and the United Kingdom, are losing interest in Zimbabwe's political crises. Stephen Chan (2011) argues that since 'the west is itself in a fiscal crisis', the region has 'moved on' from its concerns with democracy and human rights to concerns with stability. Chan reveals that:

Suddenly, all of Europe needs Zimbabwe as a trading partner, as business partner, as an investment partner, as a customer and as a purchaser of European goods and services. Europe, as a result, will start doing business with ZANU-PF in 2011. There is much conjecture that the EU contemplates some form of lifting sanctions. (Chan 2011)

This change of attitude among those western powers that have been the MDC-T's strongest supporters and funders has weakened the party, and is one of the major reasons why ZANU-PF is calling for elections. ZANU-PF is reading the signs of the global times and has concluded that, however flawed the elections processes might be, donor fatigue and desperation to trade with Zimbabwe might force the west to accept and recognise the outcome of a new election. It may have been these developments that led Mandaza to conclude that: 'The (targeted) sanctions issue is fast declining into the background in London, Brussels and Washington, even if, albeit ironically, the ZANU-PF leadership is inadvertently keeping it alive through its ill-advised 'anti-sanctions' campaign' (Mandaza 2011: 5).

Reading the situation in Zimbabwe in early 2012, and projecting into the future against this background, ZANU-PF's call for elections seems more opportunistic than anything else. The situation on the ground does not indicate any readiness in the country for new elections. Security-sector reform has not even begun and is vehemently opposed by ZANU-PF. The securocrats still control the infrastructure of violence. Fear of another violent election has the potential to reverse all the achievements of the inclusive government to date, particularly in the economic arena.

The Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration seems to have been a mere public-relations exercise. How can it heal, reconcile and integrate the nation when disunity is rampant within government, where the prime minister and the president are openly hostile towards one another? Zimbabwe remains a polarised nation and any rush into elections is likely to be a recipe for renewed tension, conflict and violence. The police force is still acting in a very partisan manner with MDC-T and MDC-N ministers, members of parliament, and supporters still targets of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

The challenging question is: why is ZANU-PF motivating to have elections before the conclusion of the constitution-making process? It would seem Mugabe's age and ill health is one of the reasons. ZANU-PF seems keen to push for elections while Mugabe is still able to stand against Tsvangirai. There seems to be fear within ZANU-PF ranks that any candidate other than Mugabe would not stand a chance against Tsvangirai. It also seems that Mugabe does not wish to leave the political stage without making sure that his party is fully in charge of government in Harare. The other reason may be that ZANU-PF, using revenue obtained from the Marange diamond fields, feels confident that a carrot-and-stick strategy will be effective

in winning the elections. ZANU-PF may also be counting on exploiting the weaknesses of the MDC-T and MDC-N. It is clear, though, that ZANU-PF has not yet completely abandoned the use or threat of violence on any political formation that will try to stand on its way. The securocrats have issued several threats from the barracks against those who wish to make ZANU-PF history in the next elections. Perhaps ZANU-PF's wish for early elections is also propelled by the realisation that SADC and the rest of the world are tired of the Zimbabwe question, which has been on the global radar for over a decade. At another level, the increasing calls for elections by ZANU-PF may be little more than a political strategy to put pressure on competing political formations.

Conclusions

One of my central conclusions is that Zimbabwe's elections have been a recipe for tension, violence and death for those who have not understood that the elections were nothing more than a ritual designed to promote the myth of democracy and a cover for the authoritarianism of the strong 'nationalist-military alliance' established during the liberation struggle (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2006). While the 1980 elections partially resolved the 'native-settler' question created by colonialism that had provoked a protracted armed nationalist liberation struggle, Zimbabwe's elections (particularly those held since 2000) have, by and large, been a recipe for increasing tensions rather than a remedy for reconciliation. The campaign period for every one of Zimbabwe's elections has degenerated into a terrain of violence and death, particularly for supporters of opposition parties.

A dangerous philosophy relating to power and elections was developed and nurtured by ZANU-PF during the time of the liberation struggle, where 'guns and elections' were conflated and seen as 'Siamese twins.' The *Gukurahundi* policy that destroyed any form of opposition to ZANU-PF's quest for state power has characterised all of Zimbabwe's elections since 1980. There is no sign of ZANU-PF's paradigm having shifted from this dangerous philosophy, and there is a danger of it being unleashed on the opposition yet again if new elections are held before thorough reforms are implemented and strategies are developed to minimise violence.

Zimbabweans are currently held hostage by the threat of violence. The wheels of democratic change are stuck in the same way. The relationship that existed between ZANU-PF and its armed wing during the liberation struggle has been reactivated every time any kind of opposition threatens the party's hold on power. The ex-ZANLA commanders who are today in charge of the armed forces, prisons, central intelligence services and the police force (as well as other institutions of the state including parastatals) continue to act as the party's 'storm troopers'. In the period after the March 2008 election in which ZANU-PF was defeated by MDC-T, and Mugabe was beaten by Tsvangirai in the presidential elections, ZANU-PF's political wing surrendered to the securocrats, allowing them to determine the outcome of all political power struggles. The era of inclusive government has failed to dislodge the securocrats or to prevent them from running the government clandestinely from their military barracks via the Joint Operations Command (the secret ZANU-PF body responsible for co-ordinating state security in Zimbabwe).

Similarly, Zimbabweans are held hostage to ZANU-PF's Marxist-Leninist-Maoist and vanguardist notions of a revolutionary party that claims that it has been blessed by oracles and given a messianic historic mission to deliver the masses from the oppression and exploitation of colonialism. This thinking has mutated and metamorphosed into extreme forms of arrogance, such as disciplining the masses for voting 'wrongly' (Operation *Mavhoterapapi*). Zimbabwe has been reduced to a pseudo and choiceless democracy in which elections have been reduced to nothing more than rituals, covering the nakedness

of a one-party authoritarian regime led by a singular 'dear leader' who believes that his unchallengeable liberation-struggle credentials make him the alpha and omega. In this context, the Zimbabwean electorate's choices and judgments have been rendered impotent. This reality provoked Welshman Ncube (who, at the time of writing was leading the smaller faction in the MDC) to lament that:

If all political players were to accept that it is the sovereign right of the people to freely elect a government of their choice no matter how we may disagree with their judgment. Even if we fiercely believe that it is wrong judgment we must accept it as their sovereign choice. If the political parties were to embrace that principle that the will of the people is sovereign ... in my view that is the problem that faces the country at the moment - the refusal by the majority political players that people can make a judgment, which is different from theirs. For as long as there is unwillingness to accept the judgment of the people we will have this crisis where the major political players seek to manipulate the will of the people. (Ncube 2008)

Unless there is a psychological and mental paradigm shift, Zimbabwe's elections will remain mere rituals, legitimising those already in power, controlling the state and monopolising the means of violence. Zimbabwe's election processes are also held hostage to a generational struggle in which the old are taking time to die and the new are taking time to emerge. Zimbabwe is experiencing an interregnum where the monsters (in the physical sense, the securocrats) are spoiling everything. It is not yet clear whether the guarantors of the GPA, namely the African Union and SADC, will be able to remedy the situation through crafting a clear roadmap to elections that would be respected by all the political players. ZANU-PF is already trying to pre-empt this by raising issues of sovereignty. It is also trying to prevent the facilitators and guarantors of the GPA from engaging the securocrats or obtaining their assurance that they will stay in their barracks and allow whoever wins future elections to assume power.

The MDC-T political formation in particular, which has been accused of being a Trojan horse of western imperialism, has not helped matters by its failure to fully refute this ZANU-PF argument. The WikiLeaks files on Zimbabwe have added some credence to ZANU-PF's position as they revealed connections between MDC-T and the western powers that have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. This accusation should not be taken lightly, because it determines how MDC-T is seen within the region. The SADC region is dominated by former liberation movements such as the ANC and PAC (South Africa), SWAPO (Namibia), FRELIMO (Mozambique), MPLA (Angola), and the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Tanzania). These are very sensitive to any political formation that is said to be working with former colonial powers to effect regime change. The MDC-T must work tirelessly to rebut this political framing as it continues to be used in Zimbabwe and in the region with some success. It also enables ZANU-PF to characterise the masses that support the MDC-T as naive and suffering from amnesia about the liberation struggles that raged against all forms of imperialism and colonialism.

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