

## THE POLITICS OF ENTITLEMENT AND STATE FAILURE IN ZIMBABWE

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In 2008, the meltdown of the post colonial state of Zimbabwe climaxed in violence-ridden presidential elections. The egregious extent of the violence instigated an unprecedented departure from the African diplomatic practice of speaking no evil of fellow leaders, with one or two countries even refusing to recognize Mugabe's presidency. Although the repressive nature of the government earned it international condemnation, for at least twenty years after independence Mugabe received significant electoral endorsement and little public protest. Even when forces massacred segments of the population and violently evicted the poor from the cities, no civil society uprising emerged. This raises the question why the population acquiesced in the rulership of an inept and corrupt government. Utilizing theoretical concepts from Gramsci and Foucault, this paper argues that a hegemonic interplay of consensual and forceful power, based on an ethos of liberation entitlement that was accepted by the public in part due to colonial resentment, enabled ZANU PF to maintain a monopoly on political office under the façade of democratic governance.

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### INTRODUCTION

In 2007, a giant billboard went up in the South African border town of Musina, proclaiming: "We know why you're in South Africa—Life in Zimbabwe is murder these days."<sup>1</sup> "Murder" was more than a metaphorical expression in the circumstances. A political and economic crisis was unfolding in the country, and with it came egregious physical violence that was meted out on political opponents of the government. To ensure that he would retain power, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) president, Robert Mugabe, unleashed on the electorate a level of violence and intimidation so intense that the opposition threw in the towel and withdrew

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from a second round of the 2008 presidential elections in order to save the lives of its supporters.<sup>2</sup> Mugabe crowned himself president, and, in a break from traditional African diplomatic practice, many of his fellow African leaders voiced their criticism publicly. Criticism of his conduct from neighbouring Botswana was scathing, and that country refused to recognize Mugabe's presidency. All pretenses to democracy had disappeared and the country's economy lay in tatters. With a record-breaking, officially acknowledged inflation rate of 11.2 million percent, most basic necessities were beyond the reach of the ordinary person.<sup>3</sup> One of Africa's most promising postcolonial states had simply unravelled.<sup>4</sup>

It would be easy and tempting, but incorrect, to understand Zimbabwe's collapse only in terms of Mugabe's dictatorial exercise of physical power. The disaster has been a complex mix of internal and external, historical and contemporary factors. This paper focuses only on the modalities of the exercise of power by the post-independence governing elite in an effort to address one of the puzzling aspects of Zimbabwean politics: the substantial acquiescence, and, to an extent, the active support, of the Zimbabwean population to the rulership of ZANU PF and Mugabe, even in the face of clear indications of impending disaster.

There were many fairly clear indicators of the unfolding disaster, including Mugabe's early attempts to declare the country a one-party state and institute a lifelong term of presidency. Two years into the independence era, the government massacred thousands of people in Matabeleland province on the premise of a security threat to the country. From the rest of the country, and indeed from the international community, there was a deafening silence surrounding the atrocities. Soon there was unbridled greed and corruption that saw the political elite amass incredible wealth in a very short space of time, while the promises of liberation remained unfulfilled for the vast majority.<sup>5</sup> Economic hardships escalated for the masses with the implementation of the Bretton Woods institutions' structural adjustment programs. Yet repeated calls for public action by civil society action groups, labour unions, and the opposition failed to mobilize the population. For all the vote-rigging accusations against him, Mugabe retained a considerable measure of popularity, at least for the first two decades after independence.<sup>6</sup>

Why did the Zimbabwean population acquiesce to and even actively support Mugabe and ZANU PF for so long? This paper makes the argument that in classic Gramscian terms, the liberation leaders transformed into a politico-

economic class and established a hegemonic monopoly on power. ZANU PF and Mugabe capitalized on anti-colonial sentiment and effectively cultivated and maintained a liberation-based entitlement discourse as the legitimating creed for holding political office. For a long time, a substantial proportion of the Zimbabwean population acceded and gave its consent. The vilification of Mugabe and ZANU PF as a dictatorial regime that rigged elections and beat people, although deserved, is therefore inadequate as an explanation of the elite's hold on political office. A more complex strategic situation evolved. Using Gramsci's concept of hegemony and some of Foucault's ideas on power-knowledge as theoretical frameworks for understanding government action, it becomes clear that the ruling elite deployed both repressive and consensual power in an interrelated and complementary interplay. The strategy succeeded for a long time, but the failure to pursue liberation ideals and meet material expectations, together with government ineptitude, rampant greed, and corruption, finally eroded the electorate's consent and undermined the hegemony to the point where the elite had to resort primarily to open and widespread coercion in order to stay in office.

#### FAILURE AND REPRESSION

The failure of the state in Zimbabwe was both swift and spectacular. At independence from colonial rule, the country was one of Africa's greatest hopes, but by 2008 it ranked in the category of failed states with complex emergencies. The statistics tell a story. In 1980, Zimbabwe was sixty-ninth on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index, but by 2006 the country was sitting at number 151. Life expectancy at birth fell from a high of fifty-eight years in 1980 to a low of thirty-two years for women and thirty-seven years for men in 2007—the lowest in the world.<sup>7</sup> Living standards (as measured by real GDP) fell 35 percent from 1980 to 2007, and unemployment was over 80% by 2008.<sup>8</sup> All told, the economy shrunk by 5 percent in 2000, 8 percent in 2001, 12 percent in 2002, and an estimated 18 percent in 2003.<sup>9</sup> The trend kept on getting worse.

There had been some notable initial successes following independence. ZANU PF introduced a universal education system that shot literacy rates to top rankings in the world.<sup>10</sup> Health care improved and became accessible to the vast majority, whose access to health care had been severely limited in the racialized colonial state. These were, however, short-term gains. The long-term liberation expectations for socio-economic well-being and land redistribution

were not met. The economy remained in white hands, and when it transferred, it was to the political elite and a small, emerging black upper-middle class. The poor, who made up the vast majority, stayed poor. The government did not ever come up with an economic plan that would have increased economic performance. As Fay Chung argues, the government took the existing industries as a static resource to be maintained rather than expanded.<sup>11</sup>

Corruption, exemplified by scandals like the 1989 Willogate affair and the cabinet ministers' land grabs in the Commercial Land Resettlement Scheme, as well as the government's economic ineptitude, added to the economic pressures.<sup>12</sup> As the foot soldiers who had done the fighting for liberation watched, the political elite amassed vast fortunes. Eventually, war veterans threatened revolt and Mugabe pacified them with a hefty one-time payment of Z\$50,000 per person (a total of Z\$5 billion), plus a Z\$2,000 monthly pension.<sup>13</sup> The monetary commitment shook the country's economy but assured Mugabe of the war veterans' long-term support. Concurrent with the war veterans' saga, Mugabe also took the country into the war in Congo. By 2000, the country was spending approximately US\$25 million a month on that war. Although, reportedly, the top army brass and the politicians were handsomely rewarded by President Kabila of Congo, there was no benefit to the country.<sup>14</sup>

The failure was not just economic. ZANU PF came into government through democratic elections after a negotiated settlement brokered by the former colonial power, Britain, in 1980. ZANU PF embraced the principle of electoral democracy, but by 1989, its former Secretary General, Edgar Tekere, was declaring that democracy in Zimbabwe was "in the intensive care unit."<sup>15</sup> The government proved intolerant of criticism and it utilized both forceful means and control of public discourse to stifle opposition. The massacres in Matabeleland were justified on the basis of state security, and, as a Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace report conceded, those were dangerous times for a nascent state. However, the commission also pointed out that the disturbances were utilized by ZANU PF for the brutal elimination of political opposition.<sup>16</sup> *Gukurahundi*, as the operation came to be known, was phenomenally destructive.<sup>17</sup> In less than six weeks, "more than 2,000 civilians had died, hundreds of homesteads had been burnt and thousands of civilians had been beaten. Most of the dead were killed in public executions . . ." <sup>18</sup>

Violence, once unleashed, became a tool of choice. When the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), posed a serious challenge to ZANU PF a few years later, senior ZANU PF official Didymus

Mutasa declared chillingly, “We would be better off with only six million people, with our own people who support the liberation struggle. We don’t want all these extra people.”<sup>19</sup> At the time, Zimbabwe had a population of 12 million people! The MDC had grown out of organized labour, which was especially susceptible to a weak industrial economy. Labour became restive when the economy faltered, and it intervened directly in the political arena by forming its own political party. The MDC mobilized the electorate for withdrawal of public support from ZANU PF and succeeded, as witnessed by the outcome of the 2000 constitutional referendum, when the ruling party’s proposed amendments were defeated. That came as a shock for ZANU PF and Mugabe. Having cultivated the ideology of entitlement to office based on liberation participation, he and his party had not considered failure to perform as criteria for electoral endorsement. In the June 2000 elections, ZANU PF was shocked even further when the newly formed MDC garnered 57 of the 120 seats in parliament.<sup>20</sup> Since independence, ZANU PF had always held more than a two-thirds majority.

The government adopted a new tactic to try and regain public consent: land redistribution. Some scholars have blamed the economic collapse of the country on the confiscation of white farms by ZANU PF. Far from being a cause, however, farm invasions were a scapegoat solution to a political problem. The government utilized farm expropriation as a last-ditch effort to regain popularity following the crushing defeat of the government’s proposal for constitutional change in February 2000. The timing of the invasions is very telling: less than a month after the constitutional-amendment defeat, invasions of white-owned commercial farms by so-called war veterans began. Some twenty-three people died in the ensuing mayhem, and thousands of farm workers were rendered both homeless and unemployed. ZANU PF banked on the passions surrounding colonial land expropriation to rally back the population’s consent to its governance as the deliverer of liberation.

The use of violence was extended beyond the political realm. By 2005, violence was being utilized as a tool to “clean up” poverty. The homeless were summarily and violently disappeared through operation *murambatsvina* (literally, “remove rubbish”). To the rulers, the poorer citizens had become an inconvenience and an eyesore. As Augustine Chihuri, Zimbabwe’s Commissioner of Police put it, “We must clean the country of the crawling mass of maggots bent on destroying the economy.”<sup>21</sup> Many of the poor were arrested, dozens were shot, and thousands of urban dwellings were razed to the ground.

The world expressed shock, UN agencies condemned the government's actions, and African leaders maintained their characteristic silence, but there was no citizen uprising.

The strategy of demonizing and using violence against segments of the population in order to gain wider endorsement clearly failed in the end. By the 2000s, there was a shift in the use of violence to directly target opposition party leadership.<sup>22</sup> In 2007, even the practitioners of law who had taken up the mantra of defending human rights were being publicly and thoroughly beaten by the police for any sign of dissent.<sup>23</sup> The electorate was not persuaded to vote differently, however, and instead reaffirmed its censure by voting for the leader of the opposition as president in March 2008. A reign of terror ensued, with the electorate as the object of subjugation. The government allowed the army, police, and its youth militias to intimidate, rape, and kill in order to persuade people to vote "correctly." By then, the elite had abandoned persuasion, and political dissent became a life-threatening engagement.

Economic failure was compounded and exacerbated by skills flight. The educated middle class left for Europe, the Americas, and Australia. Blue-collar workers and small-scale entrepreneurs headed for Botswana and South Africa. Estimates put exiled Zimbabweans at anywhere from one million to four million; a number greater than that at the time of colonial repression.<sup>24</sup> So desperate was the situation at home that Zimbabweans braved the crocodile-infested Limpopo River, barbed wire, and electrified fences to cross into South Africa. Some of the refugees starved to death on the streets of South Africa, but despite the heart-rending experiences, the exodus continued.

Throughout the failure and repression, Zimbabweans did little public protesting. There never was the level of civil protest that would have shaken the confidence and claims to legitimacy of the government. It is in the nature and use of the power exercised by the elite that some light can be shed on this puzzling phenomenon.

## KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND LEGITIMACY

The utility of power lies in that it "subverts the possibility of refusal and resistance through selective pre-formation of the premises on which decisions are based."<sup>25</sup> Power is the vector that enables desired outcomes. Often, analyses of power conceptualize a duality between coercive and persuasive forms of power, but in Zimbabwe the two forms were used in a complementary fashion. As Foucault theorized, consensual and repressive power are not necessarily exclusive

of each other.<sup>26</sup> In fact, in his view, non-repressive power can even transform into repressive power. Gramsci's Marxist analysis, that "a class and its representatives exercise power over subordinate classes by means of a combination of coercion and persuasion," provides an even clearer explanation of the dynamics of ZANU PF rulership and the acquiescence of the population.<sup>27</sup> Coercion by ZANU PF was fairly obvious, but it never operated alone. The governing elite mounted a concerted discursive effort to build a consensus behind its governance. As Mark Haugaard has indicated, "truth is used to pacify others by privileging certain ways of interpreting the world, particular discourses and disqualifying others. Power is a form of pacification which works by codifying and taming war through the imposition of particular knowledge as truth."<sup>28</sup> ZANU PF set about organizing consent around the one thing to which it could claim a near monopoly: the liberation of the country from colonization.

There can be no doubt that ZANU PF had the support of the majority of the citizens in the immediate post-independence era or that its power was consensual at that point. Concomitantly as ZANU PF successfully elicited consent from a significant proportion of the population, it utilized coercive power on opponents or perceived threats, a transcendence of the duality of power in practice. It sought to maintain the consent by creating particular forms of knowledge as truth.

Consent is a factor of knowledge and the poststructuralist concept that language transports knowledge and ideas, and locates discourse as constitutive of knowledge, at the centre of power.<sup>29</sup> Using some of the insights on power, knowledge, and truth from Foucault, the evolution of the Zimbabwean political crisis can be rendered theoretically more intelligible. Discussing Foucault's ideas on power-knowledge, Axel Honneth postulates that "... discourses are systems of social knowledge; knowledge formations assume the special function of augmenting power: and that the theory of knowledge becomes the theory of domination."<sup>30</sup> Some scholars have argued for a Foucauldian direct causality between discourse and effect, for example, Davidson's approach to discourse as "ways of conquering, of producing events, of producing decisions, of producing battles, of producing victories . . ."<sup>31</sup> I, however, see an understanding of effect as mediated by knowledge as more accurate. If discourse is understood as productive of knowledge, and knowledge as mutually constitutive with power, we get a more nuanced understanding of the Zimbabwean dynamics of power. As will be more fully discussed below, ZANU PF sought to maintain the knowledge that liberation from colonization was the ultimate

good, and that the population owed ZANU PF loyalty because ZANU PF was the deliverer of that liberation.

In Zimbabwe, knowledge became a critical element in the maintenance of power because there is a recursive, or mutually reinforcing, relationship between power and knowledge. As Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* illustrates, systems of thought are constituted by, and in turn constitute, power.<sup>32</sup> Appeal to truth becomes a strategy for gaining particular ends. As in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, wherein prisoners succumb to *panoptican* practices, identify themselves in the terms of those practices, and in this way regain entry back into society, in Zimbabwe, ZANU PF's heroic liberation sacrifices were the constructed truth to which the masses had to subscribe in order to maintain that liberated state. It placed ZANU PF in the hard-to-challenge position of legitimate holder of power.

Truth lends legitimacy to political office. Political legitimacy is the normative foundation of a government's authority to rule. It comprises the government's consciousness of its right to govern concomitant with the recognition of that right by the governed. How that legitimacy is perceived by both parties is critical to the nature and functioning of the state. Governance arrangements tend to be positive when there is a congruence of both parties' perceptions, and contention often follows from a variance in perceptions between the governed and the governors. In the modern democratic state, legitimacy theoretically flows from the electoral mandate, a reflection of popular choice freely made. However, as pointed out above, choices are factors of knowledge; hence, hegemony of knowledge can substantially contribute to and enable the acquiescence of the electorate. I argue that this became the case in Zimbabwe.

In the contemporary world, democracy is touted as the ideal form of governance, one that lends legitimacy to an elected government. But democracy can prove to be a faulty mechanism even in the developed state. As Converse found from empirical research, even in the developed democratic state, a tiny stratum of ideological elites determines democratic legitimacy.<sup>33</sup> In a nascent state, that possibility is even higher. The more the claims to democratic governance, the greater the weight of numbers in the calculus of power. In electoral democracies, obtaining the numbers becomes the major objective of political elites. In this endeavor, public discourse becomes a critical resource because discourses set the boundaries of meaning or the parameters of defining possible truths. Discourses are an integral component of any political community and an even more powerful tool for defining political legitimacy in

emergent states, where institutions of governance are often contested territory. Since independence, Zimbabwe had putative democratic institutions based on electoral democracy. Given the contemporary world of liberal democracy, the governing party felt constrained to embrace democracy.

Success at the polls immediately after gaining independence and the global ascendancy of democracy as the legitimating political ethos induced in ZANU PF a confidence in electoral politics. However, the use of repressive power and the violence that had delivered independence was hard to renounce. There was always a tension between reliance on populism and the leadership's yearning for an emancipatory narrative as the legitimizing political ethos. Violence had, after all, been romanticized as the ultimate instrument for dismantling colonial domination. As much, however, as it romanticized violence, ZANU PF was also alive to the key role played by the support of peasants in the guerrilla war and the critical need for consent if the image of democracy was to be maintained. It therefore adopted a dual exercise of power, an interplay of force and persuasion: persuasion for ZANU PF's constituency and a combination of the stick and the carrot for opponents. As long as a majority of the population could be persuaded to acquiesce to ZANU PF's governance, electoral democracy was acceptable to, and indeed lauded by, ZANU PF. The ruling party, therefore, expended significant resources in maintaining the image of electoral endorsement by the population.

That hegemonic framing of ZANU PF power requires explication. The Gramscian analysis places hegemony as a strategy of class, yet ZANU PF claimed to be a revolutionary party. How hegemony becomes a fitting framework lies in the in fact that, in Zimbabwe, revolution did not happen with independence. As so many analysts have pointed out, the structures of government and the economy were not transformed.<sup>34</sup> A black elite simply moved into the offices vacated by the racial elite. As will be discussed below, it was ZANU PF that transformed from being a liberation leadership to a politico-economic class. Hegemony became useful for the management of society, and the elite waged a relentless ideological struggle to complement its use of force in order to retain political power.

Thus, liberation discourse as the key to electoral popularity dominated Zimbabwean politics for most of the country's post-independence existence. It obtained for ZANU PF the desired allegiance of the electorate, but that allegiance was never complete or guaranteed. Its erosion is what eventually led to the crisis of dictatorial governance. The use of repressive power increased as

consensual power declined. The naked form of repressive power was articulated in the usurping of the people's ability and choice to decide. The statement of then-Minister of Justice Patrick Chinamasa in response to the possibility of Mugabe losing in the presidential elections is illustrative. As he declared, "If people attempted to unfree themselves, moves would be made to free them."<sup>35</sup> The moves turned out to be naked physical coercion. With the abandonment of consensual power and the legitimacy that emanated from electoral endorsement, Mugabe turned to divine authority for his legitimacy. Faced with the reality of electoral rejection, he proclaimed to a traumatized citizenry that had attempted to hand the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) an electoral victory that "The MDC will never be allowed to rule this country—never ever. Only God who appointed me will remove me . . ."<sup>36</sup> ZANU PF and Mugabe had come a long way from emancipatory liberation.

#### THE POLITICS OF ENTITLEMENT

A public discourse that simultaneously demonized opponents and reduced the role of the masses to adulation of the liberators undergirded ZANU PF's organization of consent. The use of liberation credentials as a gateway to power and its retention is not a stranger to African postcolonial politics. In Zimbabwe, however, liberation heroism was so carefully constructed and persistently and forcefully maintained as to assume the nature of an ideology. It also simultaneously served to rationalize the use of repressive power on dissenters.

##### *Public Statement of Entitlement*

Liberation entitlement spread from the top echelons of the party and cascaded down to the local party cadre. The demand for adulation was curiously quite contemptuous of the masses, especially the rural population. In 2000, at a party rally at Ngundu growth point in Chivi, Vice President Simon Muzenda articulated for the peasants and war veterans the meaning of liberation. As he put it; "Even if we put a baboon in Chivi, if you are ZANU PF you vote for that baboon."<sup>37</sup>

Voting for ZANU PF was consistently framed as a duty, and failure to do so was portrayed as treason. None spoke the language of treason more loudly than the president. As early as 1982, Mugabe had declared that, "as clear as day follows night . . . ZANU-PF will rule in Zimbabwe forever. There is no other party besides ours that will rule this country."<sup>38</sup> Speaking at Mutoko in the run-up to the 2005 elections, Mugabe warned that "All those who will vote for the

MDC are traitors.”<sup>39</sup> As he emphasized, an election victory by the opposition would not be tolerated.<sup>40</sup> That rejection of any outcome but an endorsement of the ruling party was repeated several times during electoral campaigns. The reason was not lack of electoral support for other parties besides ZANU PF, but rather, as the president put it, that “Tsvangirai (MDC president) will never govern Zimbabwe because he does not have liberation war credentials.”<sup>41</sup>

The ZANU PF discourse of war credentials was so pervasive that it came to be propagated even by those from his party who dared to mount challenges to Mugabe. Despite being booted out of government and the ZANU PF party he helped create, former Secretary General and Manpower Planning Minister Edgar Tekere clearly remained trapped in the liberation credentials discourse. Speaking to journalists in Harare in 2007, Tekere revealed that he had long before made a pact with Mugabe that Vice President Teurai Ropa Nhongo would be president of Zimbabwe because of her achievements in the liberation war.<sup>42</sup> Liberation was so powerful as a criterion for political office that political analysts assessed political careers based on war credentials rather than capability. Eldred Masunungure, for example, listed as the critical factor for presidential electability that “She [Teurai Ropa Mujuru] meets the set criteria such as liberation war credentials . . .”<sup>43</sup>

Pejorative labels like *mafikizolo* (“the late comers”) were brought into usage to denote anyone who had not been active in ZANU PF or the other liberation war movement, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU), in the war years. Interestingly, such labels were never applied to those who, despite never having seen combat, unquestioningly supported Mugabe. Through a system of largesse, ZANU PF membership and unqualified support of Mugabe, rather than actual participation in the liberation struggle, bestowed legitimacy. This had an important function. The non-ex-combatants in ZANU PF, having no constituency of their own and no war credentials, were totally dependent on Mugabe for their political life. That assured Mugabe of their complete loyalty.

#### *Co-optation of the Uniformed Services*

Understanding the war-based legitimacy claims and practices of ZANU PF requires the factoring in of the role of the uniformed forces. Again, in Gramscian terms, there was a building of alliances between the political and the military elite that was made easily possible by the grounding of legitimacy in war-attained liberation.<sup>44</sup> There was, too, a longstanding tradition of military-political alliances. The military, as well as the police, had been partisan in the

preceding colonial era, when the Rhodesian Army gave service to the white Rhodesian Front government agenda. The structures did not change with the substitution of former Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army commanders for colonial chiefs of staff.<sup>45</sup> Post-independence army and police commanders not only declared openly their partisanship to ZANU PF, but also ordered all uniformed officers to do the same.

It was relatively easy for ZANU PF to co-opt the uniformed services into entitlement mode. The liberation ethos gave former liberation-army commanders greater standing. There was, thus, a merger of the political, the military, and the police in Zimbabwe that helped to reinforce the liberation legitimacy discourse. The defence forces and the police so identified with ZANU PF that they did not see any distinction between state institutions and the party to which they tied their public careers. Hence, for example, former Zimbabwe Defence Forces commander Vitalis Zvinvashe, speaking to voters in his home area of Gutu on 14 June 2007, found it logical to declare that "Even if you do not vote for me, I do not care because I know President Mugabe will appoint me because of the role I played during the war. Even if you do not vote for me the President will know what to do. People might be offended with my remarks but that is the truth. My role during the war speaks for itself."<sup>46</sup>

Due to the merger of the political and the administrative, practicing violence on ZANU PF opponents could be done with impunity. The institutions whose function should have been the protection of the citizens were complicit in the violence. Numerous pronouncements by successive service chiefs confirm the twinning of liberation legitimacy and uniformed services co-optation. In 2002, General Zvinvashe openly indicated that the armed forces would only support leaders who fought in the liberation war: "the armed forces were not prepared to salute a president who did not have liberation war credentials."<sup>47</sup> The police chief joined in, issuing the threat of "a military takeover if another party other than ZANU-PF won the presidential elections."<sup>48</sup> The army and police made clear that if the masses dared not to like ZANU PF and Mugabe, the uniformed services would go against the people; and they did.<sup>49</sup> The uniformed services had morphed from custodians of the nation's security to being guardians of ZANU-PF's liberation entitlement. The government's setting up of an extralegal machinery of violence in the form of the "Green Bombers" was only a logical extension to the co-optation

of the uniformed services.<sup>50</sup> The bombers could, and did, commit most of the brutalization because they had the protection of the police and the army.

### *Selective Memorialization and Class Fracturing*

The legitimating paradigm had selective application. The liberation war was a guerilla-based movement that could only have been successful with the active participation and support of the majority of the population, but the contribution of the masses to the liberation struggle was excluded from the discursive accreditation for liberation. Although ZANU PF portrayed itself as a people's "revolutionary party," a clear class fracturing took place after independence. There was a selective memorialization of the liberation experience. Heroism was bestowed on the leaders, who became the *chefs* (chiefs), complete with a Heroes Acre and benefits for leaders' survivors, while the lot of the *povo* (masses) remained to render adulation to the *chefs*. The hardships of the "man in the middle," the masses that endured colonial internment in village "keeps" or colonial concentration camps, fed the freedom fighters, and gave them cover on pain of death from the colonial army, went missing from the liberation discourse.

Public, collective ritual was a part of the liberation idealization. The government turned the Heroes Acre, conceptually a national monument, into a shrine for the canonization of ZANU PF top faithfuls. No one other than ZANU PF top officials has made it to Heroes Acre. As a civil action group complained, heroism was redefined as "participation in the war and membership of party structures at higher levels."<sup>51</sup> Ironically, for a liberation movement that set out to emancipate the people, class was always a central component of ZANU PF, even in death. There were provincial Heroes Acres for lesser members. Each hero burial was used by the government as a rallying point and a reinforcement of the entitlement discourse. Each year during the Heroes national holidays, the ritual of liberation valorization is conducted at the Heroes Acre and broadcast widely in the media lest the *povo* forget who has the right to rule the country. The *povo* are obligated to participate. They are regularly bused in from rural areas to populate the ritualizing.<sup>52</sup>

So elite-owned became the country's liberation that ZANU PF could ignore the actual fighters of the liberation war. Many of them died in destitution, and it was more than 15 years before war veterans found their voice. In 1997 and 1998, the mercurial Chenjerai Hunzwi mobilized the war veterans and secured for them a piece of the Zimbabwean pie.<sup>53</sup> But even when war

compensation became a reality for war veterans, the recipients of the biggest packages turned out to be members of the ZANU PF elite.<sup>54</sup> The ordinary masses never organized and no counter discourse ever materialized from them or on their behalf. They remained marginalized, both politically and economically, after liberation.

### *The Politics of Terror and the Co-optation of ZAPU*

In a classic simultaneous utilization of consensual and repressive power, ZANU PF utilized a co-optation strategy on the first formidable political opposition it faced after independence, the competing liberation movement, PF ZAPU. There was a history to the two political parties. The Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) was founded in 1961 as the original African liberation party, led by Joshua Nkomo. In 1963, a group of dissatisfied members split from the party to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The two parties prosecuted the liberation war in parallel formation, each with its own military wing. In 1976, the two parties formed an alliance named the Patriotic Front to better prosecute the war. The alliance continued through to the peace negotiations that culminated in the attainment of independence and the elections of 1980. However, the two parties contested the elections separately as ZANU-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Patriotic Front-ZAPU (PF-ZAPU). ZANU PF won the majority and formed the first post-independence government.

When ZANU PF perceived a threat from PF ZAPU following the discovery of arms caches on PF ZAPU farms shortly after independence, ZANU PF utilized two interlinked methodologies to neutralize the threat. The first was repressive power through the unleashing of the Korean-trained Fifth Brigade that wreaked havoc and spread terror in PF ZAPU's stronghold of Matebeleland in the *Gukurahundi* operation discussed above. The second was to invite PF ZAPU as a partner in government. Faced with a choice between violent repression and partnership with the dominant party, PF ZAPU was persuaded of the profit of accepting ZANU PF's invitation to govern. The two parties signed a unity accord in 1987, and PF ZAPU was swallowed whole and ceased to exist.

The demise of PF ZAPU deprived the country of a meaningful opposition and stifled the possibility of a credible public discursive political engagement. It also set a ZANU PF precedent for dealing with opposition. A few years down the line, the politics of terror were to return as an instrument used

against the short-lived Zimbabwe Unity Movement, the press, and the MDC. PF ZAPU's demise was all the more significant because ZANU PF could not so easily have dismissed a movement that participated in the liberation struggle.

### *Reining in the Public Sphere*

Control of public discourse would not have been possible without control of the media and, through that, control of public knowledge and discussion. The media is the most powerful means of communication in the public sphere. It informs, educates, entertains, and, to a degree, reflects public opinion. It is through the media that ideas, opinions, and theories of the country's political, economic, cultural, and social life can be discussed. Effective control of the media enables those in power to determine what the masses will or will not know. After independence, the Zimbabwean government moved very swiftly to take control of the media. It acquired control of six newspapers: two daily, two Sunday, and two weekly, in addition to radio and television. Consistently, these outlets were utilized for criticism of any views or persons that happened to differ from those of the ruling clique.

Over and above the direct management of media outlets, the Zimbabwean government had inherited ready-made legal machinery for the control of independent media. The political reality again underscores the Janus face of the ZANU PF government. In keeping with most of the international community, the Republic of Zimbabwe ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), which reinforced the freedom of information and expression as human rights, on 13 May 1991. Article 20 of the 1980 Zimbabwean Constitution enshrined the freedom of opinion and expression. However, the government kept on the statute books such restrictive pieces of legislation as the *Entertainment Control Act*, the *Law and Order Maintenance Act*, and the *Official Secrets Act* that had been cornerstones of the repressive colonial regime.<sup>55</sup> In fact, the state of emergency declared by the colonial regime remained in force for ten years after independence, giving the Zimbabwe police the power to allow or deny public political meetings or rallies. Invariably, ZANU PF functions got permission, while opposition groups had a hard time holding any public meetings.

New legislation was promulgated to add to the existing restrictive regime. In 2002, two pieces of legislation went through Parliament, the *Public Order and Security Bill* and the *Freedom of Information and Right to Privacy Bill*.

Despite United Nations concerns at the implications of such legislation for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the government passed the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (AIPPA), which allowed the government to license and accredit journalists at its discretion.<sup>56</sup> AIPPA also gave the government punitive backup to its control. Those who violated its provisions faced fines and up to two years in prison. No pro-government journalist has ever been prosecuted, while independent journalists have been dragged before the courts and punished many times. In 1999, journalists Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto of the *Standard* were arrested and badly tortured for reporting on the government's role in the war in Congo.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, while an independent media did emerge after independence, it suffered constant persecution from government. Minister of State for Information and Publicity Jonathan Moyo often accused the independent media of being unethical, as did President Mugabe.<sup>58</sup> Ruling party officials made numerous threats against journalists. Ultimately, the harassment took on sinister proportions. The *Daily News* was bombed twice, in April 2000 and on 28 January 2001. It was attacked again on 12 February 2002, when its premises were petrol bombed.<sup>59</sup> In 2003, AIPPA was used to close down the *Daily News*, and the weekly *Daily News on Sunday*. The *Daily Tribune* and the *Weekly Times* were also shut down, in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

### *Impact of Liberation Entitlement*

The constant assault on any alternative form of public communication ensured that the population would be subjected overwhelmingly to government-chosen messages. It helped maintain the image of a heroic government to which the people were indebted for delivering them from British colonization. The discursive campaign of the elites can be discerned easily and can be attributed directly to party leaders. The indicators for the response of the electorate are less directly ascertainable, but can fairly reasonably be deduced from the voting patterns of the electorate. The fate of any aspirants to political office, unless they were in the ruling party and towed the party line, is one of the clearest indicators of the electorate's response. Those who dissented against ZANU PF found themselves out of political office, even if they were elected by popular vote. The fates of former ZANU PF officials Edgar Tekere and Margaret Dongo are illustrative of the electorate's complicity. Once they had been ostracized by the ruling party, the electoral fortunes of these former ZANU cadres were dismal, even though they based their critique of government on

easily demonstrable corruption and economic failures.<sup>60</sup> The backward-looking legitimacy enabled government to avoid having to answer to the electorate on the basis of performance.

The trouble for government came from labour. Initially there had been an alliance between labour and government, but the relationship turned confrontational when, in addition to other economic failures on the part of the government, the structural adjustment program induced an employment downturn. ZANU PF attempted to pay labour through salary increases from printing money, but this self-defeating strategy triggered serious levels of inflation.<sup>61</sup> When labour turned political, ZANU PF resorted to its tactic of using violence and then inviting partnership. The latest attempts in 2008 were backed up by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, but labour has been more difficult to seduce than PF ZAPU and the outcome remains to be seen.

#### CLASS AND DEFENSIVENESS

The liberation-war-based legitimacy was not a universally beneficent ideology, nor was liberation an end in and of itself. Liberation was always connected to elite material self-interest. Scholars like Bhebhe and Ranger, who have analyzed the transition from colony to independent state, have argued that there was a transition of power rather than a substantive revolution with structural change.<sup>62</sup> Political office was utilized as the entree to economic wealth. Clearly, ZANU PF used the state machinery to transition from political elite to an economic class. The former liberators proved insatiably greedy, and their unbridled quest for material acquisition made them politically vulnerable. Once acquired, the material gains became an imperative for ZANU PF to hold on to power. Mugabe, by allowing ZANU PF politicians to participate in corrupt material acquisition, placed their collective destiny in ZANU PF's survival. In time, therefore, control of the state, initially perceived in terms of a liberation prize, evolved into a quest for survival because loss of control would entail the unravelling of ZANU PF's corruption networks, vast personal wealth, and gross mismanagement.

International developments regarding accountability for human rights violations added to elite worries. Leaving office could result in international prosecution, and that led to intensification of the revolutionary rhetoric conflated with anti-colonial posturing. As many analysts started to discern, the problem was not just, or maybe not even primarily, Mugabe. The fear of repercussions for the violent brutalities that the regime has practiced on so many

of the citizens became a powerful incentive for the desire to retain power.<sup>63</sup> Mugabe's departure would leave the army and top police officers exposed to prosecution for the regime's crimes against humanity.<sup>64</sup> Often identified as the Joint Operations Command, General Constantine Chiwenga (Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces), Air Marshal Perence Shiri, Lieutenant General Philip Sibanda (Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army), Police Commissioner General Augustine Chihuri, Major General Paradzayi Zimondi (Head of the Zimbabwe prison service), and Happyton Bonyongwe (Director-General of the Central Intelligence Organization) all stand a good chance of arraignment before a successive government or an international criminal tribunal. They reportedly spearheaded the violence campaign and oppose any political compromise.<sup>65</sup>

The liberation discourse, therefore, came to serve another crucial function. Part of globalization has been the internationalization of accountability for human rights violations and the erosion of territorial boundaries as shields from prosecution. Liberation provided ZANU PF and Mugabe with a platform for assuming the championship of anti-colonization. Defence of liberation became the justification for resisting democratic governance, and it appealed to the formerly colonized, who still harbor deep resentment for the ills of the colonial era. Mugabe turned anti-colonial posturing into a powerful basis for reinforcing his claim to political office. Whether and to what extent Mugabe and ZANU PF's intransigence and tenacious hold on political power is a factor of international pressures for transitional justice is a fascinating topic, but one that would require fuller treatment in a separate paper.

## CONCLUSION

Without the political will for democracy on the part of the political elite, democratic institutions cannot be an adequate safeguard against dictatorship. As journalist Ian Kershaw observed, "Hitler came to power in a democracy with a highly liberal constitution, and in part by using democratic freedoms to undermine and then destroy democracy itself."<sup>66</sup> Mugabe, despite his claims,<sup>67</sup> is not a Hitler, but he took a few pages from *Mein Kampf*. Democracy is contingent on the exercise of consensual power, but consent is a factor that can be organized. Zimbabweans got caught in the disjuncture between the trust, respect, faith, and expectations bestowed by the masses on a leadership that ended colonization and the elite's capture of the liberation. The masses refused to believe that their own leadership would abandon them and acquiesced in

the veneration of the leadership's war heroism. For the leadership, liberation-discourse-based legitimacy had a political rationale. Until recently, seventy per cent of Zimbabwe's population was rural. The impact of economic non-performance is slower to be felt in rural areas where people grow their own food. The theatre of war was overwhelmingly in the countryside. Rural folk felt the cruelty of the Rhodesian army more than the urban residents. Memories of colonization lasted longer and appreciation for liberation as the basis for voting for the liberator was stronger in the larger rural sector than in the labour-dominant urban areas where economic performance was a higher criteria.

By the time the electorate, led by the urban population, demanded accountability, ZANU PF had entrenched itself in power and was no longer amenable to a genuine democratically based legitimacy. It refused to accept electoral choice as a right of the citizens, insisting on privileging and capitalizing the selectively memorialized liberation credentials. The present remained captive to the past.

The Zimbabwean case takes us beyond Converse's electoral ignorance thesis.<sup>68</sup> It shows that discourse as an institutionalized way of thinking or the attribution of meaning can create anti-democratic truths. ZANU PF, through control of the Zimbabwean public sphere, succeeded in imposing a self-serving legitimacy through its propagation of a particular justificatory discourse. It succeeded in convincing a substantial proportion of the population, particularly in rural areas, that it was entitled, as the author of independence from colonization, to hold office. Truths are hard to disprove. With the ills of neo-capitalism so visible, there remains a segment of the population that is wedded to the liberation ethos as the most legitimate basis for holding office. After all, democracy, human rights, and economic structural adjustments all come from the same western world.

I have argued that the political, institutional, and ideological factors that gave legitimacy to the Zimbabwean political practices were situated within the discursive hegemony maintained by the ruling elite and not just in the use of physical force or repressive power. Discourse and reality were constitutive of each other. Of course, repression, mismanagement, and corruption cannot endure forever, and even ZANU PF insiders have had to acknowledge that there is now among the electorate widespread discontent, antagonism, and a desire for change. African leaders will hopefully get to the point where they put greater weight on democracy and people's well-

being than on protecting each other. Botswana appears to be there already. At some point, even well-orchestrated artificial truths will unravel, but the transformation in Zimbabwe will not be easy, and the fear is that it might just turn bloody.

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