

Editorial

Henning Melber and Heather Thuynsma

Co-Managing Editors, Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria

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Former national liberation movements (NLMs) in government deserve to be studied on their own and not simply treated as a component of a country's democracy. Wherever they have managed to seize political power and control over the state, they end up aptly documenting the "limits to liberation" (Melber 2002, Southall 2007, Blaauw and Zaire 2023). Once noted for their opposition to unfairness and oppression, they tend to mutate into authoritarian organisations that are obsessed with control and motivated by material privilege which together culminate in a predatory preoccupation with greed for the benefit of new elites. The newly established 'democratic' power structures, touted as a contrast to the settler-colonial structures of institutionalised racism, tend to do the opposite and benefit some at the expense of too many.

The realities of such emancipation have much in common with the structural violence and inequalities under the former white minority rule, believed—or at least claimed—to have been left behind. The right to self-determination in a sovereign state under majority rule and the formal, constitutionally enshrined equality of its population before the law is an indisputable achievement. It has decisively shifted the social struggles. But old attitudes and internalised concepts of power have not been eradicated. Anti-colonial slogans such as *A Luta Continua* (the struggle continues) have degenerated into "the looting continues". The "struggle narrative" occupies a particularly prominent place in the official patriotic history. It carries the claim that the sacrifices of the "liberators" entitle them to rewards. But such claims by former NLMs as governments overlook or ignore a serious flaw: War is no fertile ground for democracy, human rights, and a vibrant civil society. Liberation struggles liberate individuals and their mindsets only partly, at best. They often remain infected by toxic and predominantly violent elements that fuelled the struggle in the first place. Once in power, victims of such oppression are not immune to turning into perpetrators—violence does not build anything new. It takes one under its control and reproduces itself in those who were victimised (Xaso 2023).

The remaining active war veterans in Zimbabwe are a classic case of this vicious circle. For them politics is violence and it is a useful weapon for responding to civil

opposition politics. They define themselves as the guardians of the state with those who were not part of the *chimurenga* and who do not support them labelled as traitors (Maringira, Gukurume and Chitukutuku 2023). In the case of Zimbabwe, the role of the armed wing of ZANU, which took over firm control of the military, is a strong reminder of who controls this authoritarian democracy, as the forced exit from office by Robert Mugabe underlined (Tarugarira 2023, Dzimiri and Iroanya 2023).

The anti-colonial struggle ended when a new parasitic oligarchy occupying the commanding heights in party and state seized power with an authoritarian concept of political control, not that different from those they replaced. Beneficiaries of such state oligarchy reproduce essential elements of the erstwhile minority rule for their own gains. The socio-economic and political realities in Zimbabwe testify to this deplorable state of affairs with the average citizen dubbing their daily life as an “everyday crisis” (Helliker, Bhatasara and Chiwese 2022, Mangena, Nyambi and Ncube 2022). “Mugabeism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015) as a system persists despite the autocrat’s departure (Mazorodze 2023). His disciples remain in control and reproduce what has been an integral part of policy in their ranks since independence (Moyo and Helliker 2023)—the deeply embedded corruption and self-enrichment has been disclosed in impressive detail in a documentary on the gold mafia (Al Jazeera 2023 and Muronzi 2023).

In light of such realities, the results of an Afrobarometer survey of April/May 2023 do not come as a surprise. According to their sample, 65 per cent of respondents perceive that the country is moving in the wrong direction, 69 per cent classified the economic situation as bad or very bad, and 62 per cent cite their own living conditions in this category (Mpako and Moyo-Nyede 2023). The catastrophic socioeconomic situation manifested yet again in an extreme inflation rate which, due to the dramatic decline in the currency exchange rate of the Zimbabwe Dollar, catapulted in June 2023 to 175 per cent (Munemo 2023).

Despite this persistent crisis, it was predicted that not much would change with the elections for Parliament, the Senate, and the President on 23 August 2023. Previous results proved that the repressive political culture would not allow for free and fair elections and violence and voter intimidation would secure the continued pseudo-legitimation of ZANU-PF (Kwashirai 2023). It, therefore, required no prophetic gift to predict the perpetuation of a status quo. The conduct and procedures did not conform with the electoral guidelines for SADC Member States and citizens based abroad were denied participation—the number of Zimbabweans in the diaspora (in most cases a euphemism for exile) is much higher than at any time during the liberation struggle.

An integral part of the reproduction of established political power structures is anything but an independent electoral commission and its chaotic voter registry, characterised by massive irregularities. Over the years the judicial system has been trimmed to conform with the government and there is a long history of dismissing all claims of electoral manipulation. Similarly, opposition by civil society is intimidated by harsh judgements casting doubt on the independence of courts (Mapuva and Muyengwa-Mapuva 2023, Verheul 2021). The rule of law has been perverted into the law of the rulers with the *Maintenance of Peace and Order Act* of 2019 making it impossible for all parties but ZANU-PF to conduct a proper election campaign. The law was turned into a weapon against the opposition (Human Rights Watch 2023). If that were not enough, at the end of May 2023 Parliament adopted a so-called *Patriotic Bill* (officially: *Criminal Law Codification and Reform Amendment Act*). Signed into law in July 2023 by President Mnangagwa, it criminalises the deliberate violation of the sovereignty and the national interest of Zimbabwe. Its provisions are deliberately vague according to Amnesty International (2023), to allow perpetrators to be imprisoned for long sentences or in special cases even the death penalty. These severe repercussions fuelled greater fears of more repression (Sithole 2023), especially for those who, since the early 2000s, have been championing free speech and opinion—both of which have been systematically infringed and restricted (Melber 2004).

Despite increasing repression under an authoritarian regime, civil society forces have resisted being silenced (Chipato, Ncube and Dorman 2020, Matshaka 2022). Local voices continue to resist intimidation and express their disgust over the disrespect of ordinary people and their suffering. Novels and other fiction are prominent ways to voice anger and frustration and to illustrate the daily ordeal (Ncube 2023). This includes as another form of protest the recent publication of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in Shona (Orwell 2023), translated in a collective effort by a dozen of local writers (Mushakavanhu 2023). But further restrictions are under way with the *Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill*, seeking to further gag local NGOs through total, arbitrary state control (Jeremani 2023).

Given this setting, reducing the operational strength an already weak opposition even further, the election results of 23 August 2023 was hardly a surprise. As observed drily by Onslow (2023): “the outcome of the latest round of Zimbabwe’s ‘electoral autocracy’ was never in doubt”. Expected by all but die-hard optimists, it confirmed the ZANU-PF parliamentary majority and re-elected President Mnangagwa in the first round (Mavengano and Chirongoma 2023), benefitting from the support of a litany

of electoral manipulations (Fabricius 2023). The fact that once again the strongest opposition party did not seek justice through legal claims was also no real surprise. Aligning the judicial system with the ZANU-PF party state prevented any chance of success. By passing on a hopeless legal battle, the opposition party seemingly prevented more bloodshed on the streets.

Moreover, critical comments by election observer missions was notable and uncharacteristically uniform. For the first time the SADC mission declared that the elections did not comply with the Zimbabwean Constitution, the country's electoral laws, and the SADC guidelines (Chikowore and Ncube 2023). And remarkably, only a few of the SADC Heads of State (among them South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia) dashed ahead with congratulations immediately after the announcement of the election results. More striking was the fact that some of these leaders did not attend the official swearing in ceremony of Mnangagwa—significant no shows were all three members of the SADC Troika. President Cyril Ramaphosa's attendance was downplayed as the ANC Secretary Fikile Mbalula explained, the party was in “delicate engagements” in Zimbabwe (Chikowore 2023).

These signs suggest a constellation, in which even the “inner circle” of the former NLMs as governments in the region move to a more careful distance from the previous inviolable friendship and alliance obligation with the ZANU-PF regime. Furthermore, the economic decline of the erstwhile “pearl of Africa” (to quote Julius Nyerere to Robert Mugabe at Zimbabwe's Independence ceremony in 1980) also burdens the country's neighbouring states: beyond the brain drain, hundreds of thousands of desperate people seek a meagre income elsewhere in the hope of securing a lifeline for themselves and for those left behind. This fuels conflicts amounting to xenophobia in the adjacent societies, adding to their own internal challenges. The criticism articulated by the SADC election observer mission seems to be indicative: without credible reforms ZANU-PF risks to out-manoeuvre itself (Moakes, Chichester and Osborne 2023, Matthiashe 2023). It seems to be a matter of time before the SADC States refuse to bear the consequences of subsidising an ailing regime in Harare, amounting to a permanent crisis.

As this seems to suggest, the 2023 elections in Zimbabwe had even more relevance for the wider sub-region. In 2024 South Africa and Namibia, both ruled by former NLMs in government—the ANC and SWAPO respectively—will face another test. In both cases, their dominance has been in decline, while their democracy—in contrast to Zimbabwe—seems to have remained largely intact. These elections will be a litmus test to the extent to which their democracies remain respected. This journal will continue as

an open forum for critical examinations, analyses, and debates related to policy shifts, and will also keep an eye on further developments in Zimbabwe. We therefore invite and welcome submissions on matters related to this issue and its wider context.

In This Issue

We take great satisfaction in presenting a series of articles by Zimbabwean scholars, each analysing a different aspect of their home country. Their contributions show the country's rich history of local knowledge creation and highlight that critical engagement is most certainly a matter of democracy, academic freedom, and a value-based analysis.

The integrity of Zimbabwe's 2023 election results was again questioned—but this time most notably among countries within the SADC who previously supported ZANU-PF. This indicates a clear shift from earlier positions where allegations of electoral manipulation were largely ignored. To appreciate this impact of this shift, the research articles in this issue provide a pertinent contextual analysis of past mediations that kept ZANU-PF in power, the roles that free movement within the region and foreign interests play in Zimbabwe's domestic politics, and the evolving composition of electorate and its—potential—impact.

As *Alexander Madanba Rusero* recalls, the regional mediation of 2008 perpetuated ZANU-PF's dominance, effectively rescuing the regime and granting it a four-year compromise under a Government of National Unity. The mediation effort also provided the operational space for ZANU-PF to reconsolidate its power and side-line the country's burgeoning opposition parties. The SADC was therefore complicit in the perpetuation of rule by undemocratic means.

Increased migration and its effect on Zimbabwe's politics and economy is another prominent example of shifting regional dynamics. Here *Clayton Hazwinei Vhumbunu's* article discusses the dimensions and implications of increased free movement within SADC. Vhumbunu highlights the absence of a genuine political will to promote the free movement of capital, labour, goods, and services. He concludes that the barriers and obstacles that hinder full implementation make such mobility wishful thinking.

There is also domestic contestation when it comes to the presence of companies representing foreign economic interests, not least in the extractive sector, who operate locally under the ZANU-PF government. Chinese mining investment in the Hwange District serves as a case study by *Sylvester Marumahoko, Trust Shayawabaya, Obey Ngorima and Norman Tafirenyika Nhede*. They assess the opportunities and risks of such

investments and the necessary compromise with local communities before presenting a model seeking to reconcile different interests in favour of sustainability.

As is the case with many African countries, the number of young people—born since the turn of the century—in Zimbabwe’s electorate is growing. Dubbed “Ama 2000”, *Octavious Chido Masunda* offers a closer look at their level of political participation and their voting behaviour in the 2023 elections. His empirical findings, based on local interviews, display a considerable degree of disillusionment and apathy, which he notes are signs of frustration with the country’s policy and politicians. But this does not mean that the “Ama 2000” have turned their back on political matters. Rather, it signifies the dismissal of the kind of politics that dominates the country. It also prompts the need for further investigations into the replicability of this trend in the forthcoming elections in the neighbouring countries.

In his *Report*, *Gwinyai Taruvinga* explores another discrepancy between declared goals, commitments, and realities. His report takes stock of the trends in politicisation of local governance in Zimbabwe since the turn of the century. His analysis returns to the country focus of this issue and argues that meaningful devolution of powers by the central state and democracy are intrinsically intertwined.

Tariro Chivige and *Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp* present the results of their survey among a select group of Zimbabweans seeking to make a living in the Cape Town metropolitan area. The responses offer insights into the daily reality of many migrants, whose survival strategies rely on finding work in the neighbouring country as an integral part of regional realities. As their article shows, despite xenophobic sentiments based on the misconception that they are a liability, these migrants play a significant role in strengthening the South African economy.

The Policy Note by *Shingirai Mtero, Mandiedza Parichi and Diana Højlund Madsen* pays attention to the marginalisation of women in Zimbabwean politics. It is a necessary reminder that struggle for gender-based equality are not over and that the inroads made should never be taken for granted. We are grateful to the authors and the Nordic Africa Institute for granting permission to include this recent policy paper in our issue.

Nathan Mukoma adds a comment in our debate section, responding to the article on peace enforcement in the DRC published in issue no. 1/23. We are encouraged to see such debates and hope that more authors contribute to this section in future issues. *Mellissa Simbisai Mlambo*’s review of a recent publication dealing with transitional justice in Zimbabwe ties into the article by *Marumahoko* and his colleagues and *Taruvinga*’s report completes this issue.

We hope that the variety of contributions and their different formats encourage more submissions like them and on subjects related to the thematic framework of our journal!

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