

Memory, Identity and Power in Contemporary Zimbabwe: Movement for Democratic Change Electoral Narratives and Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front Counter-Discourse

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Abstract

Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) electoral ‘victories’ in post-2000 Zimbabwe are often attributed to the ruling party’s reliance on violence, intimidation and other strong-arm tactics. This is only part of the story. With the advent of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, ZANU-PF emerged with a power-retention matrix in which variables such as violence, patronage, memory, cronyism, regionalism and identity are marshaled to present its destiny and that of the nation as inseparable. In the elections of July 2018, for instance, ZANU-PF’s remembrances of the past intersected with its perception of itself and the MDC as mutually exclusive, giving rise to self-other discourses that saw the former sliding into historical denialism and selective amnesia. As this article demonstrates, ZANU-PF self-exculpated by emphasizing that Mnangagwa’s ascendancy to power symbolized the advent of a new socio-economic, cultural and political dispensation. In advancing this argument, ZANU-PF held Mugabe responsible for all its failures and shortcomings between 1980 and 2017 and contested the MDC’s monopoly over face-of-the-change-that-will-deliver-Zimbabwe identities by discrediting the opposition party as incapable of originating sound policies and realizable promises. This article investigates the operationalization of these counter-discourses in ZANU-PF’s 2018 election manifesto and the pronouncements of its senior officials at political rallies to critique power dynamics in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Key Words: Historical Denialism; Identity; Memory; Selective Amnesia; Contemporary Zimbabwe

Introduction

Since its formation in 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) framed its political agenda in terms of delivering what it termed “a new Zimbabwe” (MDC Manifesto, 2018, p. 1). On the other hand, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) entrenched itself in an anti-colonial discourse that applied emphasis on defending so-called gains of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle (Mugabe, 2001) which culminated in independence in 1980. As advanced by the MDC, the idea of a new Zimbabwe identified ZANU-PF as the author of the socio-economic, cultural and political challenges afflicting the southern African nation (Bond & Manyanya, 2002; Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004; Raftopoulos, 2006, 2013; Hammar & McGregor, 2010; Mhanda, 2011; Alexander & McGregor, 2013; Mpondi, 2015; Bratton, 2016). The MDC rode on the back of mass disgruntlement with hyper-inflation, unemployment, de-industrialization, pulverization of the professions, desiccation of lines of credit, international isolation, poor service delivery and state-sanctioned political violence to indict ZANU-PF as a former liberation movement that had lost grounding in the people-centered and freedom-affirming principles that accompanied its birth and development in the 1960s and 1970s. In the unfolding of these dynamics, the MDC carved a niche for itself as the only source of the solutions to the challenges facing Zimbabwe. This idea gained traction when the MDC won 55% of the vote in the Constitutional Referendum of 2000 and 57 of 120 contested seats in parliamentary elections of the same year. The same voting patterns characterized presidential elections of 2008 that Robert Mugabe (ZANU-PF) lost to Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC) and had to be rescued by the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) since Tsvangirai’s percentage of the poll as declared by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was not adequate to enable him to form a new government. In all these elections, the MDC came close to becoming the third political party in southern Africa to unseat a founding, post-independence African regime. Precedents to the history that the MDC came close to making in Zimbabwe were set in Zambia by the victory of Frederick Chiluba’s Movement for Multi-Democracy (MMD) over Kenneth Kaunda’s United National Independence Party (UNIP) in 1991 and in Malawi by Bakili Muluzi’s United Democratic Front (UDF) when it triumphed over Kamuzu Banda’s Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in 1994. To contest an MDC electoral onslaught anchored in such a history in the run-up to the July 2018 elections, ZANU-PF emerged with a counter-discourse in which it depicted MDC as unelectable while marketing itself as coterminous with change, peace, inclusion and development.

This article examines the intersection of memory, identity and power in the unfolding of the ZANU-PF quest to re-brand following Mugabe’s ouster through a military coup in November 2017, his replacement by Emmerson Mnangagwa, the rise of Nelson Chamisa to the presidency of MDC and ZANU-PF’s awakening to the challenges associated with recourse to violent coercion as a strategy of manufacturing consent (Moore, 2008; Tendi, 2010). It argues that with Mnangagwa’s rise to power, post-Mugabe ZANU-PF had to contend with the realization that the presidential candidacy of its new leader in the July 2018 elections was hamstrung by the decades he spent as Mugabe’s chief enforcer and errands boy.

Infamous for presiding over the massacre of thousands of Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans for ostensibly harboring members of Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) who were reluctant to be integrated into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) in the early 1980s (Tendi, 2014), and the orgy of violence that preceded the 2008 presidential run-off, Mnangagwa's rise to power in ZANU-PF meant that the erstwhile revolutionary movement needed re-branding to survive its first post-Mugabe elections. Part of that re-branding required ZANU-PF to foster a more attractive image of itself as democratic and progressive within the parameters of the mantra "Zimbabwe is open for business" (https://youtu.be/_eZf7JbOphU). This undertaking manifested in ZANU-PF's harnessing of memory and reframing of its own identity and that of the MDC in ways that enabled it to seek refuge in historical denialism and selective amnesia on the one hand, and discredit the MDC as incapable of originating sound policies and realizable promises, on the other. As this article evinces, ZANU-PF's reframing of memory and identity engendered a narrative of regime innocence in which everything that went wrong between 1980 and 2017 is blamed solely on Mugabe. This counter-discourse empowered ZANU-PF to claim proprietorship over face-of-the-change-that-will-deliver-Zimbabwe identities that had previously been monopolized by the MDC. We investigate the operationalization of this counter-discourse using ZANU-PF's 2018 Manifesto and political rally pronouncements of the party's senior officials such as President Mnangagwa and Vice President, Retired General Constantino Chiwenga.

MDC Electoral Narratives: 1999-2018

The advent of the MDC in 1999 presented ZANU-PF with its most formidable electoral opponent since 1980. Unlike Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) which won 20 of 80 contested House of Assembly seats in the 1980 elections in which ZANU, as ZANU-PF was known then, walked away with 57, the MDC won 57 of 120 House of Assembly seats in 2000, and all but trounced ZANU-PF in the 2008 harmonized elections. Its potential to unseat ZANU-PF became apparent in the 2000 constitutional referendum when it garnered 55% of the poll to prevent ZANU-PF from adopting a new national constitution. With a support base that encompassed the nation's working class, the unemployed and university students, the MDC thrived on electoral narratives of socio-economic, cultural and political change. In these narratives, ZANU-PF came in for criticism as a former liberation movement that had failed to live up to the agenda of the liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s. The narratives cited the ease with which the ZANU-PF establishment resorted to strong-arm tactics and the arrogance at the heart of its relations with the people, drawing attention to the need for an alternative political dispensation. With Morgan Tsvangirai as its chief exponent, MDC electoral narratives tore into the petit-bourgeois inclinations of the ZANU-PF regime and its self-proclaimed identity as a people's regime. The narratives focused on ZANU-PF's immersion in corruption, nepotism, regionalism and ethnic chauvinism, stressing that the advent of independence in 1980 had left Zimbabweans at the mercy of "a new network of repression, more formidable than the one under colonial rule" (Turok, 1987, p. 7).

They challenged ZANU-PF's self-celebration as the only patriotic force in the history of Zimbabwe, the reference it always made to its heroism in the anti-colonial struggle and its attempts to claim exclusive ownership of that struggle. Thus, from the onset, MDC electoral narratives in Zimbabwean politics disputed what the opposition party understood as ZANU-PF's polarizing political praxis. The slogan, "Chinja Maitiro" (Shona) / "Guqula Izenzo" (Ndebele), an exhortation to reframe one's political orientation, captured the party's commitment to running the country differently if elected to power. As a rallying call for change, the slogan encapsulated MDC visions of a new Zimbabwe that ZANU-PF stood accused of having failed to bring into existence since taking over from Ian Smith and the Rhodesia Front (RF) in 1980.

With Chamisa's ascendancy to the presidency of MDC, the party's electoral narratives retained much of the thrust of its formative years, bolstering it with promises of extensive scientific development. In partnership with other opposition parties such as Tendai Biti's People's Democratic Party (PDP), Welshman Ncube's splinter of the MDC, Jacob Ngarivhume's Transform Zimbabwe (TZ) and others ahead of the July 2018 elections, MDC electoral narratives evoked possibilities of bullet trains, spaghetti roads, technological advancement, state-of-the-art airports and hospitals, devolution of power, smart agriculture and cordial relations with the international community. As spelt out in its 2018 election manifesto, New Zimbabwe Pledge for a Sustainable and Modernization Agenda for Real Transformation (SMART), MDC electoral narratives underscored the need to create "an inclusive, socially just, prosperous, tolerant, transformative and democratic developmental state in which people have equal opportunities to pursue happiness" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. ii). The manifesto also pledges "to fulfill the unfinished agenda of the struggle of the working people of Zimbabwe as defined at the 1999 Working People's Convention" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 11). In his opening remarks to the manifesto, Chamisa summarizes the MDC's electoral narratives as anchored in the need to "present an opportunity for Zimbabwe to turn a leaf from the dark ages of uncertainty and despair to a new dawn of hope, certainty and thought leadership" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. v). He commits to taking steps "to release our country from the status quo of straddling from one crisis to another" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. v) and moving with speed "to stop the bleeding of Zimbabwe with the hope and aim to make it a great jewel once again" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. v). The manifesto notes that the challenges facing Zimbabwe trammled "inclusivity, transformation, opportunities and prosperity" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 1) and created "a big gap between us and our peers in neighboring countries" (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. v). In the light of these challenges, MDC electoral narratives in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe revolved around five key pillars, namely:

SMART governance, nation building and the Consensus State, SMART sustainable shared and inclusive economy, SMART citizen rights, interests and protection, SMART social justice and delivery, SMART reconstruction and remodeling of the country's infrastructure (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 2).

In the domain of governance and the state, MDC electoral narratives have it that “Zimbabwe has endured 38 years of a vacuous leadership under an arrogant ZANU-PF elite that has denied citizens a say in the way the state is governed” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 2). The opposition party identifies capture, coercion and corruption as “the three key instruments used in repressing the aspirations of our people” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 2), arguing that the reprieve to this lies in the enthronement of “a tolerant, competent and consulting state in which power is accountable to the citizens” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 3). Among other concerns in the domain of governance and the state, MDC electoral narratives stress restructuring and resizing of government downwards, restoration of the rule of law, respect of property rights, devolution of power, combating of corruption and protection of Zimbabwe’s liberation heritage. In the realm of economics, MDC electoral narratives urge “a break from the present predatory order and [the creation of] a bridge that will fast-track our country to a stable, transformational and developmental Zimbabwe” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 4). The narratives also articulate the importance of “principles of constitutionalism and the rule of law” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 4) as well as the need for “a progressive approach towards resolution of past injustices to ensure that survivors achieve closure” (MDC Alliance Manifesto, 2018, p. 4) in the sphere of citizen rights and social justice. In what touches reconstruction and remodeling of the country’s infrastructure, MDC electoral narratives prioritize construction of new, modern, smart cities and the provision of cost-efficient transport solutions.

MDC electoral narratives in the run up to the July 2018 elections also delve into spaces that are traditionally associated with ZANU-PF. Of significance in this regard is the onslaught that MDC electoral narratives mount on ZANU-PF liberation war discourse against the backdrop of the centrality of the liberation war as one of Zimbabwe’s primary and foundational myths (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009: 945) and the exclusionary ways in which liberation war memories are managed in ZANU-PF to besmirch MDC claims to significance in Zimbabwean politics. Since the 1980s, ZANU-PF thrived on legitimacy anchored in having played a critical role in liberating the country from colonial rule. While Mugabe (1981, p. iii) asserted in the early 1980s that “the armed struggle pace of the revolution was set by ZANU and ZANLA [and] credit must be given to ZAPU and ZIPRA for their complementary role”, for instance, it was General Vitalis Zvinavashe (<https://youtu.be/R5ex00A9Tj0>) who, on the eve of the 2002 presidential election pitting Mugabe and Tsvangirai, made it unequivocal that liberation war credentials were indispensable in the quest for political office in Zimbabwe. In its appropriation of the nation’s liberation war history, ZANU-PF also claimed the legacy of pillars of the primary resistance wars of the 1890s (First Chimurenga) such as Nehanda, Kaguvi, Mapondera, Mashayamombe, Mukwati and others to create the impression that there was a seamless connection between the 1890s primary resistance wars and the liberation struggle (Second Chimurenga) of the 1960s and 1970s. In recent times, this idea has been further strengthened by the depiction of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) of the early 2000s as the Third Chimurenga (Mugabe, 2001; Moyo, 2005; Primorac, 2006; Manase, 2011, 2014; Matondi, 2012; Nyawo, 2012; Nyambi, 2015, 2016, 2017; Mpondi, 2018).

ZANU-PF's attempt to neatly connect these struggles overlooks the complex and often contradictory trajectories that they traversed (Chinodya, 1991; Kanengoni, 1987, 1997; Sithole, 1999; Nkomo, 2001; Tekere, 2007; Chung, 2006). As a paradigm of making sense of the processes by which Zimbabwe was freed from colonial rule, the perception of the primary resistance wars of the 1890s as revolutionary precedents that only ZANU-PF is entitled to implies that Zimbabweans outside ZANU-PF can neither have the blessings of the s/heroes of the First Chimurenga nor accomplish anything that can be considered revolutionary. Over the years, this has enabled ZANU-PF to immobilize Zimbabweans grounded in alternative socio-economic and political worldviews as unpatriotic and their organizations as pedestals for the advancement of western imperialist interests. However, this charge does not attend to the panoply of ways in which ZANU-PF itself mortgaged the ideals of the liberation struggle in what touches the restoration of sacred African socio-economic, cultural and political traditions personified and bequeathed by the same icons of the First Chimurenga that it expropriates for itself. Perhaps more than anyone else, ZANU-PF has been instrumental in ensuring that instead of experiencing comprehensive decolonization (wa Thiong'o, 1981, 1993, 2016, 2016a; Chinweizu, 1987; wa Ngugi, 2018), Zimbabwe became one of many African countries that are still shackled to the colonial legacy. The evidence abounds in the coloniality of the country's language policies, education system and school curriculum, health and justice delivery systems, development efforts and onomastic patterns.

In its interrogation of ZANU-PF liberation war discourse, MDC electoral narratives in post-Mugabe Zimbabwe also "evoke and redefine concepts such as truth, justice, patriotism and belonging" (Gwekwerere, Mutasa & Chitofiri, 2018, p. 3). Problematizing these concepts as contested, MDC electoral narratives challenge ZANU-PF claims to possession of all the answers to the socio-economic, cultural and political challenges facing Zimbabwe. More crucially, MDC electoral narratives have been critical in broadening the space within which to think about recent Zimbabwean history in the context of the country's "misplaced priorities [and] unfulfilled promises" (Chitofiri, Mutasa & Gwekwerere, 2017, p. 72). To that extent, these narratives transgress seemingly established ways of seeing and doing without necessarily losing focus on patriotic commitment to the nation's destiny in authentic freedom and human dignity. Indeed, the MDC views itself as a home-grown movement that should be given political space to govern through free, fair and credible elections. Its challenge of the outcome of the July 2018 presidential poll underscores the MDC's perception that state institutions such as ZEC have been captured and manipulated by the ZANU-PF establishment for its partisan interests. Thus, in the MDC's electoral narratives, ZANU-PF thrives on electoral fraud to subvert the democratic right of Zimbabweans to a government of their choice.

ZANU-PF Counter-Discourse: Selective Amnesia and Historical Denialism

ZANU-PF has been the hotbed of factionalism and succession disputes since the death of founding Vice President Simon Muzenda in 2003 and his succession by Joice Mujuru in 2004. Spurred largely by the realization that Mugabe had entered the twilight zone of his life and political career, ZANU-PF's succession wars pitted three factions: Weevils, G40 and Lacoste. Led by Mujuru, the Weevils faction was decimated in 2014 when Mujuru was expelled from ZANU-PF, relieved of her duties as Vice President of Zimbabwe and replaced by Mnangagwa. This left G40 – associated with the young cadres in ZANU-PF and the Mugabes – to battle it out with Mnangagwa's Lacoste in a series of showdowns that culminated in Mnangagwa's expulsion from both ZANU-PF and government in early November 2017. Through a military coup masterminded by the then Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), General Chiwenga (now Vice President of Zimbabwe and Minister of Defence, Security and War Veterans in Mnangagwa's government), Mugabe was forced into retirement and Mnangagwa returned within two weeks of his expulsion to assume leadership of both ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe. With Mugabe disgraced and the cabal of young party cadres that supported him scattered in exile, Mnangagwa set out to reconfigure and redefine ZANU-PF with the aim of rendering it and himself electable. To his credit, he was quick to appreciate the need of legitimating his presidency through a national plebiscite that had already been on the calendar before Mugabe's ouster. Yet the burden of this realization was that Mnangagwa's electability as a presidential hopeful was compromised by his role in the Matabeleland and Midlands massacres of the early to mid-1980s. In addition to this were challenges attendant upon the use of violence, as had been the norm since 1980, given the surge in citizen journalism in the reportage of political developments.

ZANU-PF's bid to retain power without resorting to violence in the July 2018 elections had to thrive on the counter-discoursing of MDC electoral narratives within the broad framework of "patriotic history" (Ranger, 2004, p. 215). As a political instrument in the hands of ZANU-PF, patriotic history encompasses all narratives that lend credence to the former liberation movement as "the progenitor and guardian of the postcolonial nation" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012, p. 1). It "proclaims the continuity of the Zimbabwean revolutionary tradition" (Ranger, 2004, p. 215) and is averse to other perspectives on the Zimbabwean story except the one sanctioned by ZANU-PF. As part of the ZANU-PF power-retention matrix, patriotic history "delegitimizes the MDC as a party without liberation war credentials and a threat to the country's independence and unity" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009, p. 945). It presents ZANU-PF's history as one long narrative of greatness, patriotism and s/heroism. Thus, in its 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2013 election manifestos, ZANU-PF deployed patriotic history to portray itself as the unflinching defender of Zimbabwean interests in what touches socio-economic development, political stability as well as land and its restoration into the hands of black Zimbabweans. At the same time, it re-defined concepts such as 'independence' and 'sovereignty' with the express purpose of excluding all organisations and individuals whose vision conflicted with its own.

ZANU-PF's reframing of these concepts informed the undermining of all organisations and individuals that sought to challenge it as traitors that the 'revolutionary party' had to deal with. The interests of such organisations and individuals were cast by the ZANU-PF regime's information and publicity department as regime-change interests of former colonial masters whose vehicles were 'unpatriotic' black Zimbabweans. Through such manipulation of the nation's story, ZANU-PF managed to depict itself as a regime not so much in conflict with the MDC but the British and their allies in the West.

With Mugabe's departure, ZANU-PF further retreated into selective amnesia and historical denialism. Thus, at a time when the nation expected him to use his newly-acquired position to heal the wounds of the past, Mnangagwa reframed national memory by activating two modes of self-exculpation, that is, pleading with Zimbabweans to let bygones be bygones and blaming everything that went wrong in the past solely on Mugabe. The bygones mantra spurred Mnangagwa and ZANU-PF along the path of selective amnesia while blaming everything that went wrong between 1980 and 2017 entirely on Mugabe served to entrench a culture of historical denialism within ZANU-PF. Thus, in his inauguration speech as Mugabe's successor on November 24th, 2017, for example, Mnangagwa (<https://youtu.be/n6h7L9LiBA>) urged Zimbabweans to forge the future without addressing past wrongs:

For close to two decades, this country went through many developments. While we cannot change the past, there is a lot we can do in the present and future to give our nation a different, positive direction. As we do so, we should never remain hostages of our past. I thus appeal to all of us that we let bygones be bygones, readily embracing each other in defining a new destiny for our beloved Zimbabwe. The task at hand is that of rebuilding our great country. It principally lies with none but ourselves to do so. I implore you all to declare that never again, never again, should circumstances that have put Zimbabwe in an unfavorable position be allowed to recur or overshadow its prospects.

As Mnangagwa emphasized the impossibility of changing the past, he liberally drew from it to channel the energies and visions of the people of Zimbabwe in quest of what he termed "a new destiny for our beloved Zimbabwe" (<https://youtu.be/n6h7L9LiBA>). His reference to the need to let bygones be bygones reminisces Mugabe's inauguration speech as founding Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe when he offered to reconcile with the former British colonizers of Zimbabwe. It is instructive that while the need for a people to forge ahead in the aftermath of setbacks is unavoidable, it is equally important to deal with the wrongs and injustices of the past in order to heal both victims and perpetrators. Proceeding to build a nation without addressing the challenges that the past bequeaths to the present is the best way to ensure that the envisioned society of human progress, peace and development remains elusive.

Indeed, pretending that painful pasts can be forgotten without addressing the anger, hate and volition for vengeance embedded in them is the shortest route to violence, chaos, insecurity and regression. The progress that nations make is a function of the creative abilities of their citizens and the extent to which they are at peace with the past. To that extent, it stands to reason that while the wrongs of the colonial past could have been addressed by the liberation struggle and to some extent by the FTLRP of the early 2000s, post-colonial injustices in Zimbabwe are yet to be faced and resolved in ways that can inspire the confidence of adversely affected groups to feel that they belong and should participate in advancing the interests of the country.

Some of the painful memories that Mnangagwa's inauguration speech classifies as by-gones include *Gukurahundi* (Midlands and Matabeleland massacres of Ndebele people) that took place in the early to mid-1980s, Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order) of 2005 and Operation *Makavhotera Papi?* (Operation Who Did You Vote For?) of 2008. *Gukurahundi* targeted Zimbabweans of Ndebele ethnicity domiciled in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces of Zimbabwe. Anchored in ZANU's desire to annihilate all political opponents, *Gukurahundi* saw to the massacre of thousands of civilians in south-western Zimbabwe at the hands of the 5th Brigade for allegedly harboring and working in cohorts with ex-ZIPRA combatants to overthrow the Zimbabwean government of the day. Trained in Korea and commanded by Retired Air Chief Marshal Perence Shiri (current Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement in Mnangagwa's government), the 5th Brigade profiled men and women of fighting age in Midlands and Matabeleland provinces and executed them *en masse*. It forced victims to sing ZANU-PF songs, dig their own graves and brutally murdered them in front of members of their families and communities. The context in which this brigade operated was framed by Mnangagwa (<https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-121544html>), then Minister of State Security, on April 4, 1983 when he said:

Blessed are they who will follow the way of government laws, for their days on earth will be increased. But woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents for we will certainly shorten their stay on earth.

In the unfolding of *Gukurahundi*, thousands were tortured and raped and countless others burnt to death in their houses in a bid to force PF-ZAPU into submission. PF-ZAPU president, Joshua Nkomo, fled into exile while Lookout Masuku (ZNA Vice-Commander at independence and former ZIPRA Commander) and Dumiso Dabengwa (ZIPRA Chief of Intelligence) were arrested in 1982, charged with treason, acquitted in 1983 and detained for four years without trial under emergency regulations. Civilians who were lucky to survive have had to live with the pain of witnessing their relatives being killed. They have had also to contend with the reluctance of the authorities to apologize and assuage their pain by compensating them for their losses and the trauma they have had to endure.

Most of the victims of *Gukurahundi* were ordinary, unarmed civilians whose only crime was that they happened to reside in provinces that were identified as PF-ZAPU strongholds. Mnangagwa's willful forgetting of this experience constitutes an attempt at historical erasure. It can also be interpreted as indicative of his party's arrogance in the face of the pain and injury of others.

With Operation *Murambatsvina*, the ZANU-PF government went about destroying so-called illegal structures in urban areas, particularly Harare. This undertaking left over 700 000 (Moore, 2008, p. 29) Zimbabweans homeless and destitute. It resulted in the destabilization of thousands of families and destruction of livelihoods under the pretext of curbing illegal activities and restoring sanity in urban areas. Coming shortly after the 2005 House of Assembly elections in which Zimbabwe's urbanites overwhelmingly voted in favor of Tsvangirai's MDC, Operation *Murambatsvina* was presented as the beginning of an urban renewal exercise aimed at rehabilitating the country's cities in keeping with global standards. Meanwhile, the ZANU-PF regime could not face the challenges afflicting the country's urban centers in the context of its own failure to finance and run urban councils efficiently. Since the advent of independence in 1980, Zimbabwean urban municipalities struggled to provide housing for the thousands that flocked into cities to seek employment, education and other socio-economic amenities. Their challenges mounted when former farm workers displaced by the FTLRP were compelled to seek sanctuary in urban areas, compounding housing and socio-economic woes that were already out of control by the time of their arrival. The disaffection towards Mugabe's government that arose from urbanites having to battle unrelenting poverty became manifest in their voting patterns. Since the dawn of the new millennium, Zimbabwean urban communities made clear their disenchantment with ZANU-PF by voting for Tsvangirai's MDC. Thus, it is quite inviting to think of this program as ZANU-PF's way of dealing with Zimbabwe's urbanites for voting MDC in 2000, 2002 and 2005, for, as Mlambo (2008, p. 21) argues, Operation *Murambatsvina*

...can be seen in part, therefore, as an attempt by the government to...dilute MDC support in the cities by forcing large numbers of people into rural areas where they could be better controlled and monitored.

Moore (2008, p. 25) broadens this argument, noting that political challenges occasioned by the formation of the MDC may have provided the immediate justification for the exercise, but Operation *Murambatsvina* was "an almost logical extension of the techniques of a party that has consistently failed to rule Zimbabwe through consent." This is plausible, given that the program was carried out "with a high degree of insensitivity to the rights and needs of those affected and with such ferocious speed that local people began to speak of a Zimbabwean *tsunami*" (Mlambo, 2008, p. 10). That the ZANU-PF government did not put in place measures to cushion the victims before the program commenced shows that political expediency stood at the centre of the exercise.

The half-hearted effort to alleviate the suffering engendered by Operation *Murambatsvina* only came into effect after the United Nations Human Settlements Programme condemned the program for triggering a humanitarian crisis. The mitigating program was constrained by political patronage. Potential beneficiaries were vetted for political correctness and denied assistance if found to be supporters or members of the MDC.

More painful memories that Zimbabweans still need to find answers to were occasioned by ZANU-PF's failure to realize an outright victory in the 2008 presidential election. In that election, ZEC declared that Tsvangirai won by 47.9%, leaving 43.2% of the vote to Mugabe and the remainder to other contestants. Instead of the results being announced within a week in keeping with constitutional provisions governing the administration of elections in Zimbabwe, ZEC took almost two months to do so. This created suspicions to the effect that ZEC took the time to tamper with the figures and deny Tsvangirai absolute victory over Mugabe. With neither Tsvangirai nor Mugabe reaching the stipulated 50% + 1 threshold that is mandatory for a presidential aspirant to form the next government, the two had to go for another contest at the polls on June 27th, 2008. As history has since recorded, the run up to this run-off election was characterized by violence. Hundreds of MDC supporters were murdered, and thousands subjected to various forms of torture. Women and girls were raped and men and boys had their hands slashed to intimidate them into voting for ZANU-PF. Code-named Operation *Makavhotera Papi?*, this onslaught resulted in the displacement of thousands of Zimbabweans and the further entrenchment of a culture of fear that reminded many of the brutality of the Rhodesian regime. ZANU-PF's commitment to violence in this run-off stood conspicuous in its campaign slogan: June 27th: Win or War. To save his supporters from further violence, Tsvangirai withdrew from the race, leaving Mugabe to contest alone.

In its July 2018 election manifesto, ZANU-PF left no space for the processes that must take place for a country emerging from such a violent past to come to terms with itself and heal its wounds. In his introductory remarks to the manifesto, Mnangagwa (2018, p. 1) selectively draws attention to the party's legacy ideals in the form of:

Land, economic emancipation, independence, sovereignty, democracy, patriotism, Ubuntu, national pride and dignity...which we all share and take pride in as Zimbabweans, permanently connected to our past as the hallmark of the heroic, enduring and unforgettable armed struggle which liberated Zimbabwe from the shackles of colonialism.

The manifesto focuses on almost everything except the painful past that ZANU-PF played a critical role in creating. It draws specific attention to “the successful execution of Operation Restore Legacy” (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 15) which engineered Mugabe’s downfall but is silent on other “operations” that preceded “Operation Restore Legacy”, particularly the three discussed above. Thus, in its counter-discoursing of MDC electoral narratives in the July 2018 election, ZANU-PF emphasized only the aspects of its history that it is at peace with. It resisted coming face to face with its violent past, and steeped itself in narratives of heroism and gallantry in which it is packaged as a party that is “guided by democratic and Pan-African values where the leadership is accountable to the people that elect it” (Mnangagwa, 2018, p. 1). That this is detrimental to growth needs no special pleading. Often, the refusal to encounter and engage violent pasts suggests preparedness to slide back into ideas that informed the creation of such pasts in the first place. As it sought freedom from the past through selective amnesia, ZANU-PF tied down the MDC to a history of ingratiation to western powers. It evoked the mantra that Zimbabwe’s socio-economic and political challenges were the result of economic sanctions imposed by western powers at the behest of the MDC. In the process, ZANU-PF evaded responsibility over the economic challenges besetting the country and was able to rationalize its failure to conceive pragmatic socio-economic policies expected of a government under economic siege.

ZANU-PF’s counter-discoursing of MDC electoral narratives in the July 2018 elections also manifested through historical denialism. As a strategy of self-construction, historical denialism witnessed ZANU-PF distancing itself from Mugabe and blaming all the wrongs, failures and atrocities of the past on him. This is most emphatic in Mnangagwa’s response to Mugabe’s press conference on the eve of the July 2018 elections. In that press conference, Mugabe (<https://youtu.be/oBvOh-qgNaY>) endorsed Chamisa and MDC as better placed to restructure Zimbabwe’s socio-economic, cultural and political realities. He stated that between Mnangagwa and Chamisa, he would vote for Chamisa. Mnangagwa (<https://youtu.be/eE2ivUx1Wak>) responded within hours:

Now that it is clear to all that Chamisa has forged a deal with Mugabe, we can no longer believe that his intentions are to transform Zimbabwe and rebuild our nation. The choice is clear. You either vote for Mugabe under the guise of Chamisa or you vote for a new Zimbabwe under my leadership and ZANU-PF. Real change is coming. We should all be part of it.

Mnangagwa’s response to Mugabe’s press conference portrays the latter as the corrosive element that “disfigures everything that it comes into contact with” (Fanon, 1967, p. 46). Indeed, Mugabe comes through in Mnangagwa’s remarks as the enemy of national progress that no serious contender for political office should associate with. By endorsing Chamisa, Mugabe presented Mnangagwa and ZANU-PF with an opportunity to portray him as determined to scuttle the progress that Zimbabwe is allegedly making without him.

To that extent, the implementation of this counter-discourse enabled ZANU-PF to obliterate the 37 years that Mnangagwa served as a Mugabe loyalist and errands boy. During his 37-year tenure as Mugabe's chief enforcer, Mnangagwa implemented the former's policies as Minister of State Security (1980-1988), Minister of Justice and Parliamentary Affairs (1989-2000; 2013-2017), Speaker of Parliament (2000-2005), Minister of Rural Housing and Social Amenities (2005-2009), Minister of Defense (2009-2013), and Vice President (2014-2017). By his own admission at a political rally in Headlands on June 4, 2015, Mnangagwa (https://youtu.be/QOpADnj_pmw) played a critical role as Mugabe's chief election agent in the 2008 elections and the presidential run-off that came after them. In that capacity, he was instrumental in denying Tsvangirai the victory that Zimbabweans had given him at the polls as unintentionally revealed by Mugabe (<https://youtu.be/Dx6ZMZPk1QM>) when he addressed service chiefs and the leadership of Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) at ZANU-PF headquarters on December 2nd, 2014. The import of this counter-discourse to MDC electoral narratives in the July 2018 elections is that it creates the impression that the ZANU-PF faction aligned to Mnangagwa served under Mugabe and implemented his policies under duress. However, even a cursory glance at ZANU-PF's internal dynamics before the 2008 election shows that almost everyone in the party worked hard to ingratiate themselves to Mugabe. At any rate, Mugabe's ministers, permanent secretaries, provincial governors, directors of parastatals and others who served in various capacities that enmeshed them in the day to day management of affairs of the state benefitted immensely from the ZANU-PF network of patronage and the positions of power that they held with Mugabe's blessings.

The view that only Mugabe is to be blamed for the shortcomings of the past creates an impression of innocence that portrays contemporary ZANU-PF as electable. However, the value of this idea as a politically expedient instrument depreciates in the face of the party's historical ignominies such as the War Victims Compensation Fund of 1994 which saw government officials claiming restitution for liberation war trauma on the back of percentage disabilities that left the nation questioning their ability to deliver in their various offices. As Chitofiri, Mutasa & Gwekwerere (2017, p. 63) note, "the embezzled funds had to be paid out to appease long-forgotten war veterans who, until their fallout with Robert Mugabe in 2016, had always threatened the nation with war in the event that ZANU-PF is defeated at the polls." More scandals (the Grain Marketing Board scandal, 1995; the VIP Housing Scheme scandal, 1996; the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe scandal, 1999, among countless others) in which money was pilfered by government officials bear further witness to ZANU-PF's inability to rise to the dictates of responsible, accountable and transparent leadership (Achebe, 1983). Rather than being seen as personal, this inability is best understood as systemic. Mugabe was part of a system that subscribed to a particular socio-economic and political ideology. He did not run that system all by himself. He stood at its head but was ably supported by colleagues who now find it convenient to blame him because they have to survive the political challenge posed by a revived MDC under the leadership of Chamisa.

As attempts at constructing innocence, these narratives falter when it is considered that even though they had the constitutional leeway to impeach Mugabe, none in contemporary ZANU-PF was courageous enough to pursue this option, presumably because they were all steeped to the neck in the luxury afforded them by their proximity to him. Attempts to impeach Mugabe were only made as part of the effort to compel him to resign when it became clear that Mnangagwa, with the backing of ZNA, was destined for the presidency.

ZANU-PF Counter-Discourse: Change-that-Zimbabwe-needs identities

ZANU-PF counter-discoursing of MDC electoral narratives in the July 2018 election also involved claiming face-of-the-change-that-Zimbabwe-needs identities. At his campaign rallies in the run-up to the July 2018 election, Chamisa, emphasized that his party would bring about enhanced socio-economic development. He promised to introduce a series of sweeping socio-economic, cultural and political reforms to usher in a new Zimbabwe, with bullet-trains and spaghetti roads being the more popular objectives in the MDC political campaigns. In its counter-discourses, ZANU-PF dismissed these narratives by portraying Mugabe's ouster and consequent replacement by Mnangagwa as the advent of a new socio-economic, cultural and political dispensation in Zimbabwe. It buttressed this onslaught by simultaneously dissecting and expropriating the MDC's socio-economic development blueprint. The idea that Mugabe's overthrow symbolized the beginning of a new dispensation is incandescent in ZANU-PF's manifesto for the July 2018 elections in which Mnangagwa is invariably described as "a messenger of hope" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 4) and a champion of "the new dawn" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 4). Throughout the pages of this document, a counter-discourse that promotes encountering ZANU-PF under Mnangagwa as different from ZANU-PF under Mugabe is communicated through representations of Mnangagwa as a president who "listens to the people, engages with people regardless of their social and economic standing, [and] is trustworthy" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 5). More attributes in Mnangagwa's favor in the ZANU-PF manifesto depict him as an action-oriented president who believes in "implementing promises made to the people" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 5) and upholding of "sound ethical governance practices that demand accountability, transparency and responsibility in the management of public resources and the economy" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 5). To put these attributes beyond doubt, the ZANU-PF Manifesto (2018, p. 5) amplifies Mnangagwa's perceived "astuteness and principled stance on the role of the private sector in national development [which] has seen him become the first Zimbabwean president to be invited to the prestigious 2018 World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alps at Davos." On the domestic front, Mnangagwa is hailed in his party's manifesto for "pragmatic leadership...in the implementation of the Command Agriculture program whose transformative impact was highly visible through achieving a bumper harvest in the 2016/17 summer cropping season" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 6).

These counter-discourses concatenate to reinforce the idea that Mnangagwa is the embodiment of all the progressive leadership values that Mugabe is presented as having lacked or discarded in the unfolding of the 37 years that he was in power. What this implies is that with Mnangagwa's rise to the presidency of Zimbabwe and perceived grounding in a commitment to doing things differently, the MDC's electoral narratives of a new Zimbabwe had been realized through ZANU-PF's overthrow of Mugabe. Put differently, this counter-discourse depicted Mugabe's ouster as all that the MDC ever aspired to realize. On the basis of that reductionist framing of the MDC's priorities, the argument arose that it was only logical for the opposition party and its supporters to embrace Mnangagwa and give him the chance to prove himself.

The presentation of Mnangagwa's ascendancy to the presidency of both ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe as indicative of the birth of a new socio-economic, cultural and political dispensation in Zimbabwe is complemented in ZANU-PF counter-discourses to MDC electoral narratives in the run-up to the July 2018 elections by ZANU-PF's incursions into the opposition party's socio-economic development blueprint. This process witnessed ZANU-PF tearing into MDC socio-economic development proposals as outlandish and unrealizable. Speaking at the launch of the 2018 ZANU-PF Manifesto, Retired General Chiwenga (<https://youtu.be/fCFK1xFGV7E>) referred to MDC socio-economic development plans to introduce bullet trains and spaghetti roads as "crazy ideas and childish dreams which excite rude passions while not surviving even the most charitable scrutiny." Chiwenga (<https://youtu.be/fCFK1xFGV7E>) urged Zimbabweans to ask themselves "why pretenders who sell us such dummies cannot manage small traffic in our real-world cities and municipalities which they control and run." He challenged the opposition party to first excel in repairing Harare's damaged roads before "taking us to the moon on Apollo XI" (Chiwenga, 2018, <https://youtu.be/fCFK1xFGV7E>). The essence of Chiwenga's critique of the MDC's electoral narratives of accelerated socio-economic development is that only ZANU-PF has the best blueprint that Zimbabwe needs in its quest for development. In ZANU-PF's manifesto for the July 2018 elections, that blueprint is presented as preoccupied with addressing the supposedly concrete, realistic and pursuable agenda of:

...establish[ing] and sustain[ing] an egalitarian society that cherishes Pan-African values, creat[ing] conditions for economic independence, prosperity and equitable distribution of our national wealth... uphold[ing] and apply[ing] fully the rule of law, equality before the law and equal access to opportunities for all people in Zimbabwe regardless of race, tribe, gender, religion or origin...transform[ing] Zimbabwe into a middle-income economy by 2030 [and] re-opening the country for business with the global community so as to rebuild our industries, create more jobs, eradicate the scourge of poverty and uplift people's livelihoods (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 10).

The former liberation movement's manifesto also touches on "modernizing and mechanizing agricultural activities...zero tolerance to corruption, accelerated economic growth, price stability...job creation, ease of doing business reforms, promotion of domestic and foreign direct investment, public sector reforms and delivery of quality services" (ZANU-PF Manifesto, 2018, p. 11). While these submissions and commitments contest the MDC's monopoly over face-of-the-change-that-Zimbabwe-needs identities, their articulation at political rallies also witnessed ZANU-PF politicians dispensing with decorum and self-censure to openly lay hold of the very promises that their party considered unrealizable when articulated by the MDC. Speaking to ZANU-PF rally-goers in Harare, General Chiwenga (<https://youtu.be/mY6NaHsO2aY>) laid to rest any thoughts that ZANU-PF would allow the MDC to monopolize narratives on spaghetti roads:

We want to build ring-roads here in Harare to enable traffic from Mutare to proceed to Masvingo or Bulawayo without passing through the city center. This will alleviate traffic congestion in Harare. It's about time that we also built fly-overs and overhead pedestrian crossing points to arrest exposure of all road-users to traffic accidents.

By arrogating itself face-of-the-change-that-Zimbabwe-needs identities cited above, ZANU-PF invaded the terrain of the adversary and occupied discursive space that was largely associated with the MDC. This enabled ZANU-PF to buttress its already established dominance built on decades of entrenchment in exclusionary liberation war discourses in which it is packaged as the ultimate author of the country's liberation from colonialism. As the 'new' face-of-the-change-that-Zimbabwe-needs, ZANU-PF sought to entice both bona fide MDC supporters and the undecided members of the Zimbabwean electorate to commit to voting for ZANU-PF in the July 2018 elections. In the same vein, this identity reinforced the confidence of ZANU-PF's all-weather followers in their party as the preeminent institution through which the best interests of Zimbabweans can be advanced. While these discourses promote the view that ZANU-PF is capable of envisioning and bringing the new Zimbabwe into existence, they do not address its instrumental role in the genesis and development of the issues it seeks to address. Indeed, the manner in which the narratives are articulated creates the impression that perhaps another political party is responsible for running down the country that was once the jewel of Africa and the bread-basket of southern Africa.

Conclusion

This article examined the intersection of memory, identity and power in contemporary Zimbabwean politics. It focused on how ZANU-PF, in the run-up to the July 2018 elections, reframed memory and identity to counter MDC electoral narratives in the context of Mugabe's ouster through a military coup in November 2017, his replacement by Mnangagwa at the helm of both ZANU-PF and Zimbabwe, Chamisa's rise to the presidency of MDC and ZANU-PF's awakening to the challenges associated with violence as a way of manufacturing consent. Using MDC and ZANU-PF manifestos for the July 2018 elections as well as political rally pronouncements of senior ZANU-PF officials such as Mnangagwa and Chiwenga, this article argued that in its quest to re-brand, ZANU-PF had to create the impression that it embodied the best aspirations of Zimbabweans in areas of importance such as the cultivation of peace, inclusion and development. As the discussion demonstrates, this was achieved through historical denialism and selective amnesia on the one hand, and the depiction of MDC as incapable of originating sound policies and realizable promises, on the other. Historical denialism and selective amnesia saw to the emergence of ZANU-PF narratives of innocence in which everything that went wrong between 1980 and 2017 was blamed solely on Mugabe. With Mnangagwa's rise to power, the emphasis he placed on opening Zimbabwe for business and the portrayal of his presidency as synonymous with the advent of a new socio-economic, cultural and political dispensation, these narratives enabled ZANU-PF to contest the MDC's monopoly over face-of-the-change-that-will-deliver-Zimbabwe identities through projecting Mugabe's ouster as the actualization of the change that the MDC had been agitating for since its formation in 1999. These counter-discourses obviate the fact that Mnangagwa's ascendancy to power materialized through state capture and power grabbing.

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