



Relationships of entanglement

An interrogation into the historical, economic and political factors that shape political interactions in Zimbabwe

Author: Rutendo Nyaku

Supervisor: A/Professor Helen Scanlon

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Department of Political Studies.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the complex dynamics that define Zimbabwe's political landscape, particularly the interactions between political actors during elections. It investigates how historical, economic, political, and international pressures shape these relationships and influence the conduct of elections, shedding light on how these factors perpetuate contentious political behaviours such as election rigging, censorship, voter intimidation, violent repression, and the weaponisation of the law. By situating these empirical observations within a scholarly framework, the thesis seeks to deepen the intellectual understanding of Zimbabwe's volatile political ecosystem.

At the core of the study is an examination of how elections serve as both a source of opportunity and threat within Zimbabwe's political sphere. On one hand, they offer the potential for regime change, particularly for opposition movements like the CCC, while on the other, they represent a challenge to the long-established dominance of ZANU-PF. The lingering memory of previous elections marred by violence, abductions, and predictable outcomes exacerbates this tension. The complicity of observer groups, the strategic weaknesses of the opposition, and the drive for political parity further entangle these relationships.

The thesis traces the roots of these dynamics back to Zimbabwe's colonial history, revealing how colonial and post-colonial legacies continue to shape political interactions today. These historical pressures, coupled with contemporary global forces advocating for democratisation and good governance, influence the behaviour of political actors. The international community plays a dual role as both enabler and watchdog, facilitating political processes while also monitoring electoral violence and coercion.

Furthermore, the research delves into how elections are used as a means for political actors to assert their identity and redefine notions of citizenship. Drawing on theories of identity and citizenship, the thesis argues that the tensions surrounding elections are not only about political power but also about who belongs in the nation-state. The ruling party's use of electoral authoritarianism is seen as a way to define citizenship, creating exclusionary narratives about identity and belonging in Zimbabwe's political and social fabric. Through this lens, the thesis presents elections as pivotal moments that reveal deeper struggles over identity, power, and national membership.

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A thesis isn't written by one person. It's a culmination of ideas, thoughts, exchanges, and support from multiple people. I'd even twist the cliché "it takes a village to raise a child" to it takes a village to write a thesis. For that, I'm grateful.

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Interview Participants

Despite the dangers of our tea pot-shaped country. You all stood in your truth and reminded me that it's not all hopeless. The tea pot is loved and one day, there will be no need to use pseudonyms. Without your experiences, this thesis would have been cardboard flavoured bran flakes - that is to say, it would not have the soul and life it has now.

Zimbabwe:

For continuing to give beauty in the midst of suffering. It is bittersweet that this thesis was born out of a particular suffering. But thank you for letting me re-visit you with a different lens. From this thesis, I was humbled, astonished, disappointed, and proud that despite 5 currency collapses, arbitrary arrests and detentions, we are also doing the best we can with lemons we have.

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Myself

I would like to appreciate myself for writing a subject matter that is delicate and sore for me. For following through even though I didn't always want to. For following my instinct and choosing to let my country's story contribute to my growth. I, too, realize that I am complex person beyond a victim and perpetrator.

Thanks again! I hope you'll all be proud of my little contribution to the world.

Dedication

Dr Webster Zambara

In loving and honourable memory of my mentor, teacher, and a peacebuilding giant.

Acronyms

ZANU-PF - Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

CCC - Citizens Coalition for Change

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

OPs - Opposition Parties

SADC - Southern African Development Community

AU - African Union

IMF - International Monetary Fund

WB - World Bank

ZEC - Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

LOMA - Law and Order (Maintenance) Act

UOA - Unlawful Organisations Act

MDC - Movement for Democratic Change

ZCTU - Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

NCA - National Constitutional Assembly

PRI - Institutional Revolutionary Party

DRC - Democratic Republic of the Congo

ZAPU - Zimbabwe African People's Union

GNP - Gross National Product

ESAP - Economic Structural Adjustment Programs

WB - World Bank

WHO - World Health Organization

SOV - Soviet Union

LEAD - Labour Economists and African Democrats

CCEOM - Carter Center's Election Observation Mission

EU - European Union

Chapter 1: Introduction: Messy Political Interactions

Zimbabwe is a noun and an adjective, a condition, as well as a perception.

As a noun Zimbabwe refers to a small land-locked country in Southern Africa with a population of just over 15 million people.¹ The features of this landlocked country include British colonisation from 1890 to 1980 under which it was named Rhodesia.² The features also include gaining independence from colonisation in 1980 under the Lancaster House Agreement, being governed by two regimes (also known as the two republics) – firstly by later President Robert Mugabe for 37 years from 1987 to 2017, and then secondly by President Emmerson Mnangagwa since 2017.³ Emmerson Mnangagwa still continues as head of state till now.

This Southern African country is characterised by a context where as of April 2024, over 14 percent of youths aged 15-24 are unemployed, where the economy has witnessed five currency collapses, where the rate of inflation is one of the highest in the world (its peak being 231 million percent in 2008).⁴ Zimbabwe also refers to a country of high emigration rates in which over 20 percent of the population lives in the diaspora – the largest group residing in South Africa (approximately five percent), the United Kingdom (0.85 percent), and Botswana (0.25 percent).⁵

As an adjective, Zimbabwe can be described as an electoral-authoritarian state where civil liberties are curtailed by harsh censorship laws, violent repression, rigged elections,

¹ Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, “Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency,” accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.zimstat.co.zw/>.

² South African History Online, “Zimbabwe,” accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/place/zimbabwe>.

³ Duri, Fidelis Peter Thomas, Ngonidzashe Marongwe, and Munyaradzi Mawere, eds. *Mugabeism after Mugabe?: Rethinking Legacies and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe’s “Second Republic.”* Africa Talent Publishers, 2019.

⁴ See for example, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?name_desc=false&locations=ZW; <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/zimbabwe-s-new-zig-doomed-by-overall-lack-of-transparency>; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?locations=ZW>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/09/zimbabwe>

⁵ The statistics of Zimbabweans living in the diaspora vary and are different across multiply sources. The International Office of Migration attempted in 2005, to document these figures, but there has been no central database with these figures. See for example, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/over-700-000-zimbabweans-living-in-sa-report-shows-20220906>; <https://factcheckzw.org/a-million-2-million-15-the-available-data-on-zimbabweans-living-in-the-diaspora-can-not-be-substantiated/>; https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/mrs17_0.pdf; <https://www.theafricareport.com/315867/zimbabweans-strangers-in-their-motherland/>; <https://esa.un.org/migmgprofiles/indicators/files/Zimbabwe.pdf>

and where political activity is an extreme sport. According to Themba– a 35-year-old human rights activist and media practitioner, “there will never be a true reflection of the will of the people when it comes to elections and who gets elected to power because ... People have been intimidated. [the elections are] not free and fair.”

Zimbabwe can also be described as a military state due to the military’s involvement in civilian affairs – a culture which is described by 57-year- senior opposition politician Bruce as “a securocratic state” – which describes an environment where the state security permeates all institutions of society and influences government policies.

As a condition, Zimbabwe refers to a state of desperation, of trauma, of helplessness but also resilience. For instance, 50-year-old academic and gender activist Alice says “[in Zimbabwe] the ability to dream something different I think has been killed,” whilst 68-year-old Bheki says “there's been a remarkable resilience of Zimbabweans, despite all these obstacles, to continue to vote.”⁶ Zimbabwe also refers to a culture of *kujingirisa* or “*hustling*”, where citizens transcend their formal education by operating informal businesses, picking up odd jobs in addition to one’s formal employment, as well as being a jack of all trades.⁷

Zimbabwe is also a perception which has been termed on social media platforms as “it’s giving Zimbabwe.”⁸ This perception refers to the condition of being Zimbabwean. But it is also characterised by negative sentiments and ideas when describing *inter-alia* the condition of a house, roads, or a relationship.⁹ As a perception, Zimbabwe also refers to myriads of undocumented immigrants living in South Africa and working in precarious forms of employment, of a people that have invaded a neighbouring country because they can’t fight for their own country, or a people who, fuelled by a mentality of escapism

⁶ See for example. Online interview with Alice, January 2024; and Online interview with Bheki, January 2024.

⁷ See for example, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-024-03230-y>;
<https://www.scielo.br/j/remhu/a/Bdpz3RtvdYFsZbwCF8rwy3v/?format=pdf&lang=en>;
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03056244.2015.1048793>;
https://openhub.spu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/20.500.12821/489/Youth%20Political%20Mobilization_%20Violence%20Intimidation%20and%20Patronage%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁸ There is no academic study exploring the use of and employment of the term “It’s giving Zimbabwe” – but viewing multiple skits on TikTok, Instagram and WhatsApp provides a general understanding of when and how it is used.

Interestingly, a charades game in Kenya called the “50-50 boards game” also uses it as one of its key words. See for

example, https://www.tiktok.com/@cee_nyasha/video/7268304958007577889;

<https://www.tiktok.com/@daddydior4real/video/7263768242538220805?lang=en>;

https://www.tiktok.com/@ludah_ww/video/7254877963806575878?lang=en

⁹ Ibid.

that is engendered by dire economic conditions, are intimately aware of loopholes in the immigration systems of various countries such as the call for healthcare workers in the United Kingdom whose large response triggered a red listing by the World Health Organisation (WHO).¹⁰ Other loopholes include exploiting study visa programmes with the aim of transitioning into the professional world after school. This is evidenced by the growing number of agents and agencies that facilitate travel to the United States, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Canada. Although limited study has been carried out on these educational agencies and their relationship to aspiring emigrants in Zimbabwe, a study by Moira Hulme et al, reveals that education agents are treading a balance where they capitalise on the desperation and desire for students in Sub-Saharan Africa to move overseas whilst also exploiting the commercialisation of overseas high education which seeks to attract more international students as a way to meet financial quotas in their local markets.¹¹ The joke circulated amongst Zimbabweans on reflection of these patterns is that “*apana kwawusingawane muZimbo*” i.e., there is no place where you won’t find a Zimbabwean – all compounding the perceptions about Zimbabwe. These lived experiences are central to understanding the perceptions of being Zimbabwean.

I describe the various aspects of Zimbabwe and “Zimbabweanness” above to highlight the complex identities, perceptions, and conditions in this Southern African country. Initially, the challenges presented may suggest a simplistic view where the government is seen as the sole perpetrator and the Zimbabwean people as mere victims, reflecting the traditional victim/perpetrator dichotomy. However, integrating Erica Bouris' and Sanne Weber's insights reveals a more intricate reality.¹² Bouris' analysis of complex political victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and South Africa shows that victims' identities are multifaceted and influenced by factors beyond their victimization, leading them to potentially perpetuate systems of oppression.¹³ Similarly, Weber critiques the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hulme, Moira, Alex Thomson, Rob Hulme, and Guy Doughty. 2013. “Trading Places: The Role of Agents in International Student Recruitment from Africa.” *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 38 (5): 674–89. doi:10.1080/0309877X.2013.778965. Also see for example. <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/Vol22-issue4/Series-3/D2204031937.pdf>

¹² See for example.

Bouris, Erica. *Complex Political Victims*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007; Sanne Weber, *Defying the Victim-Perpetrator Binary: Female Ex-combatants in Colombia and Guatemala as Complex Political Perpetrators*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Volume 15, Issue 2, July 2021, Pages 264–283, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijab006>

¹³ Ibid.

oversimplification in conflict societies by arguing that victims can also engage in violence or support exclusionary practices, while perpetrators might be shaped by prior victimization and structural issues.¹⁴ Both scholars advocate for a deeper understanding of these roles, emphasizing the existence of 'complex political victims' and 'complex political perpetrators' in such contexts.¹⁵

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Bouris and Weber's arguments are demonstrated by Bheki – a 68-year-old academic and political activist whose reflection illustrates that while the ruling party, ZANU PF, employs coercion, bribery, and the manipulation of state resources to secure voter support, it simultaneously addresses certain needs of the citizens. According to Bheki, But also of course the ruling party has used not just coercion but also bribery and corruption and, you know, use of state resources to ensure the support of voters, particularly in the rural areas. So, while there's also a form of consent for ZANU PF, there's no doubt that ZANU PF also has support, and one shouldn't rule that out. It speaks to certain needs of the citizens, but it has also used its control over the forms of governance, particularly in rural areas and the forms of resource mobilisation to pressure citizens to support it in election processes. ¹⁶

Echoing a similar observation to Clive is Kwayedza – a 52-year-old media practitioner with experience on reporting various aspects of political activity in Zimbabwe. Kwayedza also indicates how other political actors become complicit in entrenching the practices and patterns observed in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem.

I think ZANU-PF has a legitimate reason to continue with the charade [of elections]. It is because the charade gives it legitimacy. It makes it legitimate in the eyes of the world... ZANU-PF is not bothered about local legitimacy because it doesn't care, it does what it wants. But it's interested in international legitimacy because it gives it the right to behead?? Behead who? internationally, the right to borrow money, which of course it steals. But it gives it certain rights and

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview with Bheki, January 2024.

opportunities and pathways. It wants to be seen at international forums and then it uses that legitimacy to oppress people back home. It's very interesting that, you know, when you interview ZANU-PF folk, they tell you that they hate elections, but they also understand that they cannot do without them. Most repressive regimes which are hybrid, they have elections, but elections are choreographed, and opposition just participates in order to give legitimacy as well to the process. So that's why you find that ZANU will be angry if the opposition pulled out because it wants that legitimacy of having contested and defeat or “defeated” the opposition, then it can go around saying that “We won.”

Considering Weber and Bouris’s arguments as well as Bheki and Clive’s evaluation of Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem, it becomes possible to argue that there is, in Zimbabwe, an intricate interplay between victimhood and complicity made possible by the multifaceted nature of political identities. This suggests that the Zimbabwean populace is not merely passive victims but active participants in a complex political landscape shaped by both oppression and consent. Citizens, political parties, the media, the army, and ZANU-PF are beyond the simple binary. They are all engaged in an entangled political landscape which involves enablement, complicity, victimisation, as well as resistance and negotiation.

Moreover, the complexities of these identities are shaped and influenced by overlapping interactions of historical, economic, and political processes which shift the status of these political identities in nuanced ways across different periods of time. Let us take for instance the three significant disruptions to the authoritarian post-independence landscape and its implications for complex political identities —namely the National Constitutional Assembly's (NCA) push for reform in 1997, the Government of National Unity (GNU) from 2009 to 2013, and the 2017 coup.¹⁷ Each disruption

¹⁷ See for example: (Mashingaidze, 2005:89); Kriger (2005:26); Lewanika (2014:138); Moyo, “Opposition politics and the culture of polarisation,” 109; Thomas Duri, Ngonidzashe Marongwe, and Munyaradzi Mawere, “Mugabeism after Mugabe?: Rethinking Legacies and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe's 'Second Republic'”, edited by Thomas Duri, and Ngonidzashe Marongwe, African Talent

illustrates the complex interplay of power, victimhood, and participation described by Bouris and Weber.

For example, the National Constitutional Assembly, formed in 1997, was a coalition of civil society organizations, trade unions, and other groups advocating for constitutional reform.¹⁸ This movement led to a nation-wide debate on human rights and democratic governance, ultimately rejecting the state's proposed draft constitution in a referendum.¹⁹ This disruption highlights how victims of political oppression, in their pursuit of reform, can become active agents in reshaping political structures, aligning with Bouris' concept of 'complex political victims' who, despite their victimization, play a role in challenging and transforming oppressive systems.

The GNU, established in 2009 after a contentious election marked by violence and voter intimidation, aimed to stabilize Zimbabwe's political landscape by promoting democratic reforms through power sharing.²⁰ It led to significant constitutional changes, including the adoption of the 2013 Constitution which expanded freedoms and decentralized power.²¹ However, while the GNU initially appeared to offer hope for reform and democratization, it also allowed ZANU-PF to recalibrate its dominance and neutralize opposition forces, reflecting Weber's view that political actors can be both victims and perpetrators, influenced by past and present power dynamics.

Finally, the 2017 coup that ousted long-time president Robert Mugabe and replaced him with his deputy, Emmerson Mnangagwa, demonstrated a shift from one form of authoritarian rule to another.²² The coup, while briefly creating space for reform, solidified military control over civilian governance and reinforced existing power structures. This event illustrates how new power configurations can emerge from within established systems, maintaining complex dynamics of repression and control, and underscoring how political actors navigate and perpetuate these dynamics.

¹⁸ See for example: (Mashingaidze,2005:89); Doorman (2005:848); Kriger (2005:26); Lewanika (2014:138)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Moyo, "Opposition politics and the culture of polarisation," 109.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Thomas Duri, Ngonidzashe Marongwe, and Munyaradzi Mawere, "Mugabeism after Mugabe?: Rethinking Legacies and the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe's 'Second Republic'", edited by Thomas Duri, and Ngonidzashe Marongwe, African Talent,

These disruptions collectively illustrate the complex nature of political identities and power in Zimbabwe, showing how victims can simultaneously challenge and sustain oppressive systems, and how perpetrators may be shaped by their own experiences of victimization. This nuanced understanding aligns with Bouris' and Weber's analyses of 'complex political victims' and 'complex political perpetrators,' emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to understanding political interactions and power dynamics.

In light of the lens offered by Weber and Bouris, I argue that going beyond the victim/perpetrator dichotomy requires viewing the situation in Zimbabwe within its complexity and acknowledging the processes, events, and issues which shape the evolution and development of Zimbabwe as a noun, adjective, perception, and condition. Considering this, Sarah Nutall provides the language with which we can understand societies like Zimbabwe in her conceptualisation of 'entanglements.' According to Sarah Nutall, entanglement refers to a set of social relationships which are "complicated, ensnaring, and in a tangle."²³ For Nutall, this complication creates a condition where social relations become 'twisted' or 'entwined' leading to an intimacy among the actors in the relationship whether the intimacy is resisted, ignored, or uninvited.²⁴

Applied to Zimbabwe's political landscape, entanglement defines the political dynamics above - where a political party that has ruled for more than 40 years maintains a dominant position that is both challenged and enabled by other political actors like opposition parties, the electorate, civil society organisations, as well as regional and global organisations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), and closer to home – the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Entanglement allows us to see how Zimbabwe's political actors – whether dominant, marginalised, or repressed are wrapped up in a context of poor economic conditions, global processes of globalisation and neoliberalism, brain drain, and a post-colonial state built atop the institutions of a violent colonial regime. All political actors are at once negotiating these conditions, challenging them, or taking advantage of them at different moments.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

The research journey: Interrogating Zimbabwe

This thesis interrogates the relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem by examining how historical, economic, political, and international stressors influence the manifestation of these interactions during elections, and the impact that electoral interactions have on the relationship between political actors in Zimbabwe.

I chose to focus on political relationships and interactions because I wanted to understand why the political landscape in Zimbabwe works the way that it does -, for instance the allegations of election rigging, censorship, voter intimidation, violent repression, and the weaponisation of the law. I wanted to place what I was witnessing empirically under a scholarly investigation in order to make sense of it intellectually, using theory and academic inquiry.

What started off as research on how elections are hijacked by the state and how political representation can be explained in the context of authoritarianism became a struggle to overcome the frustration and dissatisfaction I was confronting with current literature on Zimbabwean politics, and with existing theories on political relations and representation in Africa - particularly as literature on the state, democracy, and political organisation was born out of a particularly Eurocentric and Western history and ontology, which would explain its limitations in describing societies like Zimbabwe. The frustrations also resulted from the literature not satisfactorily examining or delving into the nuances of the relationship dynamics between the state and political actors interacting in the Zimbabwean political landscape. Moreover, the dissatisfaction resulted from the not adequately take a step back to examine the internal and external pressures that produce tensions and asymmetries in the interactions of political actors.

Indeed, there is a large body of literature about how ZANU-PF maintains its hold on power, how citizens resist, negotiate, and respond; how the opposition parties have mobilised as well as where the opposition parties have failed.²⁵ Stemming from this body

²⁵ See for example: Bratton, Michael, and Eldred Masunungure. "Zimbabwe's 2008 Elections: A Case Study in the Politics of Violence." *African Affairs* 107, no. 428 (2008): 1-24; Raftopoulos, Brian. *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy*

of work is the various efforts to answer the question “why do Zimbabweans not fight back?”²⁶ Answers include *inter-alia* Zimbabwean apathy produced by middle-class emigration and remittances which act as a form of pacification, Zimbabwean trauma and fear of state-led abduction, torture, and arbitrary arrests, as well as Zimbabweans’ use of comedy to subvert the ruling government’s censorship laws.²⁷ Answers have also investigated the history of Zimbabwean political culture which reveals a history of systematic state-abuse from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period and the effect of that state-led violence does on the psyche and political consciousness of citizens.²⁸

While the literature provides readers with a strong understanding of the strategies used to maintain the current power relations, the socio-economic and political effects of the current structure, as well as the external and internal pressures within which the current political order operates; it does not delve closely into the relationships between political actors and the pressures within which these relationships take place. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the general tendency is to describe political relationships in Zimbabwe on a binary of the victim and perpetrator with ZANU-PF and its supporters being the perpetrator and everyone else as a victim of ZANU-PF’s oppression. It is this binary that also fuelled my frustration. Whilst it is true that ZANU-PF wields an incredible amount of power over public institutions, and the avenues through which citizens can mobilise and engage, and while it also true that Zimbabweans have struggled to overcome the pervasiveness of ZANU-PF; I also felt that there is more complexity to these relations.

Where I tried to use existing theories like political representation and political settlements to explain political dynamics, I found them largely inapplicable or insufficient to fully interrogate political relations in Zimbabwe – particularly as a born and

of Transition. Harare: SAPES Books, 2004; Moyo, Sam. "The Politics of Land Reform in Zimbabwe." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 327-344; Moyo, Tinashe. "Why Do Zimbabweans Not Fight Back? Social Movements and the Politics of Resistance." *African Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2015): 45-62.

²⁶ Moyo, Tinashe. "Why Do Zimbabweans Not Fight Back? Social Movements and the Politics of Resistance." *African Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2015): 45-62.

²⁷ See for example: Southall, Roger. "Flight and Fortitude: The Decline of the Middle Class in Zimbabwe." *Africa* 90, no. 3 (2020): 529-47; Raftopoulos, Brian. (2015). *Brian Raftopoulos, Zimbabwe's Politics of Despair.. Thinking Beyond*. Volume 1; Källstig, Amanda. (2020). *Laughing in the Face of Danger: Performativity and Resistance in Zimbabwean Stand-up Comedy*. *Global Society*. 35. 1-16. 10.1080/13600826.2020.1828295.

²⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo & Ruhanya, Pedzisai. (2020). *The History and Political Transition of Zimbabwe From Mugabe to Mnangagwa: From Mugabe to Mnangagwa*. 10.1007/978-3-030-47733-2.

raised Zimbabwean who has witnessed several events and their effects including the fragmentation of the family unit due to emigration, the currency collapses, the long queues for food, petrol, and money at the bank, the brief moment of respite following the Government of National Unity (GNU) (2009-2013), and the ousting of long-term President Robert Mugabe who was blamed for all the problems, yet, even in his absence the conditions continue to be dire.

And then in the midst of these challenges, I am also a Zimbabwean who has witnessed the polarisation in family relations determined by ZANU-PF vs Opposition, the complicity of friends and family who, in order to survive, end up working for people and organisations aligned with ZANU-PF, whilst some friends and family, despite their bold support for opposition, also partake in corruption as a matter of pragmatism and getting on with it. These experiences of complex realities, thus, made it difficult to fully analyse the political situation in Zimbabwe using the victim/perpetrator binary, and with the lenses of existing theories on political organisation, systems, representation, and institutions.

My concerns ebbed when I encountered and interacted with Professor Achille Mbembe's book *On the Post Colony*.²⁹ Mbembe's book provided the clarity I needed – that the way the political landscape in Zimbabwe functions is more complex than the binary, and that the practice of electoral authoritarianism is a product of complex interactions between overlapping pressures confronting political actors, and the tensions ensuing from these interactions. Mbembe argues that the African state is currently undergoing a process of reconfiguration brought on by “material scarcity, deinstitutionalization, the generalization of violence, and reterritorialization.”³⁰

For Mbembe, these pressures strongly impact the structuring of power relations in the African society by challenging the “definition of the prerogatives and limits of public power; codification of the rights, privileges, and inequalities tolerable in a society; and, finally, the financial underpinnings of the first two pillars”.³¹ Furthermore, he argues that

²⁹ Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2001. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppkxs>.

³⁰ Mbembe, Achille. “On Private Indirect Government.” In *On the Postcolony*, 1st ed., 66–101. University of California Press, 2001. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppkxs.5>.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

the coherence of African societies is challenged by “internal dissolution” brought on by external pressures such as debt, globalisation, and neoliberalism; and by a combination of increasing inequalities and corruption which spark uncontrollable levels of violence and conflict.³² These pressures fracture the idea of sovereignty, the ways that the state and its citizens interact, as well as the expectations and obligations imposed on these relationships.³³ Mbembe further encourages readers to observe in these contentious political relations the struggle to “establish new forms of legitimate domination and gradually restructuring formulas of authority built on other foundations.”³⁴

New questions emerged after my engagement with “On the Postcolony,” however. I wanted to know how the political landscape is structured, what fuels tensions in the structure, how actors seek to (re)define their position in the landscape, which pressures exacerbate and ameliorate tensions. Because of my desire to move away from the victim/perpetrator binary, I wanted to know the extent to which actors were interconnected and interrelated, as well as how this interconnectedness played out especially during elections and within the constraints of international norms and standards.

By interrogating relationships of power, this thesis provides a different interpretation of elections and democracy in Zimbabwe. It also reveals the limits of existing literature on political organisation in the modern state – and specifically the African state. I, therefore, wish to contribute towards the process of decolonising academic knowledge by revealing where the gaps are and by asking questions of the current theories and frameworks on political organisations/systems. As indicated earlier, the current theories and frameworks on political organisation were produced out of a particular Eurocentric history, system of knowledge and ontology. Thus, by contributing to decolonisation, I mean that this research proposes the production of or the use of epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies which speak more closely to the experiences of peoples in Africa.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 75

³⁴ Ibid., 77

³⁵ Decolonisation can be defined as... see for example...

Research Questions

To undertake my interrogation, I approached this dissertation through the following three questions:

1. What historical, economic, and political factors have influenced the interactions between political actors in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem?
2. How do domestic, regional, and international processes and events affect interactions in the ecosystem?
3. How do these interactions manifest during elections and what impact do they have on electoral outcomes?

Conceptualising the political landscape

For the purpose of this interrogation, I have extrapolated my understanding of a 'political ecosystem' and 'political landscape' from the ecological sciences and from the architectural sciences. In ecological sciences, an ecosystem refers to "a geographical area where plants, animals, and other organisms, as well as weather and landscape, work together to form a bubble of life."³⁶ Moreover, all organisms in an ecosystem are interdependent directly or indirectly; their relations are affected by internal and external factors such as rain, sunshine, drought, natural disasters, as well as feeding, reproductive, and survival patterns and behaviours.³⁷ On the other hand, a landscape refers to a contested geographic, historical, symbolic, or cultural boundary in which various actors "structure power relations", define the meaning of human interactions, and ultimately "create understandings of 'the political.'³⁸

Re-defined in the context of my investigation – a political ecosystem or political landscape refers to a geographical area born out of a set of socio-historical processes and in which political actors interact, negotiate, and contest their understandings of "Zimbabweanness". The relations among the political actors are interdependent directly and indirectly and are affected by internal and external factors such as *inter-alia*

³⁶ http://gdcganderbal.edu.in/Files/a8029a93-30ad-4933-a19a-59136f648471/Link/EcologyandEnvironment_44344ff9-021a-4e6b-ab1f-cf8a148398f2.pdf

³⁷ <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/ecosystem/> Provide the full reference

³⁸ https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/BPL/Images/content_store/ThumbNail/LONGHURST9781405126458/9781405175654_023.PDF

economic and material conditions, international norms of human rights and democracy, as well as conflicts or transitions from conflict. Thus, the political ecosystem can be understood as a living and breathing organism that is sensitive to pressure from within and without.

I have chosen to define the different socio-political groupings as ‘political actors’ – a choice inspired by Mahmoud Mamdani’s idea that defining a society according to the victim/perpetrator binary limits our capacity to examine how individuals and groupings of individuals negotiate their existence within a particular geography.³⁹ For Mamdani, all groupings must be seen as ‘survivors’ or ‘political adversaries’ because of their shared experiences and capacities to determine and define the orderings of society through political processes.⁴⁰ Mamdani’s assessment on the limits of the victim/perpetrator resonates with Zimbabwe because as discussed herein, Zimbabwe’s political landscape is messy, entangled, and complicated. As such, the interactions between political actors take different forms of complicity, negotiation, and resistance.

I have chosen to define the different socio-political groupings as ‘political actors’ – a choice inspired by Mahmoud Mamdani’s idea that defining a society according to the victim/perpetrator binary limits our capacity to examine how individuals and groupings of individuals negotiate their existence within a particular geography.⁴¹ For Mamdani, all groupings must be seen as ‘survivors’ or ‘political adversaries’ because of their shared experiences and capacities to determine and define the orderings of society through political processes.⁴² I argue that Mamdani’s assessment on the limits of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy resonates with Zimbabwe’s complex political and social fabric.

In Zimbabwe, the colonial legacy of the ‘native/settler’ divide has created enduring socio-political dynamics that defy simple categorizations.⁴³ The historical injustices and divisions established during colonial rule continue to shape the interactions between various political actors. For example, the contentious land reform program, which aimed

³⁹ Mahmoud Mamdani, *Neither Native nor Settler*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 355

⁴² *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴³ Ndlovu Gatsheni

to rectify colonial-era land injustices, illustrates how post-colonial politics are entangled with historical grievances, making it difficult to apply a straightforward victim/perpetrator framework.⁴⁴ Similarly, the violence and repression experienced by opposition members under Robert Mugabe's regime highlight how the legacies of exclusion and oppression persist in shaping contemporary political conflict.⁴⁵ Mamdani's lens helps to understand that Zimbabwe's political actors engage in a complex interplay of complicity, negotiation, and resistance, reflecting the ongoing struggle to reconcile historical injustices with the demands of nation-building. This perspective allows for a more nuanced analysis of Zimbabwe's political landscape, where identities and roles are fluid and deeply influenced by the legacies of colonialism.

In this thesis, therefore, I argue that socio-political groupings are inherently political and referring to them as 'political actors' acknowledges their agency and desires to negotiate the terms of their existence within a particular order. I argue that the interactions of political actors take place within the constraints of flows of power⁴⁶ emanating from internal and external sources, and that power interactions are produced, manifested, and understood through uneven flows of power.

Against this definition, political actors can be characterised as domestic (internal) and foreign (external). Domestic actors include civil society organisations, activists, media practitioners, opposition party members and supporters, the ruling party members and supporters, the electorate, as well as religious and cultural organisations. Foreign actors include international bodies like the United Nations, the World Bank, the IMF, the African Union, SADC as well as state actors like the United States and the European Union.

⁴⁴ See for example: Bhatasara, S. 2011. "Women Land in Zimbabwe: Deconstructing the Impacts of the Fast Track Land Reform." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 13 (1): 1–15; and Nyawo, Vongai Z. 2023. "The Fast Track Land Reform of Zimbabwe Read through the Lens of Ubuntu." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 8 (4–6): 189–204. doi:10.1080/23802014.2023.2196980.

⁴⁵ Ruhanya, Pedzisai, and Bekezela Gumbo. 2022. "The Securocratic State: Conceptualising the Transition Problem in Zimbabwe." *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 8 (4–6): 219–37. doi:10.1080/23802014.2022.2099575.

⁴⁶ When referring to power, I mean the material and coercive technologies that shape the conduct, actions, and capacities of individuals or social groups within a particular context. This also extends to the structures and institutions through which these technologies are yielded and through which socio-political interactions take place. See more in Michael Barnett, and Raymond Duvall. "Power in International Politics." *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 39–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877878>

Methodology and limitations

A critical goal of this dissertation is to produce an experience-led investigation, assessment, evaluation, and analysis of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem. To interrogate the relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem (and paying homage to this complicated landscape), I engaged with literature on the history and development of Zimbabwe's political landscape which traced the emergence of authoritarianism, the economic and political pressures confronting political actors, the international and regional processes and events which complicate relations between political actors, and the effects of and responses to the interactions between the political actors.

The literature on Zimbabwe's political landscape did not adequately provide the experiential grounding that I desired for this interrogation.⁴⁷ By this, I mean that I wanted to understand how Zimbabweans from different walks of life have experienced the Zimbabwean political ecosystem over the course of their personal and professional lives. So, in my effort to draw a nuanced picture of political relations and dynamics in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem, I also conducted 18 semi-structured interviews.⁴⁸ The interviews allowed me to gain access to specific information about the participants' lived experiences whilst also giving the participants the freedom and opportunity to discuss their experiences freely. Table 1 below provides a brief overview of the participant profiles.

I used the snowball method to select participants. The snowball method entails recruiting participants through referrals from other participants. I chose this method as gaining access to individuals involved in Zimbabwe's political landscape is a difficult process given the sensitivities of that landscape. As a result, the interview pool does not feature representation from the ruling party or its supporters.

⁴⁷ See for example, Stanley Tsarwe, "Understanding Zimbabwe's Political Culture: Media and Civil Society," in *The History and Political Transition of Zimbabwe*, ed. by African Histories and Modernities (Springer, 2020), 117-132, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-47733-2_5; Rudo Gaidzanwa, "The Political Culture of Zimbabwe: Continuities and Discontinuities," in *The History and Political Transition of Zimbabwe*, ed. by African Histories and Modernities (Springer, 2020), 25-50, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-47733-2_2.

⁴⁸ (Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020)

Table one: Profiles of interview participants.

	Name	Age	Gender	Interview date	Profession/Position
1	Tonderai	40-45	Male	December 2023	Civil Society Actor
2	Precious	40-45	Female	December 2023	Civil Society Actor
3	Munodei	60-65	Male	December 2023	Academic
4	Delight	35-40	Female	December 2023	Academic
5	Clive	40-45	Male	December 2023	Activist
6	Hamandishe	40-45	Male	December 2023	Civil Society Actor
7	Themba	35-40	Male	January 2024	Media Practitioner
8	Justice	65-70	Male	January 2024	Politician (Opposition)
9	Bruce	55-60	Male	December 2023	Politician (Opposition)
10	Kwayedza	50-55	Male	December 2023	Media Practitioner
11	Mukai	55-60	Male	September 2023	Civil Society Actor
12	Alice	45-50	Female	January 2024	Activist
13	Takudzwa	55-60	Male	November,2023	Civil Society Actor
14	Bheki	65-70	Male	January 2024	Activist & Academic
15	Tirivashe	35-40	Female	December 2023	Civil Society Actor
16	Kureva	45-50	Male	December 2023	Civil Society Actor
17	Panashe	40-45	Male	January 2024	Activist
18	Munashe	40-45	Male	January 2024	Activist & Opposition Party Actor

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were critical ethical considerations in this study, particularly given the political context of Zimbabwe, a country widely characterised as a competitive authoritarian state. In such environments, where formal democratic structures coexist with significant authoritarian practices, participants discussing political issues may face real risks—including surveillance, intimidation, or social and economic repercussions. Anonymising the names of participants was therefore not only a methodological necessity but a moral imperative, ensuring their protection and enabling candid, uninhibited engagement with the research process. This approach safeguarded the integrity of the study while fostering a climate of trust, allowing participants to share their perspectives on governance, dissent, and political expression without fear of exposure or reprisal.

Analysis of Interviews

Instead of analysing the semi-structured interviews in traditional forms such as thematic analysis, content analysis, or discourse analysis; I focused on weaving the testimonies into my arguments – using them as empirical evidence of the relations that I describe and examine. Because my respondents were from a diverse pool of civil society actors, activists, scholars, journalists, and politicians – I was able to provide an enriched analysis of political interactions from those I have identified to be political actors.

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As part of my inquiry, I identified five critical tasks necessary to answer this thesis' questions:

1. **Define Political Actors:** I did this by determining which individuals or groups would qualify as political actors within Zimbabwe's landscape.
2. **Analyze Power Dynamics:** I explored how power is distributed and managed among these political actors.
3. **Assess Relationship Evolution:** I examined how relationships between political actors change in response to power-shifting events, such as elections.
4. **Investigate External Influences:** I investigated the impact of external pressures and international factors on the dynamics and tensions among political actors.

In framing my investigation and interpreting the theoretical frameworks, I hypothesized that Zimbabwe's political landscape functions as a complex and interrelated 'ecosystem.' This perspective highlights the intricate dynamics among various political actors operating within this landscape.

I also hypothesized that the political landscape of Zimbabwe is characterized by a diverse array of actors, each wielding different levels of power and influence. These actors are engaged in a continuous process of seeking to consolidate or alter their

positions within this environment. Their actions and strategies are driven by the imperative to enhance their standing or to navigate shifts in the political terrain.

Furthermore, the extent to which actors can effectively consolidate or transform their positions is constrained by their relative power within the landscape. This power dynamic not only affects their ability to achieve their objectives but also shapes their interactions with other actors. The interplay among these actors is marked by a complex mix of alliances, rivalries, and negotiations.

Moreover, the relationships between political actors are further strained by various events, processes, and external influences. The involvement of foreign actors and international community dynamics adds additional layers of tension to the already volatile interactions among Zimbabwean political entities.

Limitations of this research

The rationale for picking Zimbabwe as a case study was informed by my experiences as a Zimbabwean and a desire to intellectually make sense of those experiences. This study, therefore, gave me the opportunity to also learn and to try and understand a landscape that has eluded many – including myself- for a long time.

That noted, I acknowledge the bias of my positionality as a Zimbabwean. To counteract this bias, I reflected on how my own experiences of citizenship, nationality, and identity moulded within the constraints of the political and economic situation would influence how I interpreted facts and interview testimonies. I also made an effort to maintain an objective stance by taking a bird's eye perspective in interpreting the relationships and flows of power in order to provide an analysis that is fair, balanced, and faithful to the complexities of the Zimbabwean context. Being a Zimbabwean also gave me an advantage because interview participants could comfortably talk to me and express their testimonies in the local languages and using jargon/slang that would not otherwise be understood by an external person.

Theoretical and conceptual challenges

As mentioned above, I confronted challenges with using existing literature on political organisations and systems as they occur in Africa. Specifically, I narrowed down three potential theories for framing this research: political settlements theory, generational unit analysis, and entanglements. These theories were useful because they loosely

provided the language which I was seeking to provide this present examination. However, their weaknesses and certain tenets made it difficult for me to fully apply them to Zimbabwe. Ultimately, I have chosen to draw on certain definitional aspects which I saw as relevant to Zimbabwe, whilst also discarding certain classifications which are inapplicable and/or inappropriate for this examination.

The political settlements approach refers to “the distribution of power between influential groups in a particular country that is a product of the struggle between these groups and influences the distribution of power.”⁴⁹ According to the Dendere and Taodzera, the idea of ‘settlement’ refers to a balance of power whose behaviour and attributes can be discerned through a longitudinal study across multiple years.⁵⁰

I have chosen to maintain this definition throughout this thesis because of its close alignment with my hypotheses which see the Zimbabwean political landscape as containing actors with varying degrees of power, as an ecosystem where actors were looking to consolidate their position in the landscape, and finally as an ecosystem where the degree of power of political actors limited their capacity to change their position within the structure of power.

As demonstrated in this chapter, ZANU-PF (its supporters and beneficiaries) maintains a dominant position which infiltrates all aspects of social and political life, whereas marginalised political actors like opposition parties (including their supporters and beneficiaries), civil society organisations, businesses and business leaders, as well as media institutions negotiate with, challenge, and sometimes capitulate to the desires of this dominant political actor.

Despite falling into the very victim/perpetrator dichotomy which I seek to escape, this distinction between dominant and marginalised articulates the nature of the relationships between political actors in Zimbabwe and provides insight into the relationship dynamics outlined at the beginning of this chapter. The complex nature of these relationship dynamics is revealed in the definitions used to describe Zimbabwe. For example, in literature on electoral authoritarianism there is a tendency to describe

⁴⁹ Chipso Dendere and Shingirai Taodzera, “Zimbabwean civil society survival in the post-coup environment: a political settlements analysis”, 135.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Zimbabwe as an autocratic, semi-authoritarian or semi-democratic country due to the unfree and unfair nature of the electoral process, But, for interview participants like Bruce, Zimbabwe is not only authoritarian - but it is also a securocratic state. According to Omar McDoom, as securocratic state refers to “preeminent role played by security actors and their commitment to coercion to assure the state’s security and realize the regime’s developmental ambitions.”⁵¹

In one of the interviews, Bruce, a 57-year-old senior opposition politician, argues that “in all elections in Zimbabwe from 1980, what has been the determining factor is the securocratic state.⁵² What has been the determining factor is that it is the selectorate that are in charge and not the electorate.”⁵³

Bruce’s observation acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations in Zimbabwe and demonstrates that even though the political ecosystem is messy and entangled, its nature can be described using the language of power.⁵⁴ Firstly, by identifying Zimbabwe as a securocratic state, Bruce reveals that political interactions are complicated by the participation of the security apparatus in civilian political processes. Secondly, by identifying Zimbabwe as being governed by the “selectorate”, Bruce emphasises the asymmetrical nature of political interactions in Zimbabwe. Specifically, he demonstrates that the power to control the economy, allocate resources, and to make decisions and policy is concentrated in the hands of a limited elite. Considering these points, this definition of political settlements can be applied to Zimbabwe as follows: the interaction, negotiation, and understandings of “Zimbabweanness” are complicated by uneven power flows characterised by military intervention, and tightly controlled concentration of power.

Although the political settlements definition allowed me to articulate and describe the flows of power in the interactions of political actors, I found the typologies and

⁵¹ Omar Shahabudin McDoom, Securocratic state-building: the rationales, rebuttals, and risks behind the extraordinary rise of Rwanda after the genocide, *African Affairs*, Volume 121, Issue 485, October 2022, Pages 535–567.

⁵² S Ibid, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adac031><https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adac031>

⁵³ Online interview with Bruce, December 2023.

⁵⁴ When referring to power, I mean the material and coercive technologies that shape the conduct, actions, and capacities of individuals or social groups within a particular context. This also extends to the structures and institutions through which these technologies are yielded and through which socio-political interactions take place. See more in Michael Barnett, and Raymond Duvall. “Power in International Politics.” *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 39–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877878> <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3877878>

classifications of political settlements largely inapplicable for this thesis. Firstly, as argued by Machiko Tsubura, the applicability of political settlements to Africa is limited because of its overreliance on distribution of power as the causal mechanism for institutional outcomes such as electoral outcomes.⁵⁵ Machiko Tsubura posits that when drawing on the political settlements framework capacity of national leaders and state bureaucracies must be considered when interrogating the relationship and distribution of power between political actors.⁵⁶ David Booth, on the other hand, argues that the typologies posited in political settlements are not adequate to investigate events and processes in African countries. For Booth, this can be solved by drawing on a broader range of theories and analytical frameworks to produce a more nuanced and encompassing analysis.⁵⁷

Against these limitations, the ensuing discussion will show that although the interactions between political actors in Zimbabwe may be characterised by uneven flows and distributions of power; historical, economic and political pressures such as the legacy of the settler-colonial state, the declining and worsening economy, and the pressures for democratisation and neoliberal globalisation all reduce the capacities of political actors. Overall, the distribution of power is not the main reason for the tensions between the political actors, instead, power also (and technologies that yield it) becomes a mechanism through which the pressures and conflicts in the relationships of political actors are organised and expressed. These pressures create the conditions of entanglement whereby, in one instance, one observes a dominant/marginalised relationship, whilst in another instance, one observes a complicit and ensnared relationship. Consequently, these pressures make it difficult for scholars, like myself, to deconstruct Zimbabwe's political ecosystem into easily identifiable parts.

Considering Booth and Tsubura's argument, I sought out a theory which would allow me to look more closely at the capacities of political actors, the reasons why tensions occur among political actors, as well as where and how the relations between political actors overlap and interrelate. To do this, I chose to draw on the definitional aspect of the

⁵⁵ Machiko Tsubura, "Political Settlements Research on Sub-Saharan Africa: Conceptual Framework and Causal Mechanism", *Institute of Developing Economies*, (2022),21. file:///C:/Users/lyrix/Downloads/IDP000845_001.pdf

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid

generational unit analytical framework and the concept of entanglement. As with political settlements, the definitional aspects of generational units usefully permitted me to conceptualise and support my hypotheses, and to understand what creates tensions between political actors beyond the distribution of power. Firstly, the generational unit analysis speaks to the evolution and development of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem as a settler-colonial state, a post-colonial as well as a post-independence state. The distinction of these three periods allowed me to step back and examine the issues, events and processes which have culminated into the present power configuration and political dynamics – particularly as they approach and interact with the electoral process.

Generational unit analysis implores readers to examine actors in a society as existing in 'generational units.' According to Karl Mannheim, a generation refers to a group of individuals i.e., a 'generational unit' who are located within a specific economic and power structure of a society and are drawn together by their location "in [a] historical dimension of the social process."⁵⁸ For Richard Braungart and Margaret Braungart as generational units interact, negotiate, and come into conflict, they become more aware of their position within the structure – causing them to develop forms of protest to defend their existence, position, or desired position.⁵⁹ Take for instance LeBas and Munemo as well as 40-year-old political activist and journalist Munashe's assessment of Zimbabwe's political landscape :

For ZANU-PF, the liberation war remains the key event in Zimbabwean history, and its view of the link between state and citizen is plebiscitary rather than participatory. Opposition politics since 2000 have challenged these foundational myths, attempting to open political space and even to directly discredit ZANU-PF's claims about the liberation war's legacy.⁶⁰ This concept of generational units interacting and coming into conflict is evident in LeBas and Munemo's analysis of Zimbabwe's political landscape, where opposition politics since 2000 have emerged as a direct challenge to ZANU-PF's foundational myths about the liberation war, seeking to redefine the relationship between the state and its citizens from one that is plebiscitary to one that is more participatory.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 167

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Munashe, on the other hand, highlights how civil society organizations in Zimbabwe have become key actors in pushing for the completion of the unfinished democratic goals of the liberation struggle. By advocating for electoral, constitutional, and media reforms, these groups aim to open up the political space and limit the capacity for electoral manipulation, reflecting broader efforts to democratize the electoral process.

“Firstly, you must appreciate that the democratic project in Zimbabwe is seeking to conclude the unfinished business of the liberation struggle. Civic society organisations, which I will start with, have amplified the call for electoral reforms, constitutional reforms, media reforms. So, there are various civic society organisations, the Zimbabwe Media Institute, they have also been amplifying the call to democratise the space for electoral contestation in this country. Some have participated in voter registration, maybe being informed by the realisation that electoral manipulation has got a ceiling if you overwhelm the dictators can only manipulate to a certain level. If you have more registered voters, it will be very, very difficult to rig such an election.”⁶¹

The assessments provided by LeBas and Munemo coupled with Munashe demonstrated that the relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe is not operating in isolation - separated from history or from broader socio-political processes. Their arguments support the hypotheses that: (a) political actors in Zimbabwe exist and operate in an interrelated ecosystem, and (b) relationships between political actors, while tense, become increasingly so in the face of external and internal events and processes, and the influence of foreign actors in the international community. Moreover, their arguments echoed the definitions of the generational unit analysis that interactions between political actors shape and define how the actors come to understand their identity in relation to other political actors in the ecosystem, as well as to the state.

The strength of this definition resonates with the core aspect of this thesis – which is to interrogate relationship dynamics over time - as this passage of time (marked by events and processes) shifts, develops, and changes the nature of political interactions, the capacities of political actors, as well as the relationship dynamics between political actors. For example, a simplistic history of Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle reveals that the goal of liberation was majority vote, free and fair institutions, and the establishment

⁶¹ Online Interview with Munashe, January 2024.

of a one-party state that would control all aspect of economic planning, and the allocation of resources.⁶²

The assessments above show that over time, the logics of the liberation struggle have not changed but the form with which they are conceptualised has indeed evolved and shifted. For the ruling party, these logics can only be engendered by a one-party state, whereas for the civil society, these logics can be achieved through democratisation and reform of various aspects of society. Right there, one sees the conflict articulated by the generational unit analysis i.e., in the diverging approaches to the liberation desires, and the diverging ideas of nationalism and citizenship.

The limitation of generational unit analysis, however, is that the original framework was conceptualised within birth-cohorts of 15 to 30 years.⁶³ Loubna Skalli's review of the limitations of the generational unit analysis reveals that the birth-cohorts of a generation need not matter. Rather, she encourages us to pay attention to the "gaps and overlaps in the values and behaviours of generations."⁶⁴ The scholar argue that generations should not be seen in strict boundaries of historical events or age-birth cohorts – instead, they must be understood as fluid categories that can be defined by transmission of share values and memories over time.⁶⁵ Costanza et al, thus, argue that "research on generations... [should focus on] experiences that are supposed to have given rise to the existence of generations in the first place." For the scholars, this kind of approach allows researchers to examine the effects of historical events across time, and thus, seeing them as cross-generational processes.⁶⁶

Applied to my interrogation of relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe, a full application of this analytical framework would have constricted me from seeing the fluid relationship between past and present where the distribution of power is concerned, and where the tensions within the relationship dynamics are concerned. Instead, this limitation would have led me into a path where I interrogate the political dynamics based on the birth cohorts of each generation, their motivations,

⁶² Menheislon?

⁶³ Loubna Skalli

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

desires, and challenges at the time instead of the ongoing effects, implications, and repetitions within the relationship dynamics. Let us take for instance the testimony of Takudzwa, a 55-year-old civil society actor who has documented political activity in Zimbabwe for more than three decades:

You know, here is a party that came from a liberation struggle in which one of the main aims of the struggle was one man, one vote.⁶⁷ So, the understanding that there is importance in voting, it's not new to them. They fought very hard for it. Secondly, they also want to give, just not actually ZANU PF but many politicians in Africa, they want to give a façade of a democracy in which then election becomes a ritual that has to take place to try to gain or to have the mandate and legitimacy to run. So, whatever happens in the election in terms of the quality, credibility, fairness and freeness of that election is one thing. But the consistency of holding an election becomes part and parcel of democratic governance. So, if you don't run an election...you have ceased to become a democratic government in a way. But if you run an election, you are simply saying, "We are getting our legitimacy from the vote." So, they will continuously run those elections. ⁶⁸

Takudzwa's testimony reveals that ZANU-PF's development from being a liberation movement to being a political party conscientized the ruling party on the importance of the electoral process - not just as a platform to assert the agency and choice of citizens, but as a foreign policy objective needed to engender the legitimacy and credibility of the state.⁶⁹ However, a full application of the generational unit analysis would have prevented me from seeing the evolution of the liberation motive for one man, one vote,

⁶⁷ Takudzwa's views have been widely echoed by various scholars including Henning Melber and Roger Southall. Henning Melber and Roger Southall provide critical insights into the challenges faced by liberation movements in post-independence Southern Africa. Melber argues that these movements often struggle to shift from revolutionary organizations to effective governing bodies, with a tendency to centralize power and exhibit authoritarian traits, leading to a lack of democratic accountability. Southall, focusing on the ANC in South Africa, SWAPO in Namibia, and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe, observes that while these movements were initially celebrated as liberators, they have increasingly been criticized for issues such as corruption, nepotism, and failing to fulfill socio-economic promises. Both scholars underscore the difficulties these movements face in meeting governance demands and the expectations of their citizens in a post-independence era. See more on: Henning Melber, *The Rise of Africa's Middle Class: Myths, Realities and Critical Engagements* (London: Zed Books, 2016), 45-67; and Roger Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2013), 89-112.

⁶⁸ Interview with Takudzwa, December 2023.

⁶⁹ Legitimacy, according to Jean-Marc Coicaud, implies that citizens give leaders the consent to command authority and the allocation of resources within its juridical borders. Moreover, legitimacy implies acknowledgement by foreign actors of a government's validity to render its authority within its sovereign borders. See for example, Jean-Marc Coicaud. "What Is Political Legitimacy?" Chapter. In *Legitimacy and Politics: A Contribution to the Study of Political Right and Political Responsibility*, edited by David Ames Curtis, 10-42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

and its effect on the present relationship dynamics characterised by a process of electoral authoritarianism which shall be discussed more fully over the course of this thesis.

Takudzwa's testimony also reveals that the present political interactions in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem stem from a negotiation between the original motivations of the liberation movement, the desires for a one-party state, and a shift in global articulations of governance towards democratisation. The generational unit analysis considered in concert with this thesis' definition of a political ecosystem demonstrates that the resulting practice of electoral authoritarianism is product of a contested socio-historical process in which the ruling party became aware of the vulnerability of its position as a dominant political actor. Thus, the practice of electoral authoritarianism becomes both a response to the internal and external pressures of democratisation, and an approach to maintain the asymmetrical relationships with other political actors. As this thesis will show, negotiations and responses to domestic and international political and economic processes produce the tensions and asymmetries in the interactions of political actors.

Another contention of this thesis is that the relationships in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem are overlapping and interrelated. To demonstrate and articulate this contention, I acknowledge the and adopt Sarah Nutall's definition of entanglements. Already, I have argued that the various perceptions and understandings of Zimbabwe must go beyond the victim/perpetrator binary by acknowledging where and how the relationships dynamics of political actors overlap, ensnare, and form an intimacy that is both consensual and coerced. Throughout this thesis, the examination of economic, political, and historical processes will illustrate these entanglements, and their impact on the citizen/state relationship in Zimbabwe.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction to Political Relationships in Zimbabwe

Chapter one introduces the central inquiry of the thesis: the relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem. It examines how historical, economic, political, and international stressors shape interactions during elections, and how electoral interactions impact these relationships. The focus on political

relationships stems from a desire to intellectually understand key issues such as election rigging, censorship, voter intimidation, and repression through a scholarly and theoretical lens.

Chapter 2: Violence, Coercion, and the Contested Space of Elections

Chapter two delves into the contentious political interactions in Zimbabwe, highlighting the role of violence, coercion, and co-optation. Elections present both opportunities for regime change and threats to the existing power structure. Political actors are entangled in a complex web, influenced by past election violence and the complicity of observer groups, as well as the internal weaknesses of the opposition. The chapter also discusses how elections evoke reminders of past conflicts, shaping the present interactions.

Chapter 3: Historical Roots of Political Interactions

Chapter three investigates the historical factors influencing the interactions between political actors, particularly during elections. It explores how the legacy of colonization and the persistence of colonial structures continue to shape political dynamics. The pressures rooted in historical processes, especially those related to colonialism, still play a significant role in determining how political actors relate to one another within Zimbabwe's political ecosystem.

Chapter 4: International Influence and the Victimhood Narrative

This chapter focuses on the intersection of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem with international political and economic pressures. It draws on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy and examines how narratives of victimhood are politicized during elections. The chapter argues that the dynamics between political actors are not only domestically or historically driven but are also facilitated by international forces advocating for democratization, good governance, and market-led economic policies. The international community, therefore, becomes both an enabler of political entanglements and a watchdog against violence.

Chapter 5: Elections, Identity, and Citizenship in Zimbabwe

Chapter five concludes and addresses how elections impact the relationship dynamics between political actors by discussing notions of identity and citizenship. Drawing on theories by Braungart, Botomore, and Johannson, it explores how political actors use electoral strategies to clarify their identity and citizenship within the nation-state. Citizenship, as expressed through access to welfare, voting rights, and security, is shaped by these dynamics. The ruling party's electoral authoritarianism is analyzed as a tool for defining who belongs to the nation and who is excluded.

Even in its current form, this thesis raises more questions than it answers. It also reveals many unfilled gaps that require greater academic inquiry. But I hope the reader will share the frustration I experienced and be encouraged to expand the boundaries of modern political theory.

Chapter 2: Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem & electoral authoritarianism

“Was there an election in the first place? Was it even an election? Then we can talk about issues of transparency and everything, but my feeling is that there was no election. (we were just ushering the bridal team) *Tayingo perekedza vachati...* So, we have gone and participated in elections that are being run by the same people that are interested parties and stand to lose a lot if they allow the opposition to win. I guess what I'm saying is, like I said (we are just helping those who are already going to win) *tirikungoenda hedu kunobatsira varikufanirwa varipaposition*. And this is an inconvenient truth, but that is what is there. That without alternative force, we are participating in an election where the players are the refs, but they are only the players of one side, right. The other side doesn't have the ref, so it's difficult.”⁷⁰ Clive, a 43-year-old political activist who has protested electoral authoritarianism since his university days laments the 2023 election and the political landscape in general. Like Clive, Fareed Zakaria expresses similar sentiments in their analysis of electoral processes in semi-authoritarian states.

According to Zakaria, “in the end... elections trump everything. If a country holds elections, Washington and the world will tolerate a great deal from the resulting government... In an age of images and symbols, elections are easy to capture on film. [But] How do you televise the rule of law?”⁷¹ Fareed Zakaria’s observation about the global focus on elections over deeper democratic principles, such as the rule of law, echoes Clive’s frustration with Zimbabwe’s electoral process. Clive's reflection on the futility of participating in elections controlled by biased actors who serve as both players and referees highlights how elections in Zimbabwe, despite being central to international legitimacy, fail to embody genuine democratic practices. This connects to the broader overview of Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem, where power is unevenly distributed, and political actors—including opposition parties, civil society, and the electorate—are trapped in a complex, asymmetrical struggle for influence.

Overview of the relationship between political actors

⁷⁰ Interview with Clive, December 2023.

⁷¹ Zakaria, Fareed. 1997. “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy.” *Foreign Affairs* 76, No. 6: 22–41.

For more than four decades Zimbabwe's political ecosystem has been characterised by complicated and difficult interactions – which I refer to as a struggle - between ZANU-PF, Opposition Parties (OPs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and the Electorate/Civilians over the distribution of power, the allocation of public goods, and access to benefits of public institutions.⁷² As with elections dating back to the 1980s, this struggle persisted into the 2023 election with ZANU-PF employing a range of strategies to maintain its long-established dominance whilst disempowering the capacities of other political actors from seriously shifting ZANU-PF's position.⁷³

Although ZANU-PF's dominance in the political ecosystem produces uneven flows of power that marginalise the position of OPs and CSOs; these two groups of political actors respond to the asymmetrical relationship by conforming, resisting, and challenging the interactions within the political and legal constraints entrenched by the ruling party.⁷⁴ Where the electorate are concerned, their position in the political ecosystem is ambiguous. At times, the electorate presents as a class with little to no agency over electoral outcomes or the distributional outcomes of public goods. At other times, the electorate presents as a marginalised class whose capacity to change or maintain the balance of power is harnessed either by the ruling party or by OPs and CSOs. What is clear, however, is that the political actors in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem are interdependent despite the asymmetrical balance of power. Furthermore, these interactions are complicated and ensnared by the political and economic factors wrought by migration and the diaspora population, displacement, and processes and events in the international community. As this research explores, the complications of these factors have a bearing on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the different political actors.

⁷² Helliker, Kirk, and Tendai Murisa. 2020. "Zimbabwe: Continuities and Changes." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 38 (1): 5–17. doi:10.1080/02589001.2020.1746756.

⁷³ ACLED, 2023. "Political Succession and Intra-Party Divisions: Examining the Potential for Violence in Zimbabwe's 2023 Elections" Available: <https://acleddata.com/2023/08/17/political-succession-and-intra-party-divisions-examining-the-potential-for-violence-in-zimbabwes-2023-elections/>

⁷⁴ It must be noted that Opposition Parties, and Civil Society Organisations in Zimbabwe are not fixed identities. Their identities have evolved and changed over time in response to and as a result of their interaction with the ruling party, economic as well as political pressures, internal divisions and changes in the level of support from their electoral base.

Outlining the relationship dynamics of political actors as they manifest during elections

Leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Emmerson Mnangagwa was inaugurated as the President of Zimbabwe for another 5-year term on the 4th of September 2023. At the inauguration, the incumbent re-committed to “faithfully upholding and defending [Zimbabwe’s] sacred national Constitution and laws, with integrity and impartiality, leaving no one and no place behind.”⁷⁵

Above the surface, the speech presented the 15 million people of Zimbabwe with a renewed sense of hope about the country’s economic and political future. Below the surface, the inauguration speech was ironic because the election process was characterised by disregard of the Constitution’s provision for free, fair and transparent elections, by fear, censorship, and intimidation, as well as by arbitrary detentions of election observers and opposition activists.⁷⁶ This sentiment was expressed by a fruit vendor and an AP News source, Onismo Mweda who lamented that “There is nothing to celebrate, it’s going to be another five years of suffering and repression.”⁷⁷

So disputed was the 2023 election that only three out of 16 presidents of SADC member states attended the inauguration, whilst all the election observation missions declared the election process as “shambolic”.⁷⁸ In comparison, President Cyril Ramaphosa’s inauguration was widely attended by seven SADC heads of state.

Official opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change’s (CCC) presidential candidate, Nelson Chamisa argued that the elections were deeply flawed and subsequently rejected the election results that saw Emmerson Mnangagwa leading with 56% of the vote and Nelson Chamisa with 41%.⁷⁹ As part of the CCC’s rejection of the electoral

⁷⁵ Emmerson Mnangagwa, “Inauguration Address, August 2023,” accessed September 9, 2024, <https://irp.cdn-website.com/ff7b7050/files/uploaded/Inauguration%20Address%20August%202023.FINAL%20csd.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, Section 67, accessed September 9, 2024, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Zimbabwe_2017.

⁷⁷ Farai Mutsaka and Gerald Imray, “Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa Wins Re-election After Troubled Vote, Officials Say,” August 27, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/zimbabwe-election-emmerson-mnangagwa-4aaeb10b7bf49f54fd10af141d18ced2>

⁷⁸ Frank Chikowore and Xolisani Ncube, “‘Africa, do not leave us’ – Opposition plans to challenge poll results as Mnangagwa calls for Zim unity,” News24, August 28, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/africa-do-not-leave-us-opposition-plans-to-challenge-poll-results-as-mnangagwa-calls-for-zim-unity-20230828>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

outcome, the opposition party called for a re-run of the August elections. However, unlike previous elections, the opposition party refused to file a court challenge against the presidential outcome for fear of legitimising Mnangagwa's win in a judiciary system that has been condemned as biased in favour of the state (Chikowore and Ncube, 2023).⁸⁰

Chamisa's decision to avoid filing a court case was influenced by past frustrations where challenges to the electoral outcome were dismissed with costs, and the cases criticised for failing to present sufficient evidence for their claims. For instance, in 2018, Nelson Chamisa – under the banner of the Movement for Democratic Change - challenged the electoral outcome and sought to annul the election results. The party lawyer, Thabani Mpfu argued that the electoral commission, ZEC had colluded with the ruling party to doctor the results. Moyo's argument to the court was that "there is a massive cover-up. There has been a massive doctoring of evidence."⁸¹ However, despite the legal efforts, the court case was dismissed following the precedent in past electoral challenges.⁸² In previous elections including the 2018 and 2013 elections, court cases challenging the electoral results were tossed out of the judiciary.⁸³

What occurred in the 2023 elections was not without precedent, however. Before Mnangagwa took office in 2017, Zimbabwe was governed by President Robert Mugabe for three decades between 1987 and 2017 – a period defined as 'the first republic', and in which Mnangagwa served in several instrumental capacities.⁸⁴ Under the Mugabe regime, a similar trajectory of violence, intimidation, censorship, electoral disputes, as well as unfree and unfair elections occurred with election cycle.⁸⁵ Thus, the events of and outcome of the 2023 election was unsurprising for many scholars, observers and analysts.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Jason Burke, "Zimbabwe Constitutional Court Rejects Opposition Attempt to Get Election Result Overturned," *The Guardian*, August 24, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/24/zimbabwe-constitutional-court-rejects-opposition-attempt-to-get-election-result-overturned>.

⁸² See for example, Kaaba, O'Brien (2019) "Nelson Chamisa v Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and Others CCZ 42/18 (August 2018)," SAIPAR Case Review: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 4. Available at: <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/scr/vol2/iss1/4>

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Despite President Mnangagwa's assurances that democracy in the second republic⁸⁷ would be upheld at the highest standards, the 2023 election proved the opposite.⁸⁸ Instead, the 2023 election signified the persistence of ZANU-PF's dominance in Zimbabwe's political landscape – particularly, its maintenance of an authoritarian landscape characterised by the manipulation of the electoral process through a practice defined by scholars as 'electoral authoritarianism.'⁸⁹

Electoral authoritarianism refers to the manipulation of elections by an authoritarian regime with the aim of projecting a democratic façade without the substance of democracy.⁹⁰ The democratic façade is necessary to ward off international pressures of democratisation.⁹¹ Furthermore, the façade provides the ruling government with legitimacy – that is, the right to govern and exercise authority over the machinery of the state.⁹² Legitimacy – according to Jean-Marc Coicaud, implies that citizens give leaders the consent to command authority and the allocation of resources within its juridical borders.⁹³ Moreover, legitimacy implies acknowledgement by foreign actors of a government's validity to render its authority within its sovereign borders.⁹⁴ To maintain

⁸⁷ The Robert Mugabe presidency has been named as the First Republic whilst the presidency of Emmerson Mnangagwa has been deemed as the Second Republic. This is because the Emmerson Mngangagwa was the second president of Zimbabwe after 43 years under Robert Mugabe's regime. See for example, Mbuso Moyo and Ray Motsi, "Devolution in Zimbabwe's 'Second Republic': A Myth or Reality?" in *Making Politics in Zimbabwe's Second Republic*, ed. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Cham: Springer, 2023), 143-167, accessed September 9, 2024, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-30129-2_8.

⁸⁸ Africa News, "Zimbabwe President Promises Free and Fair Election," Africa News, April 19, 2023, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/04/19/zimbabwe-president-promises-free-and-fair-election/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ See for example: Regassa, Tsegaye, and Tadesse, Wondwosen. "A Stagnant or Retrogressive Democracy? Elections and Democracy in Nigeria, 1999–2019." In *A Sleeping Giant?*, edited by Ebenezer Obadare, 45-67. Cham: Springer, 2021; and Adebawale, Wale, and Obadare, Ebenezer. "Introduction: Excess and Abjection in the Study of the African State." In *Encountering the Nigerian State*, edited by Wale Adebawale and Ebenezer Obadare, 1-28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

⁹¹ Democratization is the process of transitioning a political regime from an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian system towards a more democratic form of governance. This often involves reforms to the electoral system, expansion of political rights and civil liberties, and the establishment of democratic institutions and procedures. There is significant international pressure for democratization, as democracy is increasingly viewed as the preferred system of government globally. This is due to the association between democracy and positive outcomes such as respect for human rights, economic prosperity, and enhanced security. International organizations like the European Union (EU) have actively encouraged democratic reforms in countries seeking EU membership as a prerequisite for accession. See for example, Laurence Whitehead, "On 'Democracy' and 'Democratization'," in **Democratization: Theory and Experience** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6-35; and Valerie Bunce, "Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations," **Comparative Political Studies** 33, no. 6-7 (2000): 703-734

⁹² Jean-Marc Coicaud. "What Is Political Legitimacy?" Chapter. In *Legitimacy and Politics: A Contribution to the Study of Political Right and Political Responsibility*, edited by David Ames Curtis, 10–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

the democratic façade through elections, an autocratic regime uses a range of legal, political, ideological, and coercive tactics simultaneously to capture, manipulate and co-opt the electoral process.⁹⁵ Because elections are a critical avenue for citizens to register their discontent in political leaders, or to facilitate a change in government; they also represent a threat to the authoritarian government’s perceived right to rule, and thus, providing a reason to thwart, manipulate, or co-opt the electoral process.⁹⁶

Elections can, therefore, be understood as a stressor or source of friction to the citizen/state relationship in Zimbabwe; whilst the conflict between democratisation and authoritarianism exacerbate the tensions between the domestic political actors, as well between the ruling government, Zimbabwe’s domestic political actors, and foreign political actors. Months before election day, ZANU-PF launched a series of legal and political manoeuvres that drained the resources of opposition parties, forced opposition leaders to withdraw, limited the capacity for canvassing or gaining support, made it difficult for opposition parties to focus on campaigning or building a political platform, as well as reducing the potential number of votes in favour of opposition parties.⁹⁷

According to a preliminary statement by the Carter Center’s Election Observation Mission (CCEOM) regarding Zimbabwe’s election, Parliament failed to implement the necessary reforms to ensure transparency and independence of the 2023 election.⁹⁸ Instead, the parliament adopted punitive legislation that “silenc[ed] reform advocates and political opponents in the months leading up to the polls.”⁹⁹

Resource draining:

A crucial tactic used by ZANU-PF included draining the human and financial resources that opposition parties needed to launch strong election campaigns and to widen their

⁹⁵ Regassa, Tsegaye, and Tadesse, Wondwosen. “A Stagnant or Retrogressive Democracy? Elections and Democracy in Nigeria, 1999–2019.”¹

⁹⁶ See for example, Morse, Y.L. (2012) ‘The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism’, *World Politics*, 64(1), pp. 161–198. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887111000281>; and Helms, L. (2023) ‘Political Oppositions in Democratic and Authoritarian Regimes: A State-of-the-Field(s) Review’, *Government and Opposition*, 58(2), pp. 391–414. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.25>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ CCEOM, “Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission Zimbabwe 2023,” European Union Election Observation Mission, November 17, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-zimbabwe-2023/final-report-eu-eom-zimbabwe-2023_en?s=410326.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

potential voters. For example, in June 2023, the Zimbabwean parliament approved a 1900% fee increase in candidacy fees for presidential hopefuls.¹⁰⁰ With an economy that is struggling and currently holding one of the world's highest inflation rates, the increase in candidates' fees from USD 1000 to USD 20 000 made it difficult for smaller opposition parties to nominate candidates and to contend in the election.¹⁰¹

The price increase led legacy political party Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) to avoid putting forward a presidential candidate because they concluded that it would be "unwise to spend the little resources from [ZAPU] members' contributions on nomination fees for one candidate when that money could be spread between candidates."¹⁰² What makes ZAPU's decision even more poignant is the dark history it shares with ZANU-PF, particularly when the latter castigated the Gukurahundi genocide as part of weakening ZAPU after the post-independence election.¹⁰³

Commenting to the press, Labour, Economists and African Democrats (LEAD) president Linda Masarira argued that the fee increases not only disabled poorer opposition parties, but it also disabled parties that were led by women and whose support base was predominantly women. Masarira lamented that:

"What we are seeing is a system that is elbowing out women from active politics. Most women are not financially independent in Zimbabwe, we must work extra hard to raise the funds. In 2018, we had four women presidential candidates and maybe in this election we will only have two women running."¹⁰⁴

True to her prediction, the 2023 election only saw one female candidate standing for presidency and only managing to amass just over 6000 votes.¹⁰⁵ By increasing the nomination fees for presidential candidates as well as the fees for aspiring members of parliament, ZANU-PF stacked the election in its favour by structurally excluding poorer

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Sharon Mazingaizo, "Zim Stifles Opposition with Outrageous Election Fees," Business Day, June 22, 2023, [https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2023-06-22-zim-stifles-opposition-with-outrageous-election-fees/..](https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2023-06-22-zim-stifles-opposition-with-outrageous-election-fees/)

¹⁰³ Kudakwashe Chitsike, *Transitional Justice Options for Zimbabwe: A Guide to Key Concepts*, 2012

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The Herald, "Elections Centre: Zimbabwe Elections 2023"

parties, and draining the resources of stronger opposition parties whose access to funds was also limited.

Limit the capacity for canvassing or gaining support:

Part of the electoral process includes the campaigning period in which political parties use various platforms to gain support and to articulate their agenda. These platforms include rallies, debates, and media appearances. In the lead up to elections, the ruling party used legal and repressive tactics through the mechanism of the state to: (a) increase its visibility by silencing and dimming the opposition; (b) codifying opposition rhetoric as illegal through legal action and policies.

Firstly, opposition parties were unable to canvas and hold rallies successfully. Their attempts were met with police interventions such as tear gas and arrests. For example, during several CCC rallies the police dispersed tear gas on opposition supporters with the intention of breaking up the rallies.¹⁰⁶ The police used several reasons to justify the dispersal of the gas like arguing that there were insufficient numbers of toilets at rallies, lack of punctuality in finishing rallies, and unsuitable venues for holding rallies.¹⁰⁷ The police actions against the CCC made it difficult for the CCC to put across its message using a platform that has the widest engagement.

Tirivashe, a 35-year-old domestic election observer and civil society actor testified to the tensions between the police and the CCC during the campaign period in the lead up to elections.¹⁰⁸

“What I noticed first of all, was a lot of banning of political rallies for the silliest of reasons. We documented a lot of CCC rallies that failed to take part at the same time. We were getting excuses like well ZRP is saying that, you know, you would have to send a notification apparently to the regulatory authority to say we intend to hold a rally on this particular day, at this particular venue, from this time to this

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See for example: Fox 5 News, "Election Tensions Rise in Zimbabwe After Police Bar Opposition Party from Holding a Rally," Fox 5 San Diego, August 2023, <https://fox5sandiego.com/news/world-news/ap-international/ap-election-tensions-rise-in-zimbabwe-after-police-bar-opposition-party-from-holding-a-rally/>; and Pindula News, "Police Fire Tear Gas to Disperse CCC Supporters at Chamisa's Rally," Pindula, August 14, 2023, <https://www.pindula.co.zw/2023/08/14/police-fire-tear-gas-to-disperse-ccc-supporters-at-chamisas-rally/>.

¹⁰⁸ Online interview with Tirivashe, December 2023.

time. And CCC had over 100 of its rallies that were banned, you know. Because then the ZRP [Zimbabwe Republic Police] would come back with issues like, well, that venue has already been booked or the government is holding a particular event or ZANU PF is holding a particular event in the same vicinity, so we'll be stretched. They always used to use this statement of saying, "We'll be stretched with resources. We won't be able to have manpower. We don't have sufficient manpower to be, you know, providing protection."

State authorities increased crackdowns on opposition activists and leaders through arbitrary arrests for issues that took place in the past.¹⁰⁹ For instance, prominent political activist and leader of Transform Zimbabwe party Jacob Ngarivhume called for nationwide protests on corruption in the country in 2020.¹¹⁰ In April 2023, Ngarivhume was convicted and sentenced to 4 years in prison.¹¹¹ His conviction comes after being unlawfully detained pretrial until 2023.¹¹² Another opposition leader Job Sikhala was arrested in 2022 and charged with a 6-month suspended sentence in 2023 for posting a video in which he demanded justice for the murder of opposition activist Moreblessing Ali in June 2022.¹¹³ With these crackdowns, the opposition parties were starved of the human resources needed for establishing the necessary support among voters.

The legal challenges faced by opposition activists and supporters made it difficult for opposition parties to fully concentrate on canvassing and building support due to the distractions of fighting legal challenges. Moreover, with the arrests of supporters and activists, opposition parties were incapacitated and stripped of the manpower needed for successful campaigning.

At the legal level, Ops and CSOs were criminalised for behaviour that is characteristic of typical political opponents such as criticising the sitting government. The introduction of the Patriotic Bill is one example of such criminalising.¹¹⁴ The Bill allows the state to monitor and suppress political organisations, activists, and journalists who are critical

¹⁰⁹ CIVICUS, "State of Civil Society Report 2023," CIVICUS Global Alliance, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2023>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

of the government.¹¹⁵ Under this bill, criticising the government is seen as being unpatriotic and makes provisions for sentences as harsh as the death sentence.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Sitholenotes that the language of the act is vague about what constitutes unpatriotic behaviour, thus making CSOs and OPs unduly vulnerable to arrest and harsh penalty. In so doing, the ruling party - which is conflated with the state – was able to silence voices of dissent in the run up to elections.¹¹⁷ By silencing criticism, ZANU-PF further placed itself in advantageous position ahead of the polls.

Civil society activist and opposition party member, Munashe recalled his experiences of the Patriotic Bill and the effect it had on the capacity of CSOs to participate in the 2023 election.

Civic society organisations have had to change their mandates so that they survive in this country. I told you that there are various pieces of legislation here that criminalise the participation of civic society organisations even in their areas. The registration of organisations, now they have passed another fascist piece of legislation, the Patriotic Act, which criminalises even dissemination of information to foreign bodies in this country and beyond. So, to survive, civic society organisations, some have had to seek accommodation with the regime. Some have had to change their mandates, just to survive. So elections have also had a negative impact on the participation of civic societies and the greatest loser is the citizen.¹¹⁸

Reducing the potential number of votes in favour of opposition parties.

Opposition parties confronted a diminished voter base on account of various strategies. Firstly, Zimbabweans in neighbouring South Africa – a population of over a million - were not allowed to vote unless they returned to Zimbabwe whereas other Zimbabweans in

¹¹⁵ Tinashe Sithole, "Zimbabwe's Patriotic Act Erodes Freedoms and May Be a Tool for Repression," The Conversation, August 3, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/zimbabwes-patriotic-act-erodes-freedoms-and-may-be-a-tool-for-repression-209984>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Online Interview with Munashe, December 2024,

the diaspora were allowed to vote at their nearest embassy.¹¹⁹ The feasibility of Zimbabwean citizens crossing the border for a few days was challenging as some Zimbabweans are in South Africa illegally, whilst others do not have the finances and leeway to travel easily. The largest population of Zimbabweans is in South Africa at just over 700 thousand people officially interviewed by South African news outlet Daily Maverick showed that a number of Zimbabweans expressed interest in voting for the opposition parties.¹²⁰ Thus, it can be argued that there is a significant voter base that was silenced as part of the ruling party-cum-state's attempts to disadvantage the opposition.

In May 2022, the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC) began carrying out a delimitation exercise in terms of Section 161 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.¹²¹ The delimitation process refers to the re-drawing and demarcation of constituencies and wards such that all constituencies can have equal numbers of voters.¹²² Constitutionally, ZEC is legally mandated to carry out such an exercise once every 10 years. However, many critics noted that the process of delimitation was unclear and unfair because (a) there was insufficient engagement and deliberation with key stakeholders; (b) the formula used to demarcate the constituencies was controversial such that ZEC's new boundaries set the maximum and minimum registered voter threshold was not in line with the constitutionally mandated voter numbers; (c) the process led to many opposition strongholds being merged and collapsed into the incumbent party's strongholds whilst the incumbent party's strongholds remained largely unchanged.¹²³

According to Phillan Zamchiya and Gavin Cawthra, the ZEC used the delimitation exercise to disadvantage the opposition parties by redefining the constituent boundaries in ways that supported the incumbent government.¹²⁴ What worsened the suspicions

¹¹⁹ Ray Ndlovu, "Four Out of Five Diasporan Zimbabweans Live in South Africa," Bloomberg, September 6, 2022, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-06/four-out-of-five-diasporan-zimbabweans-live-in-south-africa>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Farirai Machivenyika, "Delimitation of Constituencies Begins," The Herald, May 26, 2022, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.herald.co.zw/delimitation-of-constituencies-begins/>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ See for examples: Gavin Cawthra, "Delimitation and Democracy: The 2023 Zimbabwean Experience," *African Journal of Governance and Development* 12, no. 2 (2023): 89-105; and Phillan Zamchiya, "Electoral Boundaries and Political Representation in Zimbabwe: An Analysis of the 2023 Delimitation Exercise," *Journal of African Elections* 22, no. 1 (2023): 45-67.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

that ZEC has misused its authority to lead the delimitation exercise was its refusal to share the voters' roll as framed by the new boundaries.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the renamed wards and the re-constructed boundaries created confusion among voters during the voter registration period as many citizens had no idea which boundary they now belonged to.¹²⁶ In response to the controversial delimitation exercise, leader of a new version of legacy opposition party MDC Douglas Mwonzora boycotted the poll in protest of the irregularities surrounding the new boundaries.¹²⁷ Mwonzora argued that the irregularities of the delimitation exercise would be a “foolish act of bravery.”¹²⁸

On the day of the election, voting materials such as ballot papers were missing, misprinted, or did not arrive at polling stations on time. This led to massive delays to the voting process which has been described as a method to frustrate voters until they resign and decide not to vote. This argument was especially poignant because the problems concerning voting materials was mainly in opposition strongholds.¹²⁹ Tirivashe's experiences as an election observer demonstrate the extent of the issues regarding voting materials.

...speaking of actual voting day, there were a lot of irregularities, I mean they are well documented kuti some polling stations didn't open on time. People voted until manheru. Isusu yedu polling station yakavhura on time zvayo but maballot papers that were missing were mostly kumawlocal council ballot paper. Those were the ones that were mostly missing. I think it was almost a deliberate sabotage move because they should have known kuti Bulawayo, when it comes to local, people don't play about CCC. Those ones vanotongo-win-wa, it's a well-known thing you know. So they were probably trying to frustrate voters to say, “Ah sanovhotai for mamwe aya whilst we're waiting for vane mamwe maballot papers.”, but people were resilient. People really tried to be patient despite everything... kwanga kuine maballot papers they were insufficient, there would

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ CCEOM, “Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission Zimbabwe 2023,” European Union Election Observation Mission, November 17, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-zimbabwe-2023/final-report-eu-eom-zimbabwe-2023_en?s=410326.

run out. Kumwe kwacho there were no ballot papers at all. Other places the polling stations did not open on time.¹³⁰

Additionally, there was a widespread misinformation campaign which saw thousands of posters of CCC President Nelson Chamisa telling people not to vote.¹³¹ This campaign nearly damaged the opposition's potential voter base as many supporters of Chamisa truly believed that there was some danger or significant challenge that would lead the CCC leader to disrupt the voting process¹³²). Tirivashe, again witnessed the use of misinformation in the 2023 election period in her role as an observer. Her knowledge supports Ndlovu's report of the day.

“... pane maflyers aka distribute-wa kuchinzi CCC is saying, “Do not vote. Boycott the vote.”. That was a new one. Atori nepicture ya Nelson Chamisa. I saw these, they were strewn all over the place. So you can say, I don't know what you can call it. Whether you can call it misguided, I don't know whether you can call it propaganda. It's not so much propaganda, but it was misrepresentation of information, right? Where you had these fake CCC flyers being thrown out zvichinzi CCC irikuti kunevanhu, “Do not vote.” And then there was also this thing. There were a lot of people who received matext messages. You had people who received matext messages anga akanyorwa nechiShona anga akatoreba. They were very long. I don't know how, there's questions now according to protection of information yemacitizens because people were getting these random texts on their phones zvichinzi, “VaED Mhangagwa varikufamba vachitiitira zvakakanaka munyika.”, akanyorwa nechiShona chiri very deep.”

Limiting avenues for transparency and accountability

In preparation for and during the 2023 election, ZANU-PF through the parliament and the ZEC have been persistently accused of conducting an opaque electoral process to ensure a successful election for ZANU-PF by illicit means. One of the ways that countries demonstrate that they are participating in an honest, fair, and transparent election is by permitting domestic and international election observers – short term and long term – to

¹³⁰ Online Interview with Tirivashe, December 2023.

¹³¹ CCEOM, “Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission Zimbabwe 2023,”

¹³² Ibid.

witness and document various aspects of the electoral process. However, in Zimbabwe's case, the government was accused of "cherry-picking" observer missions, delaying accreditation application outcomes and, in many cases, outright rejection of long-term observer missions.¹³³ Elections expert for South Africa's Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa Grant Materson expressed that:

"Regrettably, most of the international election observer missions will be short-term and, historically, observers have not been on the ground during the crucial periods around voter registration, candidate nominations and the campaign period,"¹³⁴.

Materson's observations were strengthened by ZANU-PF's stance on the presence of election observer as expressed by Mnangagwa's deputy chief secretary George Charamba who threatened to deport observation missions if they exhibited interest in discrediting the elections.¹³⁵

Most missions acknowledge that their presence in Zimbabwe was because the government had invited them to observe the election. However, on receiving an unfavourable report, ZANU-PF launched personal and professional attacks on the observation missions and the heads of mission (ISS, 2023). For example, after the SADC-EOM report, state-owned newspaper *The Herald* attempted to undermine and discredit the SADC-EOM by accusing the head of mission Dr Nevers Mumba of "hobnobbing" with the opposition, of being mentally ill, and of being a "convict."

The Herald drew on previous court cases in which Mumba was accused and convicted for abuse of authority in two separate cases in 2015 to demonstrate that the whole SADC-EOM was not to be trusted.¹³⁶ It can be argued that ZANU-PF through ZEC only granted the SADC-EOM permission to observe the election with the assumption that the report

¹³³ Frank Chikowore and Peter Fabricius, "It's 'Foolish Bravery' to Take Part in These Zimbabwe Elections," Daily Maverick, August 20, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-08-20-its-foolish-bravery-to-take-part-in-these-zimbabwe-elections/>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Innocent Mujeri, "Nevers Mumba, SADC Mission: A Proxy for Gdansk Declaration?" The Herald, August 31, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.herald.co.zw/nevers-mumba-sadc-mission-a-proxy-for-gdansk-declaration/>.

would be favourable.¹³⁷ The reaction to the SADC-EOM report reveals that ZANU-PF and ZEC were indeed cherry-picking observation missions to control the narrative about the election. Hence, despite knowing and ignoring Dr Mumba's background when granting the SADC-EOM's accreditation, ZANU-PF still granted the mission permission to be in the country.

The EU-EOM also confronted a series of attacks following their preliminary report and pre-election critique about the delays in revealing the voters' roll. Prior to the election, The Herald published a story accusing the EU-EOM of bribery and intentionally "tarnishing the country's image".¹³⁸ The Herald alleged that the EU-EOM bribed Zimbabwean journalists with whiskey, grocery vouchers, and fuel coupons with the aim of influencing the journalists "to make outlandish claims that seek to sully the whole election process."¹³⁹

The treatment of the EU-EOM and SADC-EOM is reminiscent of the strategies used by ZANU-PF on opposition members, activists, journalists and civil society members. Firstly, the ruling party seeks to control the narrative and behaviour of those it perceives as threats. With opposition party members this means limiting airtime on radio and television, as well limiting the number of rallies during the campaign period. With activists and civil society members this means pervasive surveillance during demonstrations and on the media. Similarly, with observer missions it meant an attempt to limit interactions between EOMs and opposition party leaders. For instance, both SADC-EOM and EU-EOM were accused of having a conflict of interest or bias after they met with several opposition leaders as part of the observation process.

The second strategy is the violent reaction that usually follows after ZANU-PF fails to control the behaviour of perceived opponents. For opposition members and activists, it typically means arbitrary arrests based on past criminal infringements as witnessed with journalist Hopewell Chin'ono when he exposed various corruption-related scandals and

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ "Observer Team in Bribery Storm," The Herald, August 18, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.herald.co.zw/observer-team-in-bribery-storm/>.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

was accused of “communicating falsehoods,”¹⁴⁰ or with comedian Samantha Kureya was abducted and tortured in 2019 for a critical skit exposing police brutality in 2015.¹⁴¹ In a similar fashion, ZANU-PF drew on past cases to discredit its opponent and draw attention away from its abuses of power by resuscitating the previous cases filed against SADC-EOM’s Dr Nevers Mumba.

For domestic observers, the ZANU-PF reaction went further than reputational damage and extended to a combined tactic of repression and discreditation. Forty one poll monitors working for two accredited domestic monitoring organisations – the Zimbabwe Elections Support Network and the Election Resource Center were arrested, and their equipment confiscated while tabulating the results of the vote count the day after the election on 24 August 2023. ZRP spokesperson Paul Nyathi justified the arrests by accusing the detainees of partaking in criminal and subversive activities in a bid to fabricate election results.¹⁴²

Although ZANU-PF through state resources like the police and the media typically stifle opposition, criticism, and transparent processes; the international community through election observation missions also enable the ruling party’s behaviour. According to the Institute of Security Studies, observation missions are engaged in a balancing act of holding the government to account and trying to maintain relations in favour of external discussions and negotiations.¹⁴³ In this case, ISS argues that the findings of the SADC-EOM, EU-EOM and the Carter Center-EOM will be parked to allow a positive outcome in the African Development Banks’s debt resolution negotiations.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Fazila Mahomed, “Zimbabwean Journalist Hopewell Chin’ono Wins Court Battle, but Not Yet the War,” Daily Maverick, May 2, 2021, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-02-zimbabwean-journalist-hopewell-chinono-wins-court-battle-but-not-yet-the-war/>.

¹⁴¹ Maya Oppenheim, “Zimbabwe Satirist Abducted, Stripped and Forced to Drink Sewage Amid Crackdown on Opposition,” The Independent, August 23, 2019, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/samantha-kureya-gonyeti-zimbabwe-satirist-abducted-gonyeti-harare-a9076256.html>.

¹⁴² Farai Mutsaka and Gerald Imray, “Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa Wins Re-election After Troubled Vote, Officials Say,” August 27, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/zimbabwe-election-emmerson-mnangagwa-4aaeb10b7bf49f54fd10af141d18ced2>.

¹⁴³ Institute of Security Studies, “Balancing Act: Observation Missions and Government Accountability,” ISS Africa, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://issafrica.org/research/reports/balancing-act-observation-missions-and-government-accountability>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

The AfDB's debt resolution negotiations involve a series of negotiations between Zimbabwe and various creditors such as the Bretton Woods institutions to unblock Zimbabwe's access to international credit and to ease the conditions of repayment of past debts.¹⁴⁵ To do this, creditors insisted that the government undertake a process of reform towards good governance, economic reform, and land reform. Thus, the election served as a vital demonstration for creditors to see if Zimbabwe could reform. With the brutal reports, the negotiations would have been endangered.

True to the ISS's analysis that the international community was balancing between the negotiations and escalating the electoral violations, the SADC troika has since not made any moves that acknowledge the recommendations and findings of the SADC-EOM.¹⁴⁶

Opposition responses

Following the outcome of the election, the main opposition party CCC decided against challenging the outcome via the courts although having rejected the result.¹⁴⁷ According to Hopewell Chin'ono, this decision was wise given that the Zimbabwean judiciary is biased and captured by the state (Chin'ono on SABC, 2023). Furthermore, history, as discussed above, shows that the judiciary has always dismissed court challenges regarding election outcomes that are in favour of ZANU-PF.¹⁴⁸

Another avenue for the opposition party involves engaging with the international community and petitioning them to put pressure on the incumbent government. In 2008, international pressure played a significant role in achieving the government of national unity between ZANU-PF and MDC.¹⁴⁹ However, this avenue was undermined when South African president Cyril Ramaphosa and the African National Congress (ANC) endorsed

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ See for example: Paul Nantulya, "Zimbabwe's Debt Resolution and the Role of the African Development Bank," African Center for Strategic Studies, March 15, 2023, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/zimbabwes-debt-resolution-and-the-role-of-the-african-development-bank/>; David Berbington, "AfDB's Strategic Engagement in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities," African Development Review 35, no. 2 (2023): 123-145; and Thandeka Kasambala, "Navigating Zimbabwe's Economic Recovery: The AfDB's Role," Journal of African Economies 32, no. 3 (2023): 210-230.

¹⁴⁷ Frank Chikowore and Xolisani Ncube, "'Africa, do not leave us' – Opposition plans to challenge poll results as Mnangagwa calls for Zim unity,"

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Fortune Matiashe, "South Africa's Role in Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity: A Balancing Act," African Affairs, 122, no. 487 (2023): 345-367.

the election by attending the inauguration and congratulating President Mnangagwa.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the SADC principle of soft-diplomacy and past policy on non-interference means that the EOM's report is non-binding. According to political analyst Mandla Langa, the divisions within SADC regarding the leadership's diverse stances on Zimbabwe have also curtailed potential intervention in the Zimbabwean election.¹⁵¹

The CCC also attempted to call for a nationwide protest on the election outcome, but this was met with stern promise of a strong crackdown by the incumbent president. With Zimbabwe's history of violent crackdown, the nationwide protest failed to gain much traction.¹⁵²

This chapter explored that relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe are characterised by violence, coercion, and co-optation. The uncertainty of elections gives life to contentious political interactions due to the opportunities and threats held by elections. On one hand, the elections held the promise for a regime change from ZANU-PF to the main opposition party, CCC. On the other hand, the elections also stood as a threat to an established regime. At the same time, elections also held a reminder of elections past – featured by violence, abductions, torture, and predictable electoral outcomes. It is also clear that the interactions between political actors were entangled by the complicity of observation groups, the weaknesses and blind spots of the opposition, as well as the desires to achieve political parity through the electoral process.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Mandla Langa, "SADC's Influence in Zimbabwe's Political Landscape: The Case of the Government of National Unity," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 49, no. 2 (2023): 189-210.

¹⁵² Nyasha Chingono, "Negotiating Power: South Africa and the Formation of Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 18, no. 1 (2023): 78-95.

Chapter 3: The Historical Foundation of Political Interactions in Zimbabwe

So, I had a nasty exchange during my presentation with [Christopher] Mutsvangwa¹⁵³ and... he sort of exemplified or put to the fore what I think was the attitude from the ruling party. Because I think I tried to say that “During your presentation [at the 2023 Chatham House Round Table] you sort of kind of tell us that you are entitled to be in power and that really you would do everything within your power to stop anyone. And what that does is sort of not give confidence to citizens on processes and the outcome of the processes when you go into an election...” That's when he said the statement that; “When we were unhappy in the 70s we went to war. So, if you guys are unhappy, do like what we did in the 70s” Literally, [he] was saying that go to war if you think that the way we are running the country is wrong.¹⁵⁴

Panashe’s recollection of his experience with Minister Mutsvangwa highlights how unresolved historical tensions continue to shape the current political interactions in Zimbabwe. Moreover, Mutsvangwa’s statement, equating dissatisfaction with governance to the need for violent resistance, exemplifies the ruling party's entrenched view of its entitlement to power, rooted in its liberation war legacy. This chapter focuses on the historical foundations of the interactions between political actors. This chapter argues that the behaviours and responses that political actors have towards each other are founded on unresolved historical tensions. This unresolved historical foundation re-produces the behaviours and interactions present in current political interactions including their approaches to the electoral process. Because this thesis seeks to go beyond the victim/perpetrator dichotomy by regarding political actors as complex political identities, examining the historical foundations of these political interactions provides that opportunity.

In order to interrogate the ways that historical factors influence and shape the current political interactions in Zimbabwe, I will begin by examining how historical factors

¹⁵³ At the time of writing, Christopher Mutsvangwa is the Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services of Zimbabwe.

¹⁵⁴ Online interview with Panashe, January 2024.

complicate the identities and interactions of political actors beyond the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. Secondly, this chapter will discuss the political history of Zimbabwe in order to show the links and continuities between current political interactions and past political interactions. By so doing, this chapter demonstrates that not only do elections present moments of reiterating the past, but they also have a bearing on the capacity for political actors to challenge the asymmetries in their interactions. Lastly, this chapter will analyse how this historical foundation rears its head in present political interactions – further complicating the identities of the marginalised political actors.

Of complex identities and dynamics: Victims as Perpetrators

This thesis posits that relationships between political actors are entangled and ensnared as a result of their location within a particular socio-historical process. When examining the historical foundations of complex interactions, Sarah Nutall’s lens of ‘entanglement’ once again becomes useful. Nutall argues that there are different forms of entanglement and they each have a bearing on the relationship dynamics between political actors – one of these forms being ‘historical entanglement’.¹⁵⁵

For Nutall, historical entanglement is a set of social relations born out of institutions and social interactions of oppression, resistance, and negotiation. The persistence of institutions forged out of colonial rule further complicates and reiterates social relations born out of inequality, violence, and dispossession.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the reiteration and persistence of institutions and social relations of violence, inequality, and dispossession produces an intimacy between political actors – whether the intimacy is resisted, ignored, or uninvited.¹⁵⁷

In the context of this thesis – and particularly this chapter, I argue that the political history of settler-colonialism, of dispossession, and the liberation struggle has produced iterations of “complex victims” and “complex perpetrators”. If one regards authoritarianism as a socio-political process within which Zimbabwe’s political actors

¹⁵⁵ Nuttall, Sarah. “Introduction.” Introduction. In *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*, 1–16. Wits University Press, 2009.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

are located, then it becomes evident how this process has blurred the binary of the victim/perpetrator. Furthermore, I interpret Nutall's claim of 'intimacy' to mean the ways in which political actors mirror, re-produce, and re-iterate dynamics of perceived perpetrators at different points in time.

Nutall's lens on entanglement finds voice in Mahmoud Mamdani's native/settler dichotomy. Mamdani argues that there is a connection between violence in the colonial era and violence in contemporary Africa.¹⁵⁸ As with scholars like Aimé Césaire Homi K Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Mamdani argues that violence in contemporary Africa has its roots in the institutions of the colonial state which codified violent and asymmetrical relations in law.¹⁵⁹ During this period, colonial masters established power and authority by ignoring the humanity of other races and by politicising group identities in order to fragment them.¹⁶⁰ This dual process is thus referred to as the production of the native and settler identities where the 'settler' is the identity which has the right of authority, and of belonging, whereas the 'native' identity is classed as inferior, and as an enemy to the position and identity of the settler.

According to Mamdani, these identities were institutionalised by the colonial state, and as a result, post-colonial states built atop these institutions re-engage these identities such that "yesterday's victims are today's perpetrators."¹⁶¹ To this end, Mamdani argues that when investigating complex societies marked by histories of violence, we must "[seek] to understand the humanity of the perpetrator... to get under the skin of the perpetrator – not to excuse the perpetrator, and the killing, but to make the act 'thinkable', so as to learn something about ourselves as humans."¹⁶²

Because this thesis views the political ecosystem in Zimbabwe as a living organism that is sensitive to internal and external pressures, the arguments put forward by Nutall and Mamdani assist in making sense of the interactions between political actors in

¹⁵⁸ In Mahmoud Mamdani, "Making Sense of Political Violence in Post-Colonial Africa)

¹⁵⁹ Read more extensively: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), 87-90; Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42-45; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 202-205; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112-115.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Zimbabwe by tracing their evolution and development across time. The scholars' arguments show that the identities of today are not unique forms but remnants of and reiterations of the past given the similar conditions and processes.

Examining the historical foundation of political interactions in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's political landscape has been shaped by a long history of authoritarian rule, stemming from various sources.¹⁶³ The country's political history is a continuous progression of different forms of authoritarianism, starting with white-settler colonialism from 1890 to 1979 and followed by a black post-colonial regime since 1980.¹⁶⁴ According to Eldred Masunungure, three major influences have contributed to Zimbabwe's political culture: African traditionalism, settler colonialism, and liberation war politics.¹⁶⁵ These three streams are all rooted in authoritarian principles and have individually and collectively influenced and shaped the interactions between political actors and the capacity for political actors to transcend the vestiges of the past.¹⁶⁶

The combination of these three streams is demonstrated emphatically during elections as revealed in Chapter two's examination of political interactions as they manifest during elections. The key features of these three streams as illustrated in Chapter two include *inter alia*: co-optation and weakening of political adversaries, repression, censorship, and military intervention as mediatory technologies of political interactions; the use of law and the judiciary to codify and justify these mediatory technologies and to entrench asymmetrical relationship dynamics.

The following outline of the relationship dynamics between political actors in the colonial, post-colonial, and post-independence period, illustrates how deeply entrenched the logics of the colonial state are in the contemporary political ecosystem of Zimbabwe. This outline makes it clear that at different periods, under different conditions, and given the same institutions and material resources, political actors will likely reproduce the same patterns of the past. The resistance of political actors - particularly those who are marginalised and repressed - create tensions with other

¹⁶³ Eldred Masunungure, "Zimbabwe's Militarized, Electoral Authoritarianism," 2011

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

political actors as they attempt to break from the past by calling on new ideas and forms of consciousness to justify the break. However, once the native/settler identities are reproduced, a greater tension ensues – of attempting to be faithful to the logics that engendered a new position in the political ecosystem but being lured and eventually capitulating to the very logics that the political actors sought to change.

Violence, Repression, and Censorship: The Colonial Period

The colonial history of Zimbabwe was marked by a systematic pattern of state-sponsored violence and repression.¹⁶⁷ Across four regimes including the period of company rule (1890-1923), responsible government (1924-1953), federation (1953-1963), and the government of the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) (1965-1975); the Rhodesian state built an elaborate and brutal political system that permeated all aspects of society, supported by a highly repressive legislative framework enforced by an overzealous judiciary and civil service.¹⁶⁸

During the colonial period, the Rhodesian Security Forces, including the notorious Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), partisan police, and army, routinely harassed, detained, tortured, and executed political opponents of the racist colonial regimes that ruled Zimbabwe from 1890 to 1979.¹⁶⁹ As African resistance to colonial rule grew, the dictatorship became increasingly ferocious. For example, from 1933 to 1958, the Huggins and Todd governments enacted the Subversive Activities Act (SAA), which allowed the government to ban any activities deemed subversive.¹⁷⁰

The colonial government's repressive tactics escalated further with the 1965 Emergency Powers Act (EPA), which granted the government draconian powers to declare a state of emergency and enact regulations to deal with any perceived crisis.¹⁷¹ Under the EPA, the government could detain individuals indefinitely without trial, leading to the long-term

¹⁶⁷ Kwashirai, Vimbai Chaumba. "Violence, a Colonial Curse: The 1980 General Elections." Chapter. In *Election Violence in Zimbabwe: Human Rights, Politics and Power*, 8–34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

detention, torture, and secret execution of thousands of Africans, including nationalist leaders.¹⁷²

The security agencies, such as the Police Special Branch, CIO, and army, used the legal framework provided by the EPA to set up "murder and sabotage squads" to suppress nationalist agitation, boycotts, strikes, and protests.¹⁷³ This display of "savage resourcefulness and initiative" by the colonial state highlights the extent of its repression and the lengths it was willing to go to maintain its grip on power in the face of growing African resistance.¹⁷⁴

The Rhodesian colonial state also employed a range of repressive tactics, including censorship and draconian legislation, to suppress African nationalism and maintain its grip on power.¹⁷⁵ The Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA), introduced in 1960, was a particularly harsh piece of legislation that granted sweeping powers to the police and government to crack down on nationalist activities.¹⁷⁶

Under the LOMA, the police could enter and search private homes without a warrant, forbid any person from addressing meetings, disperse public gatherings, and impose conditions on public processions or demonstrations.¹⁷⁷ The government used these powers to ban nationalist organizations and parties, such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), which was banned within a year of its founding in 1962.¹⁷⁸ With their leaders imprisoned or in exile, African nationalists split into new antagonistic parties, which the government manipulated and divided using its vast resources and propaganda.¹⁷⁹ The government also went so far as to make it an offense to do anything that might expose government offices and security personnel to contempt or ridicule.¹⁸⁰

The LOMA also empowered the Ministers of Justice and Internal Affairs to ban any publications deemed to "violate the public interest".¹⁸¹ Officials imposed harsh

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

penalties for the publication, printing, selling, distribution, or reproduction of prohibited materials. The Moto periodical, published by the Roman Catholic Church, was regularly censored or banned, and its staff were subjected to constant harassment and surveillance.¹⁸²

The Colonial State's Weaponization of the Law

The law, as Mamdani discusses, was one of the weapons of colonial states because it codified and legalised the dehumanisation of the “native”.¹⁸³ In Zimbabwe, the colonial Rhodesian government employed a range of draconian laws and legislation to suppress African nationalism and maintain its grip on power. This "lawfare" approach was a central component of the state's repressive tactics. In 1971, for instance, the Unlawful Organisations Act (UOA) granted the President sweeping powers to declare any organization, including political parties, as unlawful if its activities were deemed to endanger public order.¹⁸⁴ This, combined with the Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA), the Vagrancy Act (VAA), and the Preservation of Constitutional Government Act (PCGA), had the overall effect of criminalizing legitimate African participation in politics. The LOMA was particularly brutal, with the then-federal chief justice, Robert Tredgold, resigning in protest, describing it as a "savage, evil, mean and dirty" law.¹⁸⁵

A Kangaroo court and Justice denied:

The colonial justice system was inherently biased, with the police force being white or white-controlled, and the vast majority of the prison population being black. Investigations and prosecutions for the torture and abuse of black people, even in non-political situations, were rare.¹⁸⁶ Violence and racism were deeply embedded in the colonial system, with little to deter the perpetrators of torture and other abuses.

Although the present political interactions are largely not underscored by issues of race, the endurance of a culture of impunity remains, and creates frictions between political

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Mahmoud Mamdani, “Making sense of violence in Post Colonial Africa”.

¹⁸⁴ George Hamandishe Karekwaivanane. “Laying Down the Law: A Historical Background, 1890–1950.” Chapter. In *The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950*, 24–46. African Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

actors as this culture denies justice to the victims of the violent and repressive practices, and thus creates a silence around violence and oppression – the results of which re-entrench the same practices across generations. This enduring impunity is illustrated by the capture of the judiciary –recalled by 43-year-old lawyer, political activist, and academic Hamandishe,

“If look at the legislature, the manner in which it operates is that it operates in order to advantage the ruling party. If you look at the judiciary from 2000 until the last election in August it is crafted authoritarianism, infiltrated by the ruling elite in a manner that the rulings that they deliver fundamentally are there to serve the interest of the ruling elite. Let me give you an example of 2017, after the coup led by Mnangagwa they went to court. Some war veterans, ana Mutsvangwa, went to court and in the court Justice Chiweshe, who is a former member of the army, ruled that the 2017 coup was constitutional. Chamisa in 2018 went to court and they ruled that despite the evidence that was presented in the court that the election was free and fair.”¹⁸⁷

The persistence of a culture of impunity, thus, limits the capacity for political interactions to reform and re-organise the basis of their interactions on new underpinnings marked by fairness and credibility as will be observed in the next section on the political interactions of the post-colonial period.¹⁸⁸

Of complex victims and complex perpetrators: The Post-colonial period

The late 1970s marked a critical period in Zimbabwe's struggle for independence, characterized by the formation of the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) in 1976, which united the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA).¹⁸⁹ This coalition led to intensified fighting on the war front and increased diplomatic pressure on the conflicting parties. In 1977, the Rhodesian government rejected the Anglo-American proposals aimed at addressing African demands, fearing that such concessions would ultimately lead to majority rule.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Online interview with Hamandishe, December 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Gusha, Isheanesu. 2019. “Memories of Gukurahundi massacre and the challenge of reconciliation.” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 45(1), 1-14. <https://dx.doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/3707>

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

The two main liberation movements, ZAPU and ZANU, later adopted the name Patriotic Front (PF) to enhance their national appeal, while simultaneously denouncing the internal political settlement of March 3, 1978, which established a racially discriminatory two-tier voting system favouring whites.¹⁹¹

The Rhodesian government's strategy of oppression continued with its labelling of ZAPU and ZANU as terrorist organizations, which excluded them from participating in the 1979 elections.¹⁹² This exclusion mirrored earlier tactics employed under the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (LOMA) and the Unlawful Organisations Act (UOA), which had criminalized legitimate African political activities.¹⁹³ The 1979 elections were held under coercive conditions, with widespread intimidation aimed at ensuring voter compliance, reflecting a continuity of state-sponsored violence and repression.¹⁹⁴ Observers noted that many voters faced threats from employers and government forces, while the government claimed an inflated voter turnout despite the absence of prior voter registration.

During this tumultuous period, armed units aligned with Muzorewa and Sithole engaged in violence against each other and against the civilian population, further complicating the political landscape.¹⁹⁵ The government's heavy-handed tactics and the activities of these auxiliaries contributed to a climate of fear and repression, damaging the legitimacy of the electoral process. The brief Muzorewa government, which came to power in June 1979, continued this trend of violence, committing atrocities against perceived opponents.¹⁹⁶

The oppressive strategies employed by the Rhodesian government laid the groundwork for the post-independence period. After the 1980 elections, ZANU initiated a campaign of terror against PF-ZAPU strongholds in a civil conflict known as Gukurahundi, which resulted in the deaths of over 20,000 civilians between 1982 and 1987.¹⁹⁷ This campaign echoed earlier tactics of repression, as ZANU sought to consolidate its power by

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² George Hamandishe Karekwaivanane. "Laying Down the Law: A Historical Background, 1890–1950."

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Gusha, Isheanesu. 2019. "Memories of Gukurahundi massacre and the challenge of reconciliation."

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

systematically targeting its political adversaries. Initially, ZANU invited ZAPU leaders to join a coalition government, but soon began a public campaign to undermine ZAPU's influence, culminating in declarations that ZAPU was an enemy of the state.¹⁹⁸

ZANU's use of North Korean instructors to train the 5th Brigade, tasked with quelling dissent, further exemplified the continuity of oppressive strategies.¹⁹⁹ The government's narrative framed ZAPU as a threat, justifying violent crackdowns on its members and sympathizers. This approach was reminiscent of earlier colonial tactics, where the state utilized legal frameworks to legitimize violence against political opponents.²⁰⁰

Despite the ongoing violence and repression, ZAPU managed to retain parliamentary seats during the 1985 elections, demonstrating resilience in the face of state-sponsored terror.²⁰¹ However, the genocide in Matabeleland weakened ZAPU politically and operationally, ultimately leading to the Unity Accord of 1987, which merged ZANU and PF-ZAPU into ZANU-PF.²⁰² This consolidation of power reflected a long-standing pattern of using violence, repression, and legal manipulation to suppress political adversaries, a strategy that persisted from colonial rule through to the post-independence era.

The re-iteration of violent institutions: the post-independence period

“The post-2000 period marked what is arguably the most turbulent phase in the electoral history of the country since independence in 1980, and Zimbabwe's elections were de facto degraded, becoming a means of sustaining incumbents in power.”²⁰³

In September 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed with its members stemming from the ZCTU and NCA. According to Asuelime and Simura MDC represented the first political party in Zimbabwe that had few ties to the liberation movement, and whose campaign was based on the issues of the time including inter-alia

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Mark Nyandoro, “Zimbabwe's Post-2000 Elections: More Hotly Contested yet Less Democratic than in the Past,” *Journal of African Elections* 21, no. 1 (June 2022), 70

unemployment, constitutional and economic reform, human rights, and justice for past violence.²⁰⁴ MDC's popularity stemmed from the victory of the 'No' vote during the referendum in February 2000; however, its victory and popularity placed a big target on MDC and its supporters ahead of, during, and after the June 2000 parliamentary election.²⁰⁵

The rise of MDC is reminiscent of the rise of the liberation movements in the pre-independence period. During the colonial period, the liberation movements based their campaign on the importance of majority rule, of political freedom, economic empowerment, and the right of self-determination.²⁰⁶ However, these desires and goals were curtailed and repressed on all cylinders. In a turn of events, the desires of MDC – though articulated in the post-independence era – were also shut down on all cylinders.²⁰⁷ This turn of events illustrates that the shift from native to settler is characterised by the internalisation of the logic of violence and exclusion. This internalisation as shown, thus, establishes the foundation of entangled identities and the persistence of political interactions that are characterised by ghosts of the colonial past. This illustration is made clearer in the next section as it describes how these internalised logics manifested in the 2005 elections.

A return to violence in the face of threatening opposition.

“The resurgence of violence in 2000 was categorically a response to emboldened opposition as civil society united to mount a spirited stand against ZANU PF autocracy.”²⁰⁸

On the political party side, ZANU-PF harnessed repressive and ideological state apparatus to dissuade the opposition from continuing its campaign and to also disable

²⁰⁴ See for example, Lucky Asuelime & Blessing Simura, 2014. "The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the Changing Geo-Political Landscape in Zimbabwe," *Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development*, in: Lucky Asuelime & Suzanne Francis (ed.), *Selected Themes in African Political Studies*, edition 127, chapter 0, pages 69-81, Springer.; and Kate Alexander. 2000. Zimbabwean workers, the MDC and the 2000 election. *Review of African Political Economy*, 27(85), 385-406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240008704474>

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 387

²⁰⁶ Wilfred Mhanda, "Relations Among Liberation Movements," 2002, 153. <https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/14-Mhanda.pdf>

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Vimbai Chaumbe Kwashirai, "Election Violence in Zimbabwe", 128

it from expanding its support base. During speeches at campaign rallies, the ruling party encouraged violence against opposition party agents whilst police turned a blind eye to the perpetrators – arguing that they did not intervene in political matters. High ranking ZANU-PF leaders like President Robert Mugabe and the former and late Defence Minister Moven Mahachi threatened the MDC with violence and often warned them against continuing with their campaign. In a report documenting torture and violence in the June 2000 election period, the Amani Trust noted that the state’s Central Intelligence Officers (CIO) would often abduct, beat and torture opposition party agents and members. The Amani Trust’s report illustrates the adoption of the colonial state by the liberation movement-turned-political party. This persistence of the colonial legacy reflected in the governance of the former liberation movement further suggests the cruel irony of the native/settler identities.

“[ZANU-PF will] ‘move door to door, killing like we did to Chiminya. I am the minister responsible for defence, therefore, I am capable of killing,”²⁰⁹

On the civilian side, ZANU-PF perpetrated violence through chaos, intimidation, and rhetoric that drew on the memory of Gukurahundi and the liberation struggle. In the first and most widely documented incident, the ruling party decided to move forward with the farm invasions which saw the displacement of thousands of white farmers and their employees.²¹⁰ For scholars like Kwashirai , Asuelime and Simura , as well as Gaidzanwa the farm invasions were linked to the parliamentary election in two ways. Firstly, without the referendum, ZANU-PF needed a platform on which to base its campaign. For years, the issue of land reform had been on the table but there had not been any significant moves to address the issue.²¹¹The referendum, thus, became the catalyst for ZANU-PF to fast track the process of land reform to assuage the MDC leaning public and ZANU-PF’s waning voter base²¹²Secondly, the land invasions were also a way to intimidate and

²⁰⁹ Norma Kriger, “ZANU(PF) strategies in general elections, 1980–2000: Discourse and coercion,” 29.

²¹⁰ Vimbai Chaumbe Kwashirai, “Election Violence in Zimbabwe”, 143.

²¹¹ Rudo Gaidzanwa, “The Political Culture of Zimbabwe: Continuities and Discontinuities.”

²¹² Ibid.

coerce farm owners and farm workers into voting for ZANU-PF or to abstain from voting altogether.²¹³

Just like the colonial government's targeted crackdown of liberation fighters and activists, suspected and actual MDC-supporters were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, or publicly humiliated at ZANU-PF rallies. Vimbai Kwashirai documents incidences where ZANU-PF would bus MDC supporters to its rallies and officially announce to the rally that they were working for colonialists and promoting white interests.²¹⁴ ZANU-PF candidates would also lie to their voters by telling them that they were being watched or that there were machines that could detect which side they voted for.²¹⁵ Opposition supporters also faced displacement as their homes were often burned down or destructed in many ways whilst others, under threat of being shot with assault rifles, were forced to publicly strip off their MDC t-shirts²¹⁶

Despite these difficult conditions, between 24-25 June 2000, more than 2.5 million registered voters cast their vote in the parliamentary elections.²¹⁷ ZANU-PF won 47.2% of the vote against MDC's 45.6% of the vote.²¹⁸ MDC had won enough parliamentary seats to prevent the ruling party from making constitutional changes by fiat, but their victory also signalled to ZANU-PF the need to intensify its strategies against political rivals.²¹⁹

The history of interactions between political actors from the liberation movement to the rise of MDC reveals that although a dominant political actor may create disabling conditions for other political actors to challenge the power configuration in the political ecosystem; the combined efforts and influence of marginalised political actors produces a formidable adversary for the dominant political actor. These moments of victory and instances where marginalised political actors challenge and/or manage to re-configure the balance of power, demonstrate the limitations and weaknesses of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy.

²¹³ See for example, Norma Kriger (2005), and Amani Trust report (2002).

²¹⁴ Vimbai Chaumbe Kwashirai, "Election Violence in Zimbabwe", 143.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Kate Alexander. "Zimbabwean workers, the MDC and the 2000 election," 392.

While structurally excluded and silenced; the agency of the marginalised political actor cannot be denied. It is this agency which, to some extent, triggers the tensions between the political actors. I say this because, the historical foundation of political interactions in Zimbabwe have so far illuminated that the adoption of the colonial state was not just an adoption of institutions and practices; but it also entailed an adoption of the mentality of colonialism – of constructing an enemy, and dehumanising the enemy based on the perception that the enemy is inferior. Thus, when the ‘enemy’ or ‘inferior’ political actor challenges these perceptions through their agency and mobilisation; it (a) creates a crisis of identity for the dominant political actors, and (b) produces a defensive response from the dominant political actor – whose goal will be to reassert its perceptions and restore ‘order’ in the political ecosystem.

Complicity, Contradictions, and Ironies: Analysing political interactions

Chapters one and two of this thesis have illustrated that the elaborate and brutal colonial political system discussed herein has transcended into present day political interactions. In the present day, this enduring colonial system is also supported by repressive legislation and a captured judiciary and civil service. As Nutall argued, societies built on the backs of violent institutions tend to re-perpetuate the same characteristics, thus creating an intimacy between the political actors of the past and those of the present.

The question arises – what are the effects of such an enduring system of violence? The answer to this is located in the testimonies of Delight – a 38-year-old academic and political activist and 50-year-old political activist Alice who now lives in exile. The two participants observe that the effects of such an elaborate system are that it produces disconcerting interactions between political actors as they participate in the political process, but also as they engage in daily activities.

Delight argues:

“ZANU PF people understand that if you're inside you get to eat, you're fed. You do whatever you do. But there is really no life outside of ZANU. And the opposition hadn't made this clear to itself, and to its membership that there is no life outside of the MDC and because they had not made this clear to themselves and to each

other, they started splintering and that splintering isn't helpful... it's because of this internal strife were now the votes are already divided. And so, from then I think ZANU PF has really learnt that all we have to do is to just carve out a small piece of the opposition... and because of that the opposition is in a continued struggle... this unending spiralling struggle.”²²⁰

Alice supports Delight’s argument and observes:

“I think Zimbabwe is in a place right now where it feels like there's no air circulating and I think that that's by design... I was in Zimbabwe last year for a number of months and it felt like people were suffocating. Like there's no new thinking, and as a result, the ability to dream something different I think has been killed. And it's been killed because everybody is in survival mode and that is an orchestration of the state.”²²¹

Delight and Alice’s observations zone in on the issue of “survival” which is closely linked to Sarah Nutall’s idea of “intimacy”, and which also resonate with the features of Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem discussed in chapter one. The persistence of a perverse and all-encompassing state has led to a situation where the interactions between political actors are marked by several tensions. Firstly, political actors are continuously negotiating, resisting and challenging their position as demonstrated by the “unending struggle” of the opposition as it attempts to carve out a stronger position in the political ecosystem. Secondly, the enduring effects of the colonial state implicate all political actors - rendering them complicit in the perpetuation of a repressive and violent system. The idea that “if you're inside you get to eat, you're fed” and that “the ability to dream something different...has been killed”, shows that in an effort to ‘get on with it’ political actors end up embracing the logic of violence. Thus, I dare say that political actors find themselves in murky waters that make it difficult to survive without being tainted by the past – thus reproducing, over and over, the native/settler identities. The practice of polarisation illustrates the depth of complicity engendered by relationship dynamics between political actors.

²²⁰ Interview with Delight, December 2023.

²²¹ Interview with Alice, January 2024.

Zenzo Moyo argues that with limited avenues to contest the structure of the Zimbabwean political ecosystem, opposition parties and other marginalised political actors practice a culture of polarisation.²²² The scholar defines political polarisation as a ‘mobilisation strategy’ whereby political actors defend their form of politics and their ideas as fundamentally different from those of their adversaries.²²³ This strategy is characterised by a cleavage formed along “processes of inclusion and exclusion... which makes it possible to identify actors in terms of us versus them,” - that is to say, those who support the ruling party and those who do not.²²⁴ Consequently, political actors forming alliances to survive within a settlement do so within the definitions of this binary.²²⁵ For Adrienne LeBas, opposition political actors, in alliance with other marginalised political actors, practice polarisation in order to maintain cohesion, discipline, and “an uncritical consensus”.²²⁶

The culture of polarisation emerged with the rise of MDC in the early 1990s. The opposition party became a foundation for alternative politics for civil society organisations, workers, and voters.²²⁷ Donors, and external actors also followed along the binary – channelling their concerns and desires for democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe by showing support for multiparty politics and/or MDC.²²⁸ Independent media in Zimbabwe modelled itself along this binary – challenging the state media whilst favouring the MDC or associated opposition politics.²²⁹ The practice of polarisation is evident in the media landscape – where the divide is most illustrated between the public/state media versus the independent/private media.

Public media in Zimbabwe is largely dominated by state-owned entities, which operate under significant government influence. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)

²²² Moyo, Zenzo. “Civil Society, the State and Democracy in Zimbabwe, 1988 – 2014 : Hegemonies, Polarities and Fractures.” University of Johannesburg, 2018. Available: <https://ujcontent.uj.ac.za/esploro/outputs/doctoral/Civil-society-the-state-and-democracy/9911990507691/filesAndLinks?index=0>

²²³ Ibid., 87.

²²⁴ Ibid., 88.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ LeBas, Adrienne. “Polarization as Craft: Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe.” *Comparative Politics* 38, no. 4 (2006), 419.

²²⁷ Moyo, Zenzo. “Civil Society, the State and Democracy in Zimbabwe, 1988 – 2014 : Hegemonies, Polarities and Fractures,” 119.

²²⁸ LeBas, Adrienne. “Polarization as Craft: Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe,” 420.

²²⁹ Mare, Admire. “Transforming Fragile Media in Post-Coup Zimbabwe.” *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 9, no. 2 (2019), 114.

is the primary broadcaster, and it operates multiple radio and television stations that predominantly reflect the government's narrative. Major newspapers such as *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* are also state-owned and serve as vehicles for government propaganda, often sidelining critical perspectives and dissenting voices. This has led to widespread public distrust of state media, which is perceived as biased and censored, undermining its credibility as a source of information. In contrast, independent media in Zimbabwe faces a challenging environment marked by legal and economic pressures. While there are several private newspapers, such as NewsDay, The Standard, and Zimbabwe Independent, they operate under the constant threat of government repression. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) has historically restricted the operations of independent media, leading to the closure of several outlets and the imprisonment of journalists for disseminating "false news" or critical reporting. Admire Mare summarises the effect and implications of the practice of polarisation as it manifests in the media space below:

“Political polarization in Zimbabwe has given birth to media polarization, which leads to diametrically opposed news angles on events because when political and economic actors who own the media are polarized, media institutions are likely to reflect that in their content. The situation also cascades down to audiences and advertisers, who are not spared this process of partisan sorting. Supporters of ZANU-PF prefer to consume public media content, while those from the MDC-T prefer the private media. Advertisers are caught in between this vicious political and media divide.”²³⁰

Although the practice of polarisation allows opposition units to articulate their agenda sans ambiguity; the effect of the polarisation culture is that it dilutes the presence of an issues-based political activity which allows the adoption of the best solutions and responses to policy, processes, and institutions.²³¹ For McAdam et al, the consequence of polarisation is that even the best ideas are “rejected [whether in the ruling class or opposition elite] not because of their value proposition, but because they are interpreted

²³⁰ Mare, Admire. “Transforming Fragile Media in Post-Coup Zimbabwe.” *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 9, no. 2 (2019), 115.

²³¹ McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, “Dynamics of Contention.” of *Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 322.

within the polarisation dialectic.”²³² Consequently, political activity in Zimbabwe is less about nation-building and economic development, and more about political adversaries cementing their stance.

Civil society actor Takudzwa demonstrates how this practice manifests in the interactions between the dominant political actors and the marginalised political actors in Zimbabwe.

“... the opposition [is] mimicking in many ways the culture of the ruling party. So, we have got a political culture in Zimbabwe that permeates beyond the opposition and in ZANU PF. So, the politics of personality count. Where in ZANU PF it started with Mugabe and now it's ED [Emmerson Mnangagwa]. In the opposition it was Tsvangirai and now it's Chamisa chete chete. Anyone who would be viewed as criticising Chamisa is regarded as a ZANU PF person. If you are in ZANU PF and you criticize ED, you will be called an opposition person.”²³³

The testimonies above reveal that political actors organise themselves into two powerful groups that follow a binary of the dominant and the marginalised. The dominant group refers to ZANU-PF, state institutions, and ZANU-PF supporters such as the rural electorate and beneficiaries like business entities, religious organisations and traditional organisations. By virtue of its name, the dominant group has a strong social foundation drawn from its access to the state and its historical past as a liberation movement. On the other hand, the marginalised groups refer to the opposition parties and their supporters, CSOs, independent media, and the urban electorate. However, the marginalised group is confronted by a weak material base and internal struggles emanating from these weaknesses as well as the dominant groups' pervasive character.

Justice and the rule of law as relative and subjective terms

An emerging issue that represents a slight break from the legacy colonial state is the dilemma of the judiciary and the rule of law. As discussed above, the colonial state was a clear kangaroo court, particularly in political matters involving blacks and whites.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Interview with Takudzwa, December 2023.

However, in the post-colonial and post-independence periods, the judiciary holds a contradictory and fluid position.

The post-colonial/independence judiciary presents a dilemma for political actors because of its position as judge of victims and perpetrators or wrong-doers and those who are right. This position adds to the complex relationships between political actors. On one hand, the actors acknowledge that the judiciary has been captured by the state (just like the colonial period) – which implies that other political actors have no recourse to challenge the acts of violence, exclusion, and repression performed by the ruling party to other political actors. On the other hand, this same sentiment is not shared when the judiciary rules in favour of a marginalised group of political actors – especially where it relates to the ruling party. Takudzwa illustrates the contradictory and ironic dynamics of Zimbabwe’s political actors,

“... in a democracy the judiciary is seen as one of the estates of the state which people would go to. Now here is my own observation; people have accused the judiciary of being captured yet if you look at the case of the Bulawayo 12²³⁴, MP's that had been removed from the ballot paper, they went to court and they won their case in the same judiciary. But when Chamisa was not declared winner [in 2018], he ended up saying we don't go to the judiciary because it is captured. However, they [CCC] could still accept parliamentary elections from the same voting system. That then brings some bit of contradiction, especially amongst the opposition particularly around Chamisa’s stance that he and his party are prepared to accept parliamentary and council election results from the same election and would not accept presidential result of the same election. Some people have questioned the logic.”²³⁵

Takudzwa’s observation speaks to the heart of this thesis’ inquiry and interrogation into the relationship dynamics between political actors. His observation illustrates the “twistedness” that characterises the Zimbabwean political ecosystem. In rejecting but

²³⁴ The Bulawayo 12 refers to the case of 12 aspiring legislators from the Citizens Coalition for Change who were removed from the 2023 ballot paper by the High Court which argued that the 12 would be disqualified from the 2023 elections due to their alleged submission of nomination papers past the deadline. However, in August 2023, the Supreme Court quashed this decision. See for example, The Herald, <https://www.herald.co.zw/12-ccc-aspiring-mps-reinstated/>

²³⁵ Online interview with Takudzwa, November 2023.

also accepting the status of the judiciary as the arbitrator of political interactions, Nelson Chamisa's actions speak to the difficulties of picking sides or defining strict binaries when describing the Zimbabwean political landscape. Political actors and interactions are complicated because they are at once enablers, beneficiaries, and victims of this perverse system.

Indeed, this analysis places one in a conundrum and gives rise to the question – how then, do we make sense of the Zimbabwean political ecosystem?

On one hand, readers can accept the situation and pragmatically approach it on a case-by-case basis as in the way that I earlier alluded to regarding my own experiences of this political ecosystem. But on the other hand, some respite can be found in Mamdani, Hofmeyr, and Sander's responses to complex political interactions.

Mamdani argues that we must “[seek] to understand the humanity of the perpetrator... not to excuse the perpetrator, and the killing, but to make the act ‘thinkable’, so as to learn something about ourselves as humans.”²³⁶

In a different light, Isabel Hofmeyr argues that when investigating complex realities, we must consider the conditions under which political interactions are taking place. To do so would be to “overcome the simplifying dualisms of ‘colonised/coloniser’”. By so doing, Hofmeyr says that considering the conditions surrounding political actors and their interactions means coming to terms with the notion that political identities “do not travel one way... [but in] bits and pieces ... transforming in many settings and places and convening numerous different publics at different points.”²³⁷

Another response is provided by Mark Sanders who asserts the notion of ‘complicity.’ Sanders' premise is that we cannot understand a complex political society by focusing on the oppression or oppressive system alone as that would simply facilitate “accusing or excusing”.²³⁸ Instead, he argues that we must track instances of “collaboration or accommodation”, of “resistance and collaboration”, and of “affirmation and

²³⁶ Mamdani, Mahmood. “Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC).” *Diacritics* 32, no. 3/4 (2002): 33–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566444>.

²³⁷ Isabel Hofmeyr, *Political Identities in Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 45.

²³⁸ Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

disavowal.”²³⁹ For Sanders, this response would permit us to understand the different and nuanced ways that victims, perpetrators, beneficiaries, supporters and opponents find themselves implicated in the thinking and practices of oppression.²⁴⁰

In the case of Zimbabwean political interactions, the lesson to be drawn from the discussed political interactions would be in echo of my earlier assertion that political actors – given the same conditions and resources and acting in a different capacity are likely to behave in similar ways. Throughout this chapter, one observes this in the evolution of ZANU-PF from the liberation movement articulating equality and justice for the native, to being the authoritarian regime oppressing political parties like the MDC who propose similar articulations to the liberation movement.

After my engagement with Isabel Hofmeyr’s text and interviews with Bheki, Bruce, and Justice, I made an unexpected connection regarding how these twisted come to be. Hofmeyr insists that political interactions are not one way and transform across various settings and places. From this perspective, it is evident that political actors are not just resisting and challenging each other, but, to some extent, they also mimic and absorb behaviours and patterns from each other. By so doing, the interrelated, twisted, and entwined web is formed and reiterated in multiple ways. At once, the political ecosystem shows its colours as a living and breathing organism, but it also demonstrates why it is challenging to detangle and examine a political ecosystem like Zimbabwe.

In light of the above responses and considerations, it becomes imperative to reflect on how these entanglements and twists occur in the present day. Let us reflect, for instance, on a few testimonies by Bruce, Bheki, and Justice.

We've seen recently, the manner in which the internal dynamics of the opposition, caused by themselves as well, the problems of the opposition themselves, have allowed ZANU PF to use the judiciary to systematically dismantle the opposition in Parliament and in local councils. And as I said, the opposition itself must take responsibility because of its own lack of internal democratic structures... particularly in this last election [2023], the manner in which they handled the succession issue after Tsvangirai. The manner in

²³⁹ Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 32.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

which Chamisa handled it, was very unconstitutional and provided a golden opportunity for ZANU PF to be able to use that lack of constitutionalism, the lack of structures, the lack of a new Congress, to be able to assist anybody within the factional battles in CCC to cause major divisions. So, that the lack of democratic accountability, the lack of democratic transition from the Tsvangirai period into the Chamisa period has provided a golden opportunity for ZANU PF to enter and to dismantle that opposition politics.²⁴¹ Bheki's reflection underscores how the opposition's internal issues and lack of democratic accountability have allowed ZANU-PF to exploit these vulnerabilities, thereby further complicating the dynamics of political interactions in Zimbabwe's ecosystem.

According to Bruce, The...thing that we have not managed well is we have allowed ourselves to be painted by this brush yekuti we are pro-West, we are puppets. As if ZANU itself doesn't have a relationship with the West or as if we actually don't have a relationship with East, which we do. But ZANU has cleverly managed to sell us as a puppet, a neo-liberal construct. When in fact they are more neo-liberal than us, particularly the current ZANU, the so-called second dispensation. It's vacuous, it has no ideology. It has no value system. So, they are actually worse than the opposition. But the spin! we have not been able to liberate ourselves from the spin... our biggest downfall of the opposition is that it has always been personality dominated. It has always been personally dominated, and it has failed to rise beyond the agenda of saying ZANU must go. But change is not content. What kind of content? So yes, we've written brilliant manifestos. Our 2018 manifesto was brilliant and not because I wrote it. But we have failed to actually say what do we stand for...And then of course, as I said, the personalisation of the party has brought about splits because big person mentality leads to privatisation, leads to unilateralism. And it has been worse now than even under Tsvangirai, who was more of a Democrat than what is there now²⁴²

Building on Bheki's reflection about the opposition's internal issues, another key challenge for the opposition is its failure to effectively counter ZANU-PF's portrayal of it

²⁴¹ Online interview with Bheki, January 2024.

²⁴² Online Interview with Bruce, December 2024.

as a pro-Western puppet, allowing ZANU-PF to dominate the narrative while masking its own neo-liberal tendencies and lack of ideological grounding. This failure, compounded by the opposition's personality-driven politics, has further weakened its position and deepened internal divisions

Furthermore, Justice presents his assessment of the opposition's blindspots,

“If you look at the MDC, you know, the split in the MDC in 2005 was a gift to ZANU PF. It was a very serious shooting in our collective feet, the fact that we couldn't agree as leadership. Tied into that, of course, was, and this is my own biased opinion, so take with a pinch of salt, but underscoring what happened in 2005 was our deviation from some of the foundational principles that we'd stood by: non-violence, anti-corruption, constitutionalism. And those things were not respected, and they led to the split in 2005 and seriously weakened the opposition and contributed to ZANU. An absolute gift to ZANU and you can't blame ZANU for that. You can only blame ourselves as opposition. Then I think in 2000, after 2018, we were not strong enough in terms of the development of our own constitution. You know, a lot of focus is on the CCC and its absence of a constitution at present. But in reality, after the May 2019 Congress in Gweru, the constitution that emerged from that, in my view, is not sufficiently strong. It wasn't a focus of the organisation and I think it left us constitutionally and administratively vulnerable. And that has now been exacerbated since the formation of the CCC. Although I was very much in support of the strategy employed, because ZANU clearly had infiltrated formal structures, there's no doubt that we have paid a high price, particularly recently through Tshabangu exploiting these deficiencies in our system. And we need to learn from those, and you can't blame ZANU for those. You can only blame ZANU to the extent that they've tried to destroy whatever formal structures we've set up, which gave the motivation for having a more informal arrangement. But I think personally, the lesson I've learned from the last few months is that whilst there are clearly dangers and major dangers in having formal structures because you provide ZANU PF with a formal structure that you can infiltrate and destroy, I think what we've learned is that there are almost equal dangers in not having structures.”

Justice's reflection further elaborates on the internal vulnerabilities that have plagued the opposition, highlighting how the split in the MDC in 2005 and deviations from foundational principles significantly weakened the party, offering a strategic advantage to ZANU-PF. This echoes Bruce's earlier point on the internal democratic failures of the opposition and its inability to counter ZANU-PF's dominance effectively. Moreover, Justice underscores how the lack of clear structures within the opposition, both historically and in recent developments, has left it vulnerable to infiltration and manipulation, much like the issues of personality-driven politics and failure to craft a coherent narrative highlighted in the previous quotes.

Bheki, Justice, and Bruce's reflection adds weight to Hofmeyr's arguments by demonstrating that although ZANU-PF and opposition parties appear to be on opposite sides of the spectrum their interactions simultaneously produce a situation of "affirmation and disavowal" whereby they mimic, absorb, and mirror similar patterns as illustrated by the disappearance of democracy within the opposition's internal structures, the shared support for the East, by the pressures of neoliberalism which engender 'big man' politics, and the search and struggle to articulate a particular ideology.

Understanding the Humanity of Political Actors

Mamdani's call to understand the humanity of the perpetrator emphasizes the necessity of contextualizing political violence and oppression. The quotes from Bheki and Bruce highlight how the internal struggles within the opposition have allowed ZANU-PF to exploit weaknesses, such as the lack of democratic structures and leadership cohesion. Bheki points out that the opposition's failure to establish a robust internal democracy, particularly following the leadership transition from Morgan Tsvangirai to Nelson Chamisa, created vulnerabilities that ZANU-PF adeptly exploited. This reflects Mamdani's argument that to comprehend the actions of political actors—whether perpetrators or victims—we must consider the conditions that enable these actions and identities to emerge.

Both ZANU-PF and the opposition have, at various times, acted as perpetrators of political violence and oppression. ZANU-PF has utilized state mechanisms to dismantle

opposition, while the opposition has often failed to present a united front, leading to self-inflicted wounds. This complicity in the political landscape suggests that both parties share responsibility for the ongoing crisis, as highlighted by Bruce's critique of the opposition's personality-driven politics and lack of coherent ideology.

Overcoming Simplistic Dualisms

Hofmeyr's argument against simplistic dualisms, such as colonized/colonizer, is particularly relevant in the context of Zimbabwe's political dynamics.²⁴³ The opposition's portrayal as "puppets" of Western interests, as noted by Bruce, reflects a narrative constructed by ZANU-PF to delegitimize dissent. This framing simplifies the complex relationships and interactions between the two parties and their respective supporters. Hofmeyr encourages a deeper examination of how political identities are formed and transformed, emphasizing that they are not static but rather evolve in response to various conditions.

The quotes illustrate that both ZANU-PF and the opposition engage in constructing narratives that serve their political interests. ZANU-PF has successfully framed the opposition as lacking legitimacy, while the opposition has struggled to articulate a clear ideological stance beyond merely opposing ZANU-PF. These dynamics underscore the need to understand the conditions under which these political identities are formed and how they influence the strategies employed by both sides.

Complicity and Political Interactions

Sanders' notion of complicity provides a framework for understanding the intricate relationships between ZANU-PF and the opposition.²⁴⁴ The internal divisions within the MDC, particularly the split in 2005, are described as a "gift to ZANU-PF," indicating that the opposition's inability to maintain unity and democratic principles has inadvertently strengthened the ruling party's position. This reflects Sanders' argument that focusing solely on oppression can obscure the complexities of political interactions and the ways in which actors are implicated in their circumstances.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Isabel Hofmeyr, *Political Identities in Transformation*

²⁴⁴ Mark Sanders, "Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid" 35.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Moreover, the acknowledgment of the opposition's failures—such as the lack of a strong constitution and democratic accountability—underscores the shared responsibility for the political crisis. Both ZANU-PF and the opposition have contributed to the current state of affairs, albeit in different ways. ZANU-PF has used its power to undermine opposition structures, while the opposition's internal conflicts have provided openings for ZANU-PF to exploit.

Historical Continuities in Violence and Oppression

The continuities in violence, oppression, and coercion reflect not only the actions of ZANU-PF but also the shortcomings of the opposition. The historical context of ZANU-PF's rise to power, rooted in the liberation struggle, has shaped its identity as the legitimate defender of national interests. However, this has not precluded the party from employing authoritarian tactics to maintain control, particularly in response to the challenges posed by the opposition.

The opposition's struggle to articulate a clear agenda beyond "ZANU must go" indicates a fundamental difference in how both parties engage with the electorate. While ZANU-PF has managed to maintain a narrative of national liberation and anti-colonialism, the opposition has been criticized for failing to present a compelling alternative vision for governance. This divergence highlights the complexities of political identity and the challenges faced by the opposition in establishing its legitimacy and relevance.

This analysis of the political dynamics between ZANU-PF and the opposition in Zimbabwe reveals a complex and nuanced understanding of power, identity, and resistance. By synthesizing the insights from Mamdani, Hofmeyr, and Sanders with the reflections from Bheki and Bruce, a deeper appreciation is gained of the historical continuities and complexities that shape Zimbabwe's political reality. The interplay of violence, oppression, and the quest for democratic accountability underscores the need for both parties to reflect on their roles in the ongoing struggle for democracy and justice. Understanding these dynamics through a lens that acknowledges complicity, contextualizes political identities, and examines the humanity of all actors involved provides a more comprehensive framework for analysing the challenges facing Zimbabwe today.

Questions for complex dualisms: beyond native and settler identities

“... the argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force.” (Franz Fanon, 1963)

But, as I conclude this chapter, a question surfaces regarding the native/settler dichotomy – and warrants greater reflection beyond this thesis. The native/settler dichotomy stems from Franz Fanon’s occupation with the colonised/coloniser relations where Fanon argues that the native’s violence on the settler is “life affirming”. In the post-independence context like Zimbabwe where political actors are all at once the native and the settler, what, then can we make of these post-colonial ‘independence identities?’ How can we begin to intellectually question and challenge the mentality of force and violence – particularly, when political actors can be perceived as interaction and behaving from a place of trauma?

Concluding reflections

This chapter has focused on examining the historical foundations of the interactions between political actors in Zimbabwe’s ecosystem. This examination revealed that the political ecosystem in Zimbabwe goes deeper than the binaries of the victim/perpetrator. Moreover, this analysis of the historical demonstrates that the ecosystem in Zimbabwe is also more complex than the power configurations which produce the asymmetrical relationships between the political actors. Drawing on notions of complicity, of the native/settler conceptions, and entanglement, this chapter demonstrates that the present interactions stem from a history of violence, repression, oppression, and dispossession whose legacy endures today. Moreover, an analysis of the native/settler identities illustrated that the traumas of the past enable conditions for yesterday’s victims to become today’s perpetrators. A deeper investigation which places issues of accountability, complicity, and intimacy at the centre of the native/settler dichotomy also revealed that the interactions between political actors are fluid and two-way.

Since political actors are in a process of exchange of ideas and practices – at different moments and in different situations, political actors may mirror and mimic the behaviours of each other. As Sanders articulated, in different spaces and at different

periods, political actors find themselves implicated in the practices and thinking of the oppressive system. This was highlighted in the testimonies provided by Bruce, Bheki, and Justice who reflected on their experiences in the opposition. It was also illustrated by Takudzwa who questioned the contradiction of the judiciary – where it is both a guarantor of justice and an enabler of repression.

This chapter has been occupied by investigating the historical factors that influence the way political actors interact, and the way these interactions manifest during elections. This chapter alluded to the pressures which engender these relationship dynamics. In this case, it was the process of colonisation and coloniality which shaped and continues to shape the ways that political actors respond to each other when confronting processes that challenge and/or impose a particular position in the political ecosystem.

The next chapter will follow from this thinking by analysing and discussing the political and economic pressures which place stress on the already contentious relationships between political actors. These pressures will be placed in their domestic as well as their broader international context. Doing so, acknowledges that the Zimbabwean political ecosystem functions within a broader context. As such, the challenges that this thesis is concerned with do not take place in isolation. By taking into account these broader pressures, chapter four paints additional complexity to the relationship dynamics between Zimbabwe's political actors.

Chapter 4: The Political and Economic Pressures on the Ecosystem

“How many perpetrators were victims of yesteryear? What happens when yesterday’s victims act out of a determination that they must never again be victimized? What happens when yesterday’s victims act out of a conviction that power is the only guarantee against victimhood, so the only dignified alternative to power is death?”²⁴⁶

Mahmood Mamdani’s reflection above encapsulates this chapter’s exploration of Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem, particularly in relation to how the narratives of victimhood have been politicized and leveraged in the interactions between political actors during elections. The chapter demonstrates that the ruling party, ZANU-PF, rooted its actions in a victimhood narrative that emerged from the liberation struggle, using this to justify its responses to both internal opposition and external economic pressures, especially in the face of the international community’s increasing demands for democracy and human rights.

This chapter discusses Zimbabwe’s political ecosystem in relation to political and economic pressures occurring within the international nation-state system. Drawing on broader discourses on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, this chapter zones into the narratives of and the politicisation of victimhood – particularly in the articulation of the interactions between political actors as they manifest during elections. Chapter two reveals that the tensions between political actors in Zimbabwe heightened following the adoption and negative impact of the economic and structural adjustment programs (ESAP) which ushered in a host of economic challenges including currency collapses, dollarisation, high unemployment, and declining quality and standard of living. Other issues include the fast-track land invasions which isolated Zimbabwe as a pariah in the international community and attracted targeted sanctions from the West. Additionally, political issues range from the collapse of the Soviet Union and rise in democratisation discourse which dashed the ruling party’s imaginations of a one-party

²⁴⁶ Mamdani, Mahmood. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

socialist state, the demonstrations of the worker's unions which led to the formation of MDC and challenged the ideas and memory of the liberation struggle. Finally, the melange of the political and economic pressures which gave way for a mass exodus of Zimbabweans which has engendered a 'brain-drain' as well as ushered in large remittances that serve as lifelines to many families in Zimbabwe – but also as a source of income for the government.²⁴⁷ The central focus of this chapter, thus, is to illustrate that the relationships of entanglement between political actors are not only enabled domestically or historically, but they are also facilitated and enabled through international expressions for democratisation, good governance, and market-led economic policies. In so doing, the international community becomes both an enabler and watchdog against political interactions facilitated through different forms of violence.

Firstly, this chapter extends the discussion on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy in relation to narratives and tropes of victimhood. Secondly, this chapter provides an overview of the international pressures confronting the Zimbabwean political ecosystem. Finally, this chapter interrogates the discussion on victimhood and that of the international political and economic pressures in order to illustrate the effects on the relationships between political actors as they manifest during elections. Ultimately, this chapter furthers the argument that the practice of electoral authoritarianism is a product of overlapping pressures and complex interactions. In this case, the simultaneous pressures of the post-independence context, neoliberal globalisation, nationalism and the economic legacy of colonialism which is manifested in issues of land reform. I must acknowledge that the debates concerning Zimbabwe's political economy as it relates to the international community is widely contested, however, the debates are beyond the scope of this dissertation. As such a general discussion will be offered to provide an illustration on what feeds the conditions of entanglement and enablement in the interactions of political actors in Zimbabwe.

On Narratives of Victimhood

This thesis revealed earlier that traditional understanding of victimhood and perpetration often simplifies these categories into distinct and opposing identities: the innocent victim and the

²⁴⁷ See for example, Pragna Rugunanan and Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama, "Introduction", in *Migration in Southern Africa*, (eds) Pragna Rugunanan and Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama, 2022.

guilty perpetrator.²⁴⁸ Scholars like Annalise Acorn, for instance, argue that these identities are far more fluid and interconnected than such a binary would suggest.²⁴⁹ According to Acorn emphasizes that many individuals who are labelled as perpetrators have themselves been victims of systemic violence or personal abuse.²⁵⁰

Amanda Nelund builds on this argument by discussing the experiences of marginalized women, particularly Indigenous women, who have been both offenders and victims.²⁵¹ Nelund argues that the criminal justice system often labels such women as offenders without taking into account the deep victimization they have experienced from colonialism, state violence, and socio-economic marginalization.²⁵²

Additionally, Sane Weber's analysis of transitional justice reveals how essentializing victims as pure and perpetrators as evil leads to an oversimplified understanding of conflict.²⁵³ She argues that this binary portrayal overlooks the agency of victims and the fact that perpetrators can also be victims of structural violence.

Let us take for instance 44-year-old political activist Panashe's recollections of Minister of Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services Christopher Mutsvangwa's remarks regarding democracy, elections, and the rule of law in Zimbabwe. In these recollections (discussed in chapter three), Mutsvangwa emphasises that those who are presently unhappy with the status quo political landscape in Zimbabwe should also go to war just as the liberation fighters did in the 1970s against the Rhodesian regime.²⁵⁴ Mutsvangwa's argument supports the arguments and observations made by Acorn and Nelund. The complexities of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem, thus, rests in the fact that the victims of yesteryear are the perpetrators of today – justified by the resolution to never become victims once more.

Against this backdrop, it can be argued that while the complexities of the victim-perpetrator relationship are evident on an individual level, these dynamics become even more significant

²⁴⁸ Acorn, Annalise. 2017. "Reclaiming a Restorative Understanding of the Victim–Offender Dichotomy." *Restorative Justice* 5 (3): 468–80.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Amanda Nelund, 2017. "The Marginalised Woman: Thinking beyond Victim/Offender in Restorative Justice." *Restorative Justice* 5 (3): 408–19.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Sane Weber, 2021. "Defying the Victim-Perpetrator Binary: Female Ex-combatants in Colombia and Guatemala as Complex Political Perpetrators."

²⁵⁴ Online interview with Panashe, January 2024.

when examined in the context of political relationships. Victimhood, especially when applied to groups, can be a powerful tool for achieving political gains.²⁵⁵

According to Barton Hronešová and Daniel Kreiss, the notion of collective victimhood has been used by political actors to frame historical grievances and justify contemporary actions, often reshaping political relationships on both domestic and international stages.²⁵⁶ For the scholars, this can be understood using the term “hijacked victimhood” which occurs when dominant groups, often those in positions of power, claim victim status to justify their political agendas.²⁵⁷

In their discussion, Barton Hronešová and Daniel Kreiss refers to leaders like Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Donald Trump in the United States as having employed this strategy, positioning their historically dominant groups as being under threat – a trope also revealed by Christopher Mutsvangwa’s recollection of the liberation war memory to re-invoke victimhood.²⁵⁸ Such recollection, thus, mobilises political support by portraying the “victims” and their followers as victims of external forces, often minority groups or political elites.

This strategic use of victimhood does more than rally political support; it also actively reverses the victim-perpetrator dichotomy.²⁵⁹ In such cases, historically marginalized or subaltern groups, who have legitimate grievances of oppression, are recast as the aggressors or oppressors.²⁶⁰ This narrative allows, therefore, the dominant group to sidestep responsibility for historical or ongoing injustices while painting their own political motives as defensive or righteous.

For Lerner, the conditions under which victimhood is leveraged politically often include moments of national crisis, political instability, or shifting social dynamics.²⁶¹ The scholar’s concept of “victimhood nationalism” highlights how nations can construct collective trauma narratives that position the entire nation as a victim of historical events like war, colonialism, or economic collapse.²⁶² In such contexts, these narratives are used to legitimize aggressive policies, both domestically and internationally. To this end, Lerner uses Slobodan Milošević, for example, as having constructed a Serbian victimhood narrative to justify actions during the Yugoslav Wars,

²⁵⁵ Sarah Banet-Weiser, 2019. “Radical Vulnerability: Feminism, Victimhood and Agency.” In *Re-Writing Women as Victims*, eds. Fuentes, María José Gámez, Puente, Sonia Núñez, and Nicolau, Gómez, 167–81.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Adam B Lerner, 2020. The uses and abuses of victimhood nationalism in international politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(1), 62-87.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

while Israel's founding narrative under David Ben-Gurion emphasized Jewish victimhood in the face of historical persecution to consolidate its national identity.²⁶³

The political leveraging of victimhood and "victimhood nationalism" provides a foundation on which to understand the effects and implications of global pressures on the relationships between political actors in Zimbabwe – particularly when these relations are strained due to economic strain. Moreover, the notions of victimhood become a critical weapon to justify the polarisation of political ecosystem, the use of violence, and the non-substantive manner in which the electoral process takes place.

The next section provides the general overview of the political and economic pressures confronting interactions between political actors in Zimbabwe in order to draw links with the politicisation of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy in response to these pressures.

International Context of Zimbabwe's political interactions

Starting in the late 1980s, significant transformations in the global political landscape began to erode the stability of numerous authoritarian regimes, paving the way for the emergence of electoral systems.²⁶⁴ The conclusion of the Cold War resulted in a substantial reduction in external backing for dictatorships, regimes, and liberation movements that had previously relied on superpower support, leading to diminished military and economic aid for both Soviet-aligned and U.S.-backed governments.²⁶⁵ This withdrawal of support often coincided with severe economic crises that destabilized these governments, forcing many states into bankruptcy and depleting their patronage resources.²⁶⁶ Consequently, numerous governments found themselves compelled to either liberalize their political systems or relinquish their hold on power.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union also shifted the global balance of power, with Western nations, particularly the United States, emerging as the dominant influence.²⁶⁷ This shift precipitated a widespread indication among countries in the Global South to adapt and transition to the new global order dominated by the liberal capitalist democracies of the West.²⁶⁸ The lack

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Rudu Gaidzanwa, 2020. The Political Culture of Zimbabwe: Continuities and Discontinuities. In: Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., Ruhanya, P. (eds) The History and Political Transition of Zimbabwe. African Histories and Modernities. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ David Moore, 2001. "Neoliberal globalisation and the triple crisis of 'modernisation' in Africa: Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa." Third World Quarterly, pp 909-929.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

of a strong alternative to Western liberalism encouraged many leaders to adopt democratic frameworks as a strategic manoeuvre to secure external assistance, which increasingly came from Western sources.

In this new context, Western foreign policy adapted significantly. With the Soviet threat diminished, the U.S. and its allies intensified their efforts to promote democracy through a blend of economic aid, military influence, and political conditions.²⁶⁹ By 1990, Western countries, including the United States, United Kingdom, and France, began linking economic assistance to commitments to democratization and human rights, which led to the rise of political conditionality.²⁷⁰ Although the enforcement of these conditions was often inconsistent, they incentivized many authoritarian leaders to conduct multiparty elections.

The 1990s also witnessed the creation of international frameworks aimed at protecting democracy and human rights. In Eastern Europe, the requirement for full democratic governance became a condition for European Union membership.²⁷¹ Similar mechanisms emerged in the Americas through the Organization of American States (OAS). Additionally, a network of transnational organizations, including international party foundations and election-monitoring bodies, developed to advocate for democracy and human rights.²⁷² These networks utilized advancements in communication technology, such as the Internet, to draw attention to human rights violations and mobilize international responses, often resulting in punitive measures against offending states.²⁷³

Despite these developments, the post-Cold War environment did not automatically lead to the establishment of genuine democracies.²⁷⁴ External pressures for democratization were often applied selectively and inconsistently, with major countries like China and regions such as the Middle East largely avoiding scrutiny.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, Western efforts to promote democracy frequently focused primarily on the mechanics of holding elections, neglecting essential aspects such as civil liberties and the need for a fair political environment.²⁷⁶

²⁶⁹ Dennis Masaka. (2013). Pitting Market Economy Against Planned Economy A False Dichotomy in Zimbabwe (1980-2011). *Journal of Black Studies*. 44.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Kwashirai, Vimbai Chaumba. "Violence, a Colonial Curse: The 1980 General Elections." Chapter. In *Election Violence in Zimbabwe: Human Rights, Politics and Power*, 8–34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Gloppen, Siri, Marja Hinfelaar, and Lise Rakner, 'Zimbabwe: Contested Autocratization', in Leonardo R. Arriola, Lise Rakner, and Nicolas van de Walle (eds), *Democratic Backsliding in Africa? Autocratization, Resilience, and Contention*.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

This narrow focus allowed many authoritarian regimes to adapt and respond to international pressures effectively. Governments learned that superficial reforms, such as conducting minimally acceptable elections, could suffice to maintain their international legitimacy. Thus, while the post-Cold War era raised the baseline expectations for regime legitimacy to include multiparty elections, it did not guarantee the establishment of fully functional democracies.

Gilbert Tarugarira argues that in Africa, the changes in the international system coincided with the wave of liberation which began in the 1960s.²⁷⁷ Fledgling African governments found themselves in a conundrum – the need to fulfil the promises of the liberation struggle which included the provision of sweeping socialist reforms, and the need to adapt to the new global order characterised by notions of market and trade liberalisation, privatisation, and reduced state intervention which meant backtracking on public spending on education, healthcare, as well as subsidies in agriculture and the purchase of certain food groups.²⁷⁸

Like many African countries, Zimbabwe found itself caught up in the changing global landscape when it gained independence in 1980.²⁷⁹ The post-cold war pressures described above found expression in domestic issues including land restitution and imaginations of a one-party socialist state.²⁸⁰ Specifically, in the adoption of structural adjustment programs, the shift towards a neoliberal policy orientation, and the implementation of the fast-track land reform program.²⁸¹ The consequences of these challenges leading to increasingly contentious political dynamics in Zimbabwe. **Effect of International Political Economy on Domestic Relations**

Socialism and structural adjustment

“After 1990, however, the accelerating social, political and economic unravelling of the country led to a rush for the exits. An economy in free-fall, soaring inflation and unemployment, the collapse of public services, political oppression and

²⁷⁷ Gilbert Tarugarira. “A historical study of Zimbabwe’s African Elite: configurations, networks and transitions c.1900-2013.” (2016).

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Dennis Masaka. (2013). Pitting Market Economy Against Planned Economy A False Dichotomy in Zimbabwe (1980-2011).

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

deepening poverty proved to be powerful, virtually irresistible, push factors for many Zimbabweans.”²⁸²

When ZANU-PF took office in 1980, the party was committed to creating a socialist state. As such, they introduced a series of thick socialist reforms in the country as part of their agenda to empower and include the black majority.²⁸³ These reforms included investments in education, health care, the ‘Africanisation’ of the public service, food and agriculture subsidies, and wage protections to workers in trade unions. According to Tom Meseinhelder, the reforms saw infant mortality, increased enrolment in basic education, and increased state funding to university students including grants for living expenses and accommodation.²⁸⁴ Despite a drought which saw the economy decline from 1982 to 1984, the economy in post-independence Zimbabwe was marked by a decade of stable growth, strong balance of trade and payments, and low levels of inflation – for instance, inflation fell from 20 percent in 1983 to 12 percent by the end of the 1980s.²⁸⁵

At the heart of ZANU-PF’s socialist agenda was the issue of land restitution for the African population. Desiring to avoid a capital flight from white farmers and miners, as well as submitting to the constraints of the Lancaster House agreement – which emphasised the ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ model; the ruling party decided to adopt a gradualist approach to the issue of land reform in order to buy enough time to raise the capital required to buy land back from white farmers and mine owners.²⁸⁶ However, the shifts in the global political and economic order spoiled the ruling party’s socialist plans.²⁸⁷ Instead, the pressures of the changing global order led to the adoption of policies whose consequences catalysed a series of ill planned, desperate, and hasty decisions that poorly served two purposes: (a) maintain the ruling party’s popularity and hold on power, and (b) stabilise the economy and gain back the successes of the first decade of power.²⁸⁸

²⁸² Crush, J., & Tevera, D. 2010. Exiting Zimbabwe. In J. Crush & D. Tevera (Eds.), *Zimbabwe’s exodus: Crisis, migration, survival* (pp. 1–51). Southern African Migration Programme, IDRC.

²⁸³ Paul Teedon, David Drakakis-Smith. 1986. “Urbanization and socialism in Zimbabwe: the case of low-cost urban housing” *Geoforum*/

²⁸⁴ Tom Meseinhelder, “The decline of socialism in Zimbabwe” 1994

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

In the early 1990s, ZANU-PF took on loans from the IMF and World Bank which came with the same strict conditions or structural adjustment measures that were the feature of many other post-independence governments in Africa and Latin America. The Economic and Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) were introduced in 1992 with then Finance Minister Bernard Chidzero remarking, “if we believed in socialism at a certain period, it doesn't follow not to change when circumstances change.”²⁸⁹

Between 1999 and 2007, Zimbabwe's gross domestic product (GDP) fell by approximately 30 percent, with a more significant decline of over 50% recorded from 1999 to 2008.²⁹⁰ From 1992 to 1994, government subsidies were reduced leading to a \$3.8 billion loss of revenue for public enterprises.²⁹¹ The rate of real economic growth also declined to 0.9 percent from four percent between 1985 to 1990.²⁹² This economic downturn was also accompanied by severe balance of payments issues that began in late 1997 which saw the debt-export ratio increasing to US\$4.72 billion from US\$4.54 billion – or two-fifths of the country's export earnings.²⁹³

The situation worsened when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suspended its support for Zimbabwe in 1998, a decision influenced by the country's involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which negatively impacted economic performance and investor confidence.²⁹⁴

Additionally, the increasingly difficult economic conditions saw a rise in pressure from war veterans who had been promised payouts for their service in the liberation struggle.²⁹⁵ Initially, as part of its gradualist approach, the government was going to finance the payouts by increasing income taxes. But the economic effects of ESAP reduced the parity of salaries, thus provoking serious opposition from the ZCTU.²⁹⁶ To afford the Z\$50 thousand lump sums for each of the 50 thousand veterans including a monthly tax-free pension of Z\$5 thousand; the central bank financed these unbudgeted

²⁸⁹ Bernard Chidzero, 1991 "Interview." *Southern African Political and Economic Monthly* (December January): 13.

²⁹⁰ Godfrey Kanyenze. 2003. *The Performance of the Zimbabwean Economy, 1980–2000*. In: Darnolf, S., Laakso, L. (eds) *Twenty Years of Independence in Zimbabwe*. International Political Economy Series.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ International Monetary Fund, 2003. “Press Release: IMF Suspends Zimbabwe's Voting and Related Rights.”

²⁹⁵ Godfrey Kanyenze. 2003. *The Performance of the Zimbabwean Economy, 1980–2000*.

²⁹⁶ Vimbai Chaumba Kwashirai. “The Movement for Democratic Change Was Number One Enemy in 2000.” Chapter. *In Election Violence in Zimbabwe: Human Rights, Politics and Power*, 128–58.

payouts by printing money, resulting in approximately Z\$2 billion (around US\$180 million) being injected into the economy.²⁹⁷ These excessive payouts contributed to speculative attacks on the local currency and marked the beginning of a protracted currency crisis in Zimbabwe.²⁹⁸

Factors leading up to Structural Adjustment

The Zimbabwean government's most critical objective was to initiate and implement land restitution as part of its broad agenda to empower Africans and indigenise the economy.²⁹⁹ During the liberation struggle ZANU and ZAPU received a great deal of financial and technical support from Russia, China and the Soviet States.³⁰⁰ Thus, the ruling party aimed to leverage this relationship to finance the land reform agenda.

However, by the time of signing the Lancaster House Agreement, the Soviet Union was in decline and withdrawing economic and financial support to its allies.³⁰¹ This placed ZANU and ZAPU in a difficult position because the terms of the Western-backed Lancaster House Agreement protected white-owned mines and farms from nationalisation and expropriation without compensation.³⁰² What compounded the problem was that the US and the UK pledged to provide financial assistance to the government's land expropriation program. But, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the allied super powers hesitated for several reasons including: (a) the changing international balance of power which placed the West on stronger footing to impose its own governance and economic agenda as a condition for financial aid; (b) the commercial farmers in Zimbabwe led a targeted lobby campaign convincing the international community that expropriation would endanger Zimbabwe's status as a 'bread basket' in the region, and (c) the British were unhappy about the allocation of land earmarked for expropriation as it was allegedly going to the hands of too many cabinet ministers.

What worsened the ruling party's agenda was that other African countries who were initially going to support Zimbabwe's land reform agenda, were confronting their own

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Sachikonye, L.M. (1997). Structural Adjustment and Democratization in Zimbabwe. In: Lindberg, S., Sverrisson, Á. (eds) Social Movements in Development. International Political Economy Series. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-25448-4_9

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006. "The Nativist Revolution and Development Conundrums in Zimbabwe," Occasional Paper Series. Available: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/100054/op_2006_4.pdf

economic challenges as well as the pressure to re-orient to the new international order. Backed into a corner, ZANU-PF decided to fast-track economic growth by taking a IMF and World Bank loans with the intention that this would raise enough home-grown capital to pay for land restitution.

Corruption, Extraction, War, Land Reform.

Besides the challenges of financing land reform, Zimbabwe's economic decline was also catalysed by several events that coincided with the period of adjustment – thus, worsening the country's fiscal position.

In 1998, President Mugabe announced Zimbabwe's intervention in the DRC conflict. The post-genocide Rwandan government, with the help of Uganda and Eritrea, attacked the Hutu army that was living in the Congolese borderlands.³⁰³ To support Desire Kabila's regime with restoring stability in the region, Zimbabwe together with South Africa, Namibia and Angola sent military support to the DRC.³⁰⁴ For President Mugabe, the move was motivated by the potential access to DRC's vast mineral wealth which would be possible after supporting Kabila.³⁰⁵ Moreover, with declining support at home, Mugabe sought to strengthen Zimbabwe's position in the SADC region by demonstrating his commitment to regional peace and security.³⁰⁶ But these plans backfired.

Firstly, the daily costs of maintaining three thousand troops amounted to more than US\$263 million, which provoked intense criticism from the domestic and international media.³⁰⁷ Because Zimbabwe was under structural adjustment, the costs of the conflict could not be justified to the IMF and the World Bank.³⁰⁸ Underreporting of the daily costs also fuelled tensions with Zimbabwe's donors including the British who then decided to suspend development aid.

Secondly, the plan to profit and attract financial injection from the mineral wealth in DRC was successful for a handful of government officials who received mining concessions and contracts to supply war materials.³⁰⁹ However, these profits did not make their way to Zimbabwe, neither did they lead to any financial gains for the austerity-hit country.

³⁰³ Munangagwa, Chidochashe L. "The Economic Decline of Zimbabwe," 115.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Editorial, "A nation crying out for leadership," Zimbabwe Independent, October 25, 1998.

³⁰⁸ Munangagwa, Chidochashe L. "The Economic Decline of Zimbabwe," 116.

³⁰⁹ See for example, Chidochashe Munangagwa (2009); Tom Meisenhelder (1994)

Impact of Economic Decline on Political Interactions

The overlapping challenges of Soviet collapse, the impacts of the ESAP, failures to bring land reform, as well as a mix of poor economic policies including the printing of excess money following the War Veterans' unbudgeted payouts provoked widespread protests and disillusionments from the civil society, the war veterans, and ZANU-PF's largest support base – the rural population.

The shift in political and economic ideology in the international community also increased pressures for ZANU-PF's one-party state ideations. When the party came to power in 1980, they had dreams to become a *de jure* one-party socialist state with central control over the economy and public institutions. For the ruling party (including the swallowed ZAPU), the socialist project was the best way to undo Zimbabwe's oppressive past by guaranteeing equal access to the privileges of citizenship. However, the shift towards the Western liberal democratic model made it increasingly difficult for the ruling party to achieve the one-party state due to the growing focus on multiparty politics and democracy. Secondly, the funding channelled towards civil society organisations, electoral observation missions, and NGOs made it harder for ZANU-PF to use violence to achieve its objectives in the same way that it had done with Gukurahundi.

The mix of bad decisions, harsh consequences for the bad decisions, and desperate and/or knee-jerk responses to these external pressures hardened ZANU-PF's stance to the civil society, to opposition, and to the international community as will be discussed below. Moreover, the above examination reveals that ZANU-PF's decision making in the late 1980s to the 1990s spiralled out of control, leading to a loss of support domestically. This loss of support was perceived as increasing instability and an attack on the objectives of the liberation movement – thus, engendering a need to establish a form of stability within the political ecosystem by any means necessary.

Disillusionment, Protest, and Unpopularity

Beatriz Magaloni's examination of electoral authoritarianism under the 71-year leadership of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico revealed that declining economic conditions reduce a dominant regimes' capacity to maintain political

strongholds, especially in places that are most impacted.³¹⁰ Her research also revealed that economic deterioration and deterioration of livelihoods open opportunities for new political organisations to emerge – incentivised by the weaknesses of the dominant regime and seeking to re-construct the terms and conditions of livelihood.³¹¹

In Zimbabwe, the deteriorating economic conditions strongly impacted the working class and middle class in the urban areas. The rising costs of living, inflation, and currency decline precipitated widespread protests from the ZCTU – which sought to protect the position and wages of union members. The economic decline also impacted the War Veterans – whose protest led to the unbudgeted payouts and guaranteed pensions. However, with the economy in free fall, the value of the payouts significantly lost value and placed the veterans in a tough position.

With the international community’s increasing financial and ideological support for human rights, multiparty politics, democracy, and the rule of law; the disillusioned civil society and workers’ union in Zimbabwe found a voice to express, discuss, and organise around a new form of politics. The result of which undermined ZANU-PF’s dominant position. After the referendum vote in 2000, it became clear that political actors in Zimbabwe stood on conflicting political spectrums.

As discussed in Chapter one, a useful insight from the generational unit – posited by Richard Braungart and Margaret Braungart, and applied in this research – is that political actors are differentiated by their mobilisation on certain issues, interests, desires or struggle.³¹² For the scholars, this creates conflict between political actors especially when there are clashing ideas and perspectives around those interests and struggles.³¹³ As the political actors negotiate and conflict, they become more aware of their position in the structure of the political ecosystem – causing them to develop forms of protest to defend their existence, position, or desired position.³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Magaloni, Beatriz. “Equilibrium Party Hegemony.” In *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.,51.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Braungart, Richard G. and Margaret M. Braungart. “Life-Course and Generational. Politics.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 12 (1986): 205-231.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

The post-2000 contentious dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe – marked by conflict over the declining economy, the appetite for democracy and multiparty politics, and disagreements over the approach to and implementation of land reform – illustrated for political actors their position in the political ecosystem. For the ruling party, these diverging interests signalled its waning dominance the political ecosystem; for the civil society, workers unions, war veterans, urban middle-class and rural populations, it signalled their marginal position in economic planning, and finally for commercial farmers and white mine owners, this signalled their decreasing role and influence over the economy or political interactions.

In response to these illuminations, political actors developed forms of protest to defend their existence – ZANU-PF fell back on the colonial state’s practices of repression and adopted the strategy of manipulating elections, civil society, business owners, and opposition parties leveraged the growing international support for democracy in order to articulate their desires, whilst others chose to emigrate and divorce from the ecosystem altogether.

Emigration, Remittances, and Private Indirect Government

“There are almost as many women migrants as men; there are migrants of all ages, from young children to the old and infirm; those fleeing hunger and poverty join those fleeing persecution and harassment; they are from all rungs of the occupational and socioeconomic ladder; they are highly-read and illiterate, professionals and paupers, doctors and ditch-diggers.”³¹⁵ (Crush and Tevera, 2010)

The worsening economic and political situation in Zimbabwe also produced a mass exodus of Zimbabweans seeking a better life and reprieve. Presently, there are approximately five million Zimbabweans living in the diaspora with just over a million living in neighbouring South Africa.³¹⁶ The exodus had several significant effects on the political ecosystem and interactions between political actors. Firstly, the exodus led to massive brain-drain of skilled workers which eroded the middle-class base in Zimbabwe

³¹⁵ Crush, J., & Tevera, D. (2010).” Exiting Zimbabwe”. In J. Crush & D. Tevera (Eds.), Zimbabwe’s exodus: Crisis, migration, survival (pp. 1–51). Southern African Migration Programme, IDRC

³¹⁶ See for example: Tariro Chivige and Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp (2023), Samukele Hadebe (2022), and Ray Ndlovu (2022).

and the organisational capacity of the opposition as well as the extractive capacity of the ruling government. Secondly, the diaspora population's remittances have inadvertently resulted in a situation of political apathy, private indirect government, and consolidation of electoral authoritarianism by exit.

Eldred Masunugure argues that recipient households are mildly shielded from the lack of service delivery and the persistent decline in living conditions such that they are numb to the state's inadequate governance. As of the 2023/24 financial year, international remittances to Zimbabwe amount to over US\$1.47 billion.³¹⁷ Without this large influx of remittances Masunugure argues that perhaps Zimbabwe would have seen an uprising akin to the 2010 Arab Spring in which the dismal effects of a declining economy propelled the citizens to stand up against the Ben Ali regime Masunugure.³¹⁸

Samukele Hadebe, on the other hand, argues that the flow of remittances has become a critical source of income for various government branches by establishing roadblocks, placing high taxes on the receipt of money, and charging a premium for access to government documents such as passports and birth certificates. Achille Mbembe explains that this form of extraction can be understood as *fiscality* – which refers to the indirect and informal appropriation of livelihoods in the absence of a stable tax base³¹⁹ For Mbembe, the orientation towards neoliberal economic policies – discussed above as structural adjustment measures – has created a situation in which the authority of governments becomes fragmented and unable to raise tax. Needing to raise capital to service the public service, the extraction and appropriation of livelihoods becomes a critical way to manage the administration of government.

Finally, the exodus to the diaspora has opened an unexpected opportunity for the ruling party to silent dissent and prevent further undermining of its dominant position.³²⁰ This opportunity has been consolidated as an election strategy by the ruling party – particularly in 2023 when the diaspora population was officially declared unable to vote

³¹⁷ See for example, Ian Scoones (2024) and Mthandazo Nyoni (2024).

³¹⁸ Masunugure, 2011:50

³¹⁹ Achille Mbembe, "On Private Indirect Government," 66.

³²⁰ Masunugure, 2011

unless they were in Zimbabwe. Justice provides insight into the use of this strategy by the ruling party,

“.. the main thrust now is a fairly sophisticated and comprehensive breach of law, which doesn't just happen during the electoral process itself. It starts five years before. Let me take, for example, the right of citizens to vote. The constitution is very clear on this. All citizens of the age of 18, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to be registered to vote and therefore to vote. And yet the fact remains that if you live in the diaspora, even if you're a citizen, that right isn't recognised.”

Justice's testimony reveals that the mix of political and economic pressures which precipitated an economic crisis in Zimbabwe and created the asymmetries between political actors and tensions over the distribution of power, allocation of resources, and the terms and conditions of political organisation; has created a crisis of citizenship in which exit becomes a means to silence political actors within Zimbabwe's political ecosystem.

The Production of Victimhood in the middle of crisis

The economic decline and subsequent political instability in Zimbabwe are closely linked to the strategic use of victimhood narratives by ZANU-PF. As discussed earlier, victimhood nationalism enables ruling entities to position themselves as defenders of the nation against external or internal threats. In the case of Zimbabwe, the challenges stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union, the implementation of ESAP, and international pressures toward multiparty democracy were framed by ZANU-PF as existential threats to the gains of the liberation struggle.

The party leveraged its historical victimhood under colonial rule to position itself as the only legitimate custodian of Zimbabwe's independence, claiming that the opposition and civil society movements were part of a neocolonial agenda designed to undermine Zimbabwean sovereignty. This aligns with the concept of "hijacked victimhood," where ZANU-PF presented itself as a victim of international forces and neoliberal policies, justifying its authoritarian responses to maintain control. The political opposition, civil society, and even economic reform movements were portrayed as aggressors, seeking to reverse the liberation gains. The victimhood narrative thus became a tool for ZANU-PF

to rally support and maintain its legitimacy in the face of growing unpopularity.

While the economic and political crises in Zimbabwe appear to create a simplistic victim/perpetrator dichotomy—ZANU-PF as the victim of external pressures and civil society as the aggressor—this narrative masks the complex interactions between these actors. The overlapping crises of economic decline, land reform failure, and international pressures are interconnected, and all political actors are influenced by these external forces. ZANU-PF's representation of itself as a victim overlooks its own role in creating the economic crisis through poor policy decisions, such as unbudgeted payouts to war veterans and the mismanagement of land reform.

This dichotomy simplifies the realities of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem by casting the ruling party as a perpetual victim and the opposition as the perpetrator. In reality, the opposition, civil society, and the urban middle class are themselves victims of economic decline and political repression. These overlapping crises blur the lines between victim and perpetrator, as actors on both sides of the political spectrum are responding to structural failures and external pressures. The complex nature of these relationships reflects the cyclical nature of victimization, where today's victim can easily become tomorrow's perpetrator.

Justifying Responses to Crisis, Opposition, and Political Pressure

ZANU-PF's victimhood narrative has been crucial in justifying its responses to the political and economic crises that have plagued Zimbabwe. As the party faced growing opposition from civil society, war veterans, and the working class, it fell back on its liberation war legacy, framing itself as the victim of both historical injustices and contemporary external pressures. This narrative provided a moral and political justification for the ruling party's authoritarian tactics, including election manipulation, repression of civil society, and exclusion of diaspora Zimbabweans from voting.

The notion that ZANU-PF is under attack from neocolonial forces helped the party justify its actions as necessary to preserve the stability and independence of the nation. The

complex realities of economic decline, opposition from political actors, and the growing international focus on human rights were all folded into a narrative where ZANU-PF's survival was tied to the survival of the liberation struggle's legacy. By invoking victimhood, the party not only silenced dissent but also garnered domestic and international sympathy for its continued dominance

Of international complicity and legitimising questionable regimes

The final factor that shapes the way that the interaction of political actors in Zimbabwe manifests during election and further entangles these political interactions is the complicity of the international community.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how the shift in the global order towards Western liberal democracy foregrounded elections as the primary signal of compliance with the new global order. Fareed Zakaria, for instance noted that elections were an easier measure of democracy than the rule of law such that "Washington and the world will tolerate a great deal from the resulting government."³²¹ To this extent, governments like the Zimbabwean government realised that they only needed to put on the performance of elections to maintain access to financial and political resources in the international community. In the same vein, the international community's own engagements with the capital resources of a country increase its complicity in the complication of political interactions. Testimonies from 43-year-old civil society activist and domestic election observer Precious, and 52-year-old media practitioner, Kwayedza reveal the complicity of the international community in producing contentious and entangled dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe.

Precious:

"Because I believe that those that control the politics subscribe to elections only to legitimise the leadership that they would have selected, so that that leadership would be internationally accepted. But otherwise, if it wasn't that, I think that

³²¹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," 30

these guys would just select their person and put at the top and say let's move on.”³²²

Kwayedza:

I think ZANU-PF has a legitimate reason to continue with the charade [of elections]. It is because the charade gives it legitimacy. It makes it legitimate in the eyes of the world... ZANU-PF is not bothered about local legitimacy because it doesn't care, it does what it wants. But it's interested in international legitimacy because it gives it the right to be involved internationally, the right to borrow money, which of course it steals. But it gives it certain rights and opportunities and pathways. It wants to be seen at international forums and then it uses that legitimacy to oppress people back home. It's very interesting that, you know, when you interview ZANU-PF folk, they tell you that they hate elections, but they also understand that they cannot do without them. Most repressive regimes which are hybrid, they have elections, but elections are choreographed, and opposition just participates in order to give legitimacy as well to the process. So that's why you find that ZANU will be angry if the opposition pulled out because it wants that legitimacy of having contested and defeat or “defeated” the opposition, then it can go around saying that “We won.”

Precious and Kwayedza’s testimonies demonstrate that elections are a foreign policy strategy – a sort of cover charge for to gain access to the international system. The complicity of the international community thus, deepens the distrust and disingenuous nature of political interactions in Zimbabwe.

Final Thoughts: The Complications of Victimhood, the Global order, and Zimbabwe

The political interactions in Zimbabwe are deeply influenced by a combination of internal economic decline, historical narratives of victimhood, and international complicity. The ruling party, ZANU-PF, has effectively leveraged its liberation war legacy and positioned itself as a victim of both colonial oppression and external economic pressures. This

³²² Online Interview with Precious, December 2023

victimhood narrative has allowed the party to maintain control, even in the face of domestic opposition, economic collapse, and widespread disillusionment. By framing its responses to opposition and crises as necessary defences of national sovereignty and the liberation struggle, ZANU-PF has managed to justify its authoritarian practices and suppress dissent.

At the same time, the economic and political crises in Zimbabwe have blurred the lines between victim and perpetrator. Civil society, opposition groups, and marginalized populations have also suffered from the country's economic decline and political repression. This overlapping victimhood has created a complex political ecosystem where all actors are, in some ways, both victims and perpetrators. ZANU-PF's use of repression and manipulation to maintain power mirrors the same colonial tactics it once fought against, reproducing the victim/perpetrator dichotomy in a new form.

Complicating these dynamics further is the role of the international community. As Zimbabwe navigates international political and economic pressures, the global shift towards liberal democracy has placed elections at the forefront as the primary signal of compliance with international norms. However, as discussed earlier, these elections are often choreographed performances designed to maintain access to international financial and political resources. Precious and Kwayedza's testimonies underscore how elections in Zimbabwe are used as a foreign policy strategy, providing ZANU-PF with the legitimacy it needs to continue its rule while simultaneously oppressing its own people.

The international community, by prioritizing elections over substantive democratic practices such as the rule of law, becomes complicit in this process. By accepting the superficial performance of democracy, international actors enable ZANU-PF to maintain its hold on power, further entangling the political relationships within Zimbabwe. This complicity not only reinforces ZANU-PF's victimhood narrative but also deepens the distrust and disingenuous nature of political interactions in the country. Ultimately, the international community's role in Zimbabwe's political ecosystem contributes to the perpetuation of an authoritarian regime that continues to exploit its historical victimhood for political gain, while neglecting the economic and social wellbeing of its people.

This chapter focused on providing a general analysis on the external political and economic pressures confronting the relationships between political actors. The chapter revealed that these pressures produce a lens of victimhood which is politicised and harnessed in times of political crisis as exemplified by the introduction of the ESAPs, the protests by ZCTU, the issue of land reform, and the rise of opposition politics in Zimbabwe.

The next chapter concludes this thesis with thoughts and an interrogation on the future of Zimbabwe's political ecosystem in light of new and recurring crises both domestically and abroad.

Chapter 5: Impact of political interactions

This thesis has interrogated the relationship dynamics between political actors in Zimbabwe. It has examined the historical, political, and economic factors which have shaped and influenced the nature of political interactions. So far, this thesis has established that elections are a source of tension for the relationship between political actors due to their capacity to shift the balance of power, their importance in maintaining foreign relations, and their usefulness for authoritarian practices in Zimbabwe. The thesis has also interrogated how elections create the toxic, complicit, and entangled dynamics between political actors, as well as their role in producing complex victims and perpetrators in Zimbabwe.

But the question remains – what is the impact that elections have on the relationship between political actors in the African country? I also ask that in the context of increasing neoliberal globalisation, the emergence of global conflict, and an emerging bi-polar world order, what role will elections serve in a country like Zimbabwe? How can Zimbabweans understand issues of citizenship, nationality, identity, and belonging within this broader context, but also with the consolidation of the militarised state in Zimbabwe?

The analysis of Zimbabwe's electoral landscape reveals a troubling paradox: while elections are ostensibly a mechanism for democratic engagement, they have become a strategic performance for the ruling party, ZANU-PF, to secure international legitimacy rather than genuine public representation. As articulated by civil society activist Precious and media practitioner Kwayedza, the electoral process in Zimbabwe is less about fostering democratic values and more about maintaining a facade of legitimacy to appease external stakeholders. This performance is crucial for ZANU-PF, as it enables access to international financial resources and political support, despite the underlying repression and manipulation of the electoral process.

This dynamic underscores the complexities of political interactions in Zimbabwe, where the international community's complicity inadvertently supports a regime that prioritizes its survival over the will of the people. The testimonies of Precious and Kwayedza highlight a critical understanding: the ruling party's engagement with elections is a

calculated strategy to project an image of democracy while continuing to exert control domestically. As such, the legitimacy gained from these elections is wielded not to empower citizens but to consolidate power and justify oppressive measures against dissent.

Transitioning into the next section, it becomes imperative to explore the implications of this electoral charade on the relationships between political actors within Zimbabwe. Specifically, considerations of the impact of these manipulated elections in the context of increasing neoliberal globalization, the emergence of global conflicts, and the evolving bi-polar world order.

Impact of elections/EA on the relationship dynamics between political actors

The contestations between political actors in Zimbabwe speaks to the notions of identity and citizenship. Richard Braungart and Mary Braungart's revelation that the conflict between political actors causes them to develop forms of protest that defend and clarify their position. The tensions engendered during elections including the various strategies used by political actors to 'protect' the vote or manipulate the vote can be understood as efforts by political actors to defend and clarify their identity and their citizenship. Engaging with the work of Marshal and Bottomore, Johansson argues that citizenship refers to the legal, political, social, and economic belonging/membership to a nation-state.³²³

For Johansson, citizenship is expressed through the everyday happenings which influence how this membership is experienced, satisfied, and oppressed. These expressions are demonstrated in the degree of one's access to welfare, voting rights, employment, education, and security. However, exclusions from these services create perceptions and understandings over who belongs and who does not belong. The application of electoral authoritarianism by the ruling party can, thus, be understood as precisely this process of defining the terms of citizenship and of identity.

³²³ Johansson, S., 2019. The right to the city in post-apartheid South Africa: Abahlali baseMjondolo's struggle for land, housing, and dignity, Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg. See also the work of Thomas Humphrey Marshall and T. B. Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992)

Political Activist Clive bitterly notes the challenges of belonging and accessing citizenship through the electoral process in Zimbabwe. Having suffered political persecution leading to torture and arrest, Clive, too, now lives in exile – returning to Zimbabwe to vote or offer technical and advisory support to civil society organisations and opposition political parties.

“For ZANU PF they are organised because they use military precision. They use the military infrastructure to do this right ... they are all involved in elections in Zimbabwe for the purposes of giving ZANU PF an upper hand. So, for the opposition, if you want to win that kind of an election, then you have to dismantle that infrastructure. You have to dismantle the link between ZANU PF and the military, and there's no other way to do that than to actually have some other kind of force. Which means either you use military force that is having an uprising, a violent uprising with guns or you have mass action with people dying and then somehow you push the military out, or whoever is heading the military until there's a general consensus that the military is going to stay out of the elections. But we have not done that. We have been incapable of doing that.”³²⁴

Lawyer, political activist, and academic Hamandishe, recalls the complicit and enabling behaviour of civil society groups in manipulating votes in the rural areas. Hamandishe's testimony reveals the complex nature of citizenship through voting rights by describing the ways this citizenship is censored, silenced, and misappropriated.

“So, they did not want the army to be involved [in the 2023 election] but they created an organisation, a quasi-hybrid securocratic organisation called Forever Associates of Zimbabwe and you saw what they were doing in the rural areas. They had created desks, intimidating people in the rural areas. Who has ever seen such a thing like exit polls...What is an exit poll? ... They were recording people's names when they were pointing them to the poll... [They were] telling people and asking them electoral information, intimidating them before they cast the vote... what ZANU-PF also did differently is the apparent abuse of traditional leaders. Before the election, traditional leaders were given all-terrain vehicles, Toyota vehicles.

³²⁴ Online Interview with Clive, December 2023.

They were promised bonuses and actually the bonus was delivered for the first time... Have you read that book by Mamdani, 'Citizen and Subject', and how chiefs were used in the colonial period. That is how they were used in Zimbabwe in 2023.”

Where Clive speaks to the violent nature of citizenship, Hamandishe describes the softer and more psychological aspects of citizenship such as fear and intimidation, as well as patronage and greed. The two participants' testimonies show that contestations over citizenship are both violent and psychological. They entail the threat of life as well as the amelioration of life as in the case of the gifts received by the chiefs in exchange for intimidating rural residents. The testimonies of Clive and Hamandishe also find expression in Mamdani's analysis of extreme violence and its role in defining citizenship. Mahmood Mamdani asserts that extreme violence often stems from historical conflicts regarding who belongs to the political community.³²⁵ He emphasizes the importance of understanding violence, whether it is committed by the state or directed against it, within its political context.³²⁶

This perspective highlights how such violence relates to the construction and contestation of political membership boundaries. Additionally, Mamdani urges for violence perpetrated on behalf of the state, or against the state to be viewed in its political content i.e., the building and challenging of boundaries of political membership.³²⁷ The intimidation of voters by the security apparatus and the weaponisation of traditional leaders illustrate the role of electoral authoritarianism in perpetuating the colonial past of exclusion and marginalisation. Furthermore, these dual practices also reflect the breakdown of relations between political actors as they attempt to access the perks of citizenship whilst warding off political violence and the pressures of economic decline.

Achille Mbembe speaks to the re-ordering of political relations in lieu of pervasive processes of neoliberalism which continue to haunt the fabric of political interactions in

³²⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Native nor Settler: The making and unmaking of permanent minorities*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2020), 331

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

Zimbabwe.³²⁸ Mbembe argues that in scenarios where private sector interests or public officials profit personally from managing public services, the citizen who should be safeguarded by the state's coercive mechanisms instead becomes an individual who benefits from the privatization process.³²⁹

Narsiah and Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue that the work of the colonial state is not complete – only evolving and finding new expression in the post-colonial landscape through the process of privatisation. According to Narsiah privatisation is: “the systematic transfer of appropriate functions, activities or property from the public to the private sector, where services, production and consumption can be regulated more efficiently by the market and price mechanism.” Alexander points out that privatization created avenues for officials at local, provincial, and national levels to enrich themselves by securing government contracts for public services.³³⁰ Alongside the appropriation of public tenders for personal gain, Narsiah highlights the rise of nepotism and the politicization of municipal services, which have contributed to the decline of public services, particularly in regions considered to be less "profitable."³³¹

Kureva, a 46-year-old civil society actor attached to foreign observation missions noted his experiences of privatisation of public services and the silencing of civil society from accessing the benefits of citizenship. Having lived overseas most of his life, Kureva provides his shock and surprise at the premium of citizenship in Zimbabwe in two testimonies – his professional experience, and his personal experience.

“So, during 2022 when civil society was coming back to the field after a year and a half of basically very few operations because of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic... the provincial development co-ordinators, the PDC's, [were] requiring civil society organizations to enter into MOUs with them and some of the quantities that they were asking for those MOUs amount to \$2,000.

So, they were asking actually for something that is not provided in any law at the moment, and they were claiming that we would be part of the [Private Voluntary

³²⁸ Achille Mbembe, “On Private Indirect Government,” 74.

³²⁹ Ibid.,

³³⁰ Peter Alexander, “Rebellion of the poor: South Africa’s service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis”

³³¹ Ibid.

Organisations] Amendment bill and it's actually not... there's nothing that speaks of MOUs in that Amendment Bill... I think the sad thing is that people have given up, and you see that not only towards the expectations they should have from a government that is there to protect the human rights of all, but you can also see that.... [with] ZESA [Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority].

It was one of the first things that astonished me when I arrived in Zimbabwe was I rented an apartment and then electricity was gone all of a sudden. After checking that everything was fine, I went on the streets and then I start knocking on my neighbours' doors and I said, "Hey, guys, do you have electricity?"... "No we don't." And I'm like, "Oh, did you call the electric company?", and they all start laughing and they're like, "Nah, you know, it will come back. Maybe not." And then, you know, that sort of hopelessness, just even the most basic services are not being provided for."³³²

So, unless you're fairly wealthy and you can drill a borehole, you might not have drinking water in Harare, in the capital. Unless you can afford to buy solar or get a generator, you might not have electricity. So, I think the average Zimbabwean goes through so many things in their daily lives that relate to their socio-economic well-being, that the political concerns are actually shovelled as a secondary concern. Of course, it's actually the source of many of these things, but in your everyday life that doesn't matter because you still need to plug those holes."³³³

Kureva's testimony provides empirical evidence of the patterns of privatisation and their effects in the daily experiences of citizens that Alexander, Mbembe, Narsiah, and Ndlovu-Gatsheni articulate. Kureva shows that the relationship between citizens and the state is characterized by a growing sense of hopelessness, where individuals are compelled to find alternative solutions for their needs, such as drilling boreholes for water or investing in solar power for electricity. This shift indicates a retreat from state dependence, as citizens increasingly rely on private means to secure their basic needs.

³³² Online Interview with Kureva, November 2024

³³³ Ibid.

Consequently, political concerns take a backseat to immediate socio-economic challenges, as survival becomes the primary focus for many Zimbabweans. The resulting situation in Zimbabwe is that citizens are left to navigate their existence in a landscape marked by privatization and individualism, reflecting a broader trend in neoliberal governance that prioritizes market solutions over public welfare.

Kureva's testimony underscores a critical shift in the citizen/state relationship in Zimbabwe, where the state's inability to fulfil its responsibilities has led to a reliance on private solutions and a diminished political engagement among the populace. What is also clear is that there the state in Zimbabwe has not necessarily failed, but rather it is now the privilege of the few – of what Bruce referred to earlier as “the selectorate.” These dynamics raises important questions about governance, accountability, and the role of the state in ensuring the well-being of its citizens.

The Trauma of Political Interactions in the face of Elections

According to Kleber, trauma refers to the range of symptoms that manifest in individuals and communities that confront overwhelming events like inter-alia war, violence, death, and physical violence.³³⁴ At the phenomenological level, the trauma psychologist argues that trauma creates an “extreme sense of powerlessness as well as a disruption of beliefs and expectations.”³³⁵

In terms of impact, Kleber describes that victims of trauma often feel unsafe, numb, and in constant alert for danger.³³⁶ On the other hand, in communities, violent experiences undermine the social fabric of communities which leads to a dissolution in social networks through voluntary or forced migration as well as psychological disengagement.³³⁷ Kleber's description of trauma and its impact are demonstrated in Makonye's assessment of conflict transformation theory in Zimbabwe which reveals that

³³⁴ Kleber, R.J. (2019a) 'Trauma and Public Mental Health: A Focused Review', *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2019.00451>, 1.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

elections are a root cause of violence that need to be addressed if the symptom of voter apathy is to be resolved.³³⁸

Jeremias Zunguze’s close reading of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) provides insight into the psyche of the Zimbabwean citizen as it pertains to elections as a site of trauma.³³⁹ Zunguze argues that the consequences of exposing people to persistent structural violence deprives them of the basic ideas of what it means to be a human by: “distorting, disfiguring, or destroying the episteme or knowledge and system of knowing that shape the “welfare, worth, and dignity of human beings,”³⁴⁰ In the case of Zimbabwe, Ndlovu describes how the multiple cycles of economic crises and the lack caused by these crises are so persistent as to be ingrained in the Zimbabwean identity and understanding of reality such that feelings of “hopelessness, fear and intimidation” are a regular facet of life.³⁴¹

Ndlovu argues that the complexity of victims and perpetrators in Zimbabwe is located in the endurance and pervasiveness of “historical trauma”.³⁴² According to Ndlovu, historical trauma is an omnipresent force manifested by continuous repetition of an outcome following a course of action.³⁴³ To illustrate her point, Ndlovu draws on the experiences of the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe in which the army opened fire on unarmed civilians, including the abduction, detention and torture of prominent journalists and opposition leaders. In light of the 2018 attacks, the scholar argues that the elections are a debilitating trigger which highlights abusive layers in the relationships between political actors – particularly the citizen and state relationship. To this end, Ndlovu notes that:

“[t]here is no true peace in the presence of a volatile and traumatised state. Even if the election results were not contested, the silencing of the lived realities would

³³⁸ Makonye, F. (2021) ‘Analysing Zimbabwe’s Electoral Ecosystem from April 1980 to November 2017: Challenges and Complexities’, *African Journal of Democracy and Election Research*, 1(2), pp. 103–118. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2752-602X/2021/v1n2a4>

³³⁹ Zunguze, Jeremias. “Coping with Epistemic Trauma: The Africana Pursuit of New Humanism.” *Public Philosophy Journal* 2, no. 2 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.59522/QBCU8277>.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ Ndlovu, M. (2018) OP-ED: Trauma revisited – understanding the impact of Zimbabwe’s post-electoral violence, *Daily Maverick*. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-08-06-trauma-revisited-understanding-the-impact-of-zimbabwes-post-electoral-violence/> (Accessed: 21 July 2023).

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

have produced an unsustainable negative peace. Memory does not forget subconsciously placed trauma – particularly when the oppressor bears a familiar face.”³⁴⁴

Concerns for the future of Zimbabwe in a conflicting and neoliberal world

At the time of writing, the world is undergoing significant re-orderings marked by the Israel/Palestine conflict, the Russia/Ukraine conflict, and the wave of militarised coups in West Africa. The Western model of liberal democracy is in question as the responses to the above outlined challenges have increased global inequalities and opened the way for grave human rights abuses to proliferate in the everyday – through migration patterns and practices, employment practices, and political interactions.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, the political ecosystem in Zimbabwe is vulnerable to many processes – both domestic and global. Thus, the future of political interactions in the country is of critical concern for citizens such as myself, for regional relations, and for scholars and practitioners seeking to make sense of and implement processes for peace, reconciliation and stability in the country. With all political actors complicit and entangled in the practices and thinking of oppression and repression as engendered by the colonial state, there is a need for academic and intellectual tools to be developed or critically expanded in order to provide the language and lenses through which African people can understand their contexts whilst also being acknowledged and validated in these bodies of knowledge.

The concerns articulated above are shared by the interview respondents whose own experiences of political interactions in Zimbabwe have left them fatigued, traumatised, and unsure about the future of Zimbabwe – especially a future in which the colonial state’s violent practices are not the modus operandi in political interactions. That the cycle of native/settler identities can be reconciled and reformed. To conclude this chapter, I leave the reflections and concerns of several participants as food for thought for the reader.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

Academic and activist, Bheki laments the international community's complicity in Zimbabwe's situation,

“The major challenge now is, of course, what's happening at international level. The Gaza issue is now the major issue and the Western countries have begun to lose a lot of legitimacy because of their role in the violence against Palestinians in Gaza. And therefore, authoritarian regimes like Mnangagwa say to the Western countries like the US, “Who are you to preach to me about democracy when you are engaging in a massive displacement and violence and a possible genocide of the Palestinian people? You have no credibility to do so.”, and increasingly on the continent that message is being heard. So, regimes like Mnangagwa don't feel the push of democracy coming from outside as much as they did, say even five years ago. ”³⁴⁵

Munashe, a 43-year-old political activist and opposition politician observes,

... what I think is at the centre of challenges that have continued to dog elections in this country. They relate to this ZANU-PF person's mentality, psyche. This entitlement mentality which I call ‘the liberation mentality’, which says those who went to war are only the people who are entitled to rule this country. Never mind the will of the majority of the people. So, we have to make sure we address this entitlement mentality. It focuses on trying to change that psyche...The entitlement mentality that, “We went to war, we liberated this country, therefore we must rule it ad infinitum” ...So, it calls for reforming ZANU-PF from within... I am in the opposition, but I played a part towards the liberation of this country and I know many opposition people who played a part in the liberation of this country, but who are not necessarily ZANU-PF members. So we have to respect that.³⁴⁶

Political activist and journalist, Panashe worries about the potential rise of anarchy in response to the suffocating pressures of economic decline and political disillusionment.

Really when elections don't work the way they are supposed to work, you are creating a time bomb. Whether it will have sufficient conditions to detonate is

³⁴⁵ Online interview with Bheki, January 2024.

³⁴⁶ Online interview with Munashe, January 2024.

another thing, but I think that we might be pushing a lot of our young people into uncomfortable territories and it's very easy to slide into. I know people think that Zimbabweans can't go to war, they are too... But peace is very fragile. Once we enter into that phase, it becomes difficult. It becomes very difficult. I think you remember what we saw in 2005, 2006, where police stations were being bombed. We don't know whether it was an internal thing by the military or by ZANU PF or it was just frustrated young people at the time. We don't know. But it's easy to slide into anarchy. Mozambique is too close to us for people to dismiss the idea of a war. It's a time bomb. And elections themselves, will become very unconvincing, going by the last two elections, to many, many, many people.³⁴⁷

What is clear from these testimonies is that the work of detangling, reconciling, and reforming the political interactions in Zimbabwe will be a long and difficult road – but one which has become increasingly necessary to undergo.

³⁴⁷ Online interview with Panashe, January 2024.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis has interrogated the layered and often contradictory political relationships that define Zimbabwe's electoral landscape, focusing on how political actors relate, compete, and co-exist within a complex web of coercion, legitimacy, history, and external pressure. It has shown that elections in Zimbabwe are not simply events where citizens express political will but are instead performative and strategic rituals that reflect and reproduce deeper asymmetries in the political system. The study departs from simplistic binaries of oppressor versus victim and instead situates political actors within an ecosystem of entanglement—where histories of violence, tactics of survival, and quests for legitimacy intersect.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of work on electoral authoritarianism by advancing the idea of “entangled political interactions.” Drawing on insights from transitional justice, postcolonial theory, and political sociology, the study demonstrates that political actors in Zimbabwe cannot be understood solely as free agents or coerced subjects. Rather, they are shaped by inherited structures of colonial and liberation-era politics, and by the relational dependencies that elections impose. The notion of entanglement offers a more nuanced framework for analysing hybrid regimes—not just as flawed democracies, but as systems that deliberately obscure the lines between democratic participation and authoritarian control.

Methodologically, the study embraces a grounded, qualitative approach centred on lived experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews, complemented by thematic and discursive analysis, enabled a textured understanding of how power operates not only at the level of institutions but also in the realm of narrative, memory, and identity. Crucially, the decision to anonymise participants was not just an ethical choice, but a political one—rooted in an understanding of the risks posed by Zimbabwe's surveillance and repression apparatus. In doing so, the research foregrounds the importance of methodological sensitivity when studying political dynamics in authoritarian contexts.

Empirically, the thesis makes several key contributions. First, it reveals how elections serve multiple, often conflicting functions: as moments of hope, performance, resistance, and repression. They are a source of potential transformation, yet also tools for entrenching power. Second, it illustrates how political actors—including opposition figures, civil society leaders, and citizens—navigate these contradictions through strategies of complicity, survival, and co-option. The study offers compelling evidence that even within repressive environments, political agency is not absent—but rather reconfigured, negotiated, and often entangled with structures of domination. Third, the study unpacks how the idea of citizenship itself is contested and operationalised during elections—often mobilised to include or exclude, to reward loyalty or punish dissent.

Importantly, the study also attends to the historical and international dimensions of Zimbabwe's political interactions. It shows how unresolved liberation legacies continue to legitimise authoritarianism, and how the ruling party strategically performs democracy to court international legitimacy while undermining democratic practice at home. The analysis of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, especially in relation to narratives of entitlement and resistance, adds depth to current debates on political accountability and reconciliation in postcolonial Africa.

In sum, this thesis contributes to political science and transitional justice literatures by offering a relational, historically grounded, and ethically attuned analysis of political interactions under electoral authoritarianism. It challenges scholars and policymakers to move beyond normative assumptions about elections and democracy, and to grapple with the messiness of power, identity, and legitimacy in contexts like Zimbabwe. While the study raises more questions than it answers—particularly around how to dismantle such entangled systems—it provides a conceptual vocabulary and empirical grounding from which future research can proceed.

As Zimbabwe and other post-liberation African states continue to navigate the promises and pitfalls of democratisation, this thesis calls for a deeper interrogation of the structures that sustain authoritarian resilience—and a re-imagining of the political as a space not only of contestation, but also of possibility.

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