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WITHHOLDING POLITICAL AUTHORITY:  
CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEOPLE'S POWER IN ZIMBABWE

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Josef Korbel School Of International Studies  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

A. Scott DuPree

August 2012

Advisor: Professor Alan Gilbert

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Author: A. Scott DuPree  
Title: WITHHOLDING POLITICAL AUTHORITY: CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEOPLE'S POWER IN ZIMBABWE  
Advisor: Prof. Alan Gilbert  
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### **Abstract**

The relationship of civil society to the state is rarely antagonistic and at most times supportive. The political regime and civil society are taken to be interdependent social structures that interact through hegemonic, supportive and socially constructed dimensions. Given this interdependency, when does civil society challenge authority or do its efforts rise to the level of a people's power revolution? When does it act to dismantle the political regime or seek to reconstruct it? This project attempts to shed light on how civil society mobilizes a people's power capable of challenging political authority through the story of its ongoing struggles to pursue social objectives in Zimbabwe in the 1990s.

Since 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) controlled the only post-colonial government Zimbabwe has known. Drawing from its revolutionary credentials it set out to finish the interrupted war for Zimbabwean Independence. This objective resonated with civil society less and less over time as groups began to see Zanu's promises as hollow and its corruption and patronage systems as the primary obstacle in accomplishing their objectives. This development is explored through a grassroots empowerment movement, the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress, the widespread protests in 1997 catalyzed by the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions and the efforts to rebuild the constitutional order spearheaded by the National Constitutional Assembly.

The story points to at least three civil society strategies to locate power within the people and counter political power: 1) constructing political alternatives within the existing regime, 2) mass withdrawal of support for the authority of the regime and 3) reconstruction of the social contract. Nevertheless, civil society did not succeed to dismantle the political regime, hampered by the continuing capacity of the state to exert hegemonic control, remove the pillars of its support and exploit polarized values within civil society.

Despite the terrible destruction of social and economic fabric of the country by the political struggles of the 2000s, the ongoing development of democratic values and the diminishing importance of the interrupted revolution can provide a glimmer of hope for the future transformation of the country.

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## **PRELUDE: THE FILABUSI CAMPFIRE**

*Or how I learned that people's power makes a difference*

By the light of a campfire in the village of Filabusi, Zimbabwe in 1997 villagers gathered for a discussion on the possibility of creating the country's first community foundation from their contributions to a traditional savings practice called *qoqelela*. Women of all ages sat on the ground with their legs straight out in front of themselves, as is the custom; interspersed among them were a few men, but many stood in the back where their faces were only illuminated occasionally when the flames of the fire burned more brightly.

I sat in a small space cleared for the guests, staff and mobilizers with the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). Our objective was to discuss the creation of the country's first community foundation from the contributions that villagers in this community and 50,000 other ORAP members across the region had made to assist in their own development. After a process of research and inquiry that had taken years and involved members from many villages, different models, such as microcredit organizations, had been discarded in favor of building a philanthropic foundation that would be owned by its original donors and would seek to increase financing by partnering with local and international organizations. A community foundation is an organization that raises and distributes resources, usually in the form of grants, for the benefit of a particular community.

With the reality finally coming to fruition, however, some challenging political issues had come to the fore. The most important one was who would be supported, whether it would be all communities in the region of western Zimbabwe (the three provinces—Midlands and Matabeleland South and North—in which ORAP worked) or only the communities of ORAP associations that were original contributors. Some ORAP staff members were worried the contributors would expect the foundation to support only those groups that had given the initial



start-up funding. They argued that grants to non-contributing communities could fan new jealousies and anger as those who did nothing to build the new foundation would jump on as free riders once it started distributing grants. We set out to answer this question by visiting many of the contributors in meetings such as this one in Filabusi. As an advisor to the process (I worked with an organization that was partnered with ORAP), my role was to learn and help shape the foundation to meet the expectation of the contributors.

In the electric atmosphere of accustomed politeness, one of the ORAP staff members carefully reviewed the *qoqe/ela* initiative, recalling the years of discussing how ORAP members could mobilize their savings to fund their own initiatives. Through the *qoqe/ela* initiative, village mobilizers had collected five Zimbabwe dollars apiece from contributing members. Each dollar was to be used to fund projects at various levels of organization. The first dollar was for the family units, the smallest level of ORAP organization. The next three dollars funded other levels of organization, but the fifth and final dollar, was the subject of creating the shared greater dream launched the process for building for the future. Heads nodded in understanding. Each person in the crowd had experience with raising and using the funding on these levels particularly in their family units.

Then, the ORAP speaker reviewed how the lessons and work led to shaping a community financing institution called a “community foundation.” When it was clear that this narrative conformed to the general understanding, we began to discuss some of the issues that were being raised in the final efforts to establish this new organization. The ORAP speaker emphasized the investment of the contributors and their dreams to progress in their own areas. It would be understandable, she emphasized, if contributors were counting on this money to come back to them to help invest in their projects. Was this the case, did they want the new foundation to commit to funding only the projects of the groups who have contributed to it? That is, did they want the money they had given to start the foundation to come back to them in the future in the form of grants?

The question was important because ORAP had already evoked the ire of some of its members who had contributed money and not received receipts or financial reports. But it was also important to shape the mission and programs of the future foundation. Was it to be an ORAP program, that is, meant to support only ORAP linked associations or was it to take on a larger vision and mission for community development in the region?

A pause followed in which the profiles of audience members danced as shadows in the firelight across their neighbors. I wondered if people had understood the question. In a way, it seemed like it had an obvious answer. Of course, the contributors expect to be the main beneficiaries of the foundation. Staff at ORAP had been telling me this for weeks, arguing that the foundation would need to have a narrow mission. Perhaps it could grow in time, but the foundation needed to be accountable to those who invested in it as its first priority.

Finally, an elderly woman pressed her skirts around her outstretched legs and rose in the flickering light. Solemnly and in a confident voice she said, no, of course we do not expect this money to come back to us. Our dream is that it will help everyone, that it will build a better future. This future may be something that those of us here will never know. Only our grandchildren and their grandchildren will live to see it.

One could see and hear the murmurs of assent around her. As though a dam had opened, several others rose to build on the idea of how important it was to open the dream to everyone. Some spoke of the lack of resources for everyone's development and others argued that it would make no sense for ORAP communities to progress at the expense of their neighbors. Most would have agreed, at the least, that the twenty years of waiting for the fruits of governmental promises for development and prosperity had yielded little progress. What brought them together, however, was not resistance but the dream of building on the traditions, ideas, energy and resources they already possessed without waiting for the government. Their need to believe they could take development into their own hands, ran counter to an air of resignation that hung over a country in which the practice of waiting for government patronage and its social programs to lift up its citizens was commonplace. How did the passion for autonomous

development and the firm commitment to social solidarity fit with a political sphere that seemed to rule largely from clientelist structures and closing off the access to resources for the benefit of a few?

My work brought me often to Zimbabwe in the 1990s. I traveled extensively around the Bulawayo region to meet with members of village associations and other organizations engaged largely in community development. One thing that struck me again and again was how knowledgeable and politically savvy many people were. Despite the fact that print media and television were scarce in the rural areas—but hardly absent—most people found time to listen to the radio or to analyze political and economic affairs with their friends and neighbors. As an upshot, they were very aware of and concerned about the political context in which they found themselves. They tended to be intimate with current events and history and curious about diverse sides of issues.

Political debate covered not just local issues but international politics and events such as the US invasion of Somalia. Zimbabweans struggled with why the world was willing to let Rwandans die and rot in their own rivers and watched with hope the demise of the racial regime of Apartheid in South Africa. Talk of Zimbabwean politics itself was guarded. Nevertheless, I regularly heard murmurs about how the “old man” (Robert Mugabe) could not live forever. Frustration with the high cost of school fees and a common interest in addressing the region’s endemic water shortages were hot political issues.

I compared the Zimbabweans I met to my expectations about political interest in the United States where political discussion, in my experience, seemed to be limited to those who do it for a living or families with an interest and culture of political services. I was curious and wondered what to make of the much higher general level of political consciousness. Why did Zimbabweans (and this seemed to hold true in Botswana where I also lived but less true in Mozambique) care so much? Why did Americans care so little? I was left with a conclusion that Zimbabwean society was deeply political. Fanon’s undifferentiated and apolitical masses were hard to find in Zimbabwe in the 1990s. Whatever catastrophe was on the horizon could not be

attributed to the political ignorance of the people. Which is not to say that citizens were in the political driver's seat. Robert Mugabe and those around him seemed to be on a train speeding to the end of its tracks. They could neither disembark nor turn themselves around. By 1997, it was clear that historical change was on the horizon in Zimbabwe.

What was uncomfortable was the contradiction between what appeared to be a strong understanding of political power and a sense of powerlessness to change it that pervaded the society around me. It seemed that every discussion on political conditions ended with a disclaimer, "well, the old man is old now," "we can only hope," "The problem is, who will replace him," or a standard Zimbabwean expression of polite resignation when considering a change in the political climate, "maybe."

The feeling of hopelessness in the shadow of power politics may be a constant for us all. We have all felt and fought against it. Nothing heals this dismay of citizens when we realize that we are incapable of moving our leaders or our institutions from destructive paths. But we do console ourselves by acting where we can, by doing what we can—keeping the government at bay. What I saw was a government that was very present in all aspects of life. The widely repeated warning to be careful of criticizing the government of Zimbabwe because the CIO (Central Intelligence Organization) had spies in every bar and restaurant, for example, illustrates just how much people believed the Zimbabwean government was breathing down their necks. Citizens discerned few degrees of separation between themselves and their national leaders. National leaders exercised direct control to a degree that politicians are rarely visible in the United States.

Perhaps the zenith of the idea of civil society has come and gone. Those who wanted to hitch their hat on civil society as the next big hope for "democratization," believe very strongly that all social and political progress must point that way. Robert Putnam and Vaclav Havel, among others, gave shape to an idea of an energetic civil society that pervaded 1990s Zimbabwe. In this form, civil society alters the course of bad policy, puts pressure on the government to respond and acts on behalf of the voiceless. To the south of Zimbabwe, in South Africa, civil society was

crowned as an important factor in the demise of Apartheid. And, to differing extents, something called civil society was embedded in the many democracy movements of the 1990s in Africa.

The fervor over civil society by 1990 was primarily caused by the fall of totalitarian governments in Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>. Civil society showed its strength in Africa by being an organizational space in which people demanded the demise of Apartheid and acted to change regimes in Zambia and other single party states. Could civil society emerge as a balancing power to unjust, undemocratic governments? The answer was apparently yes. It seemed that political change was emerging from a new people's power in Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, Malawi and across Southern Africa,. As such, the support for civil society organizations, specifically NGOs, was becoming a staple for international donors. The post-colonial relationships with the international community established on a donor/recipient relationship worked on their own logic. United Nations Agencies, the international financial institutions and Western AID programs became more attentive to NGOs, as an alternative way to reach African populations. Having fostered the creation of one-party states during the Cold War, many African governments, Zimbabwe was no exception, had severely limited all political competition. The idea of civil society, thus, not only promised to strengthen citizen organization and voice—leading to greater democracy—it provided a means to take alternative paths for development and policy that would not directly compete with government power.

The international financial institutions sought to reshape African political economies through structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s with little or no concern for the impacts on the rural poor. Civil society organizations picked up the slack and tried to address the negative impacts of retrenchment and weakening of social services. The price tag of providing pitifully small resources for civil society organizations to address social needs was nowhere near the scale of development funds being demanded by African governments. Support was justified

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Hamm traces the origins of the meaning of civil society in Eastern Europe to an antidote for totalitarianism. Seen as a replacement of socialism, he argues it is a weak utopian concept that is no longer taken seriously in the region. Hamm, C. (2004) In the Church of Civil Society. in M. Glasius, D. Lewis and H. Seckinelgin (eds) *Exploring civil society : political and cultural contexts*. New York: Routledge, pp. x, 213.

not by the potential economic gains or even the assistance to poor communities but because of the supposed linkage between civil society and good governance, which was seen as a real solution to the mismanagement of government and economy. Read this way, the West may have channeled support to civil society, not so much to balance the power of African governments but to keep them in power by supplying an escape valve for citizen expectations. While this financial support may have distorted internal social processes by stimulating a cottage industry of NGOs, it was only successful to the extent that it met a homegrown demand for association, characterized by a fundamental human drive to make life better.

Sitting around the Filabusi campfire, I began to think of civil society as the place in which people bring and form their sense of justice in the context of their aspirations and dreams. I do not think this is merely an idealistic process but a practical one in which people gain the capacity to judge political positions. The staff at ORAP had one understanding in which justice could only be served by limiting the benefits of a new institution to one that would privilege some over others. Happily ORAP staff tested their own ideas of justice by asking people what they wanted and creating the conditions in which people could actively participate in an ethical discourse. What if a state as a political institution of the people could be formed in the same way? This is not such a theoretical question as that is exactly the aspiration that would later become so powerful in the work of the National Constitutional Assembly to convene a national dialogue around constitution making.

The Zimbabwean discourse of the time seemed to be caught in a vortex of despair. But this was not the same as political apathy. I began to think that expressions of resignation should not be taken as sign that Zimbabweans had given up, but rather that they were part of a process of coming to understand what was at stake in the political sphere and how to address it. It was common to shake your head and say something along the lines of “Maybe the old man should go, but who will replace him? Zimbabwe has nobody else who can take his place.”

Underlying these words for me is the challenge of understanding why not just anybody can lead a polity, because not just anybody has the credibility as well as the raw power and skills

to direct the Leviathan. The content of the political message (the real objectives of the government and not just manipulating propaganda) and how it is heard against the diverse dreams of people and groups is continually judged and changing as part of the political process. The problem deserves to be understood on its own ground. The persistence of the political cult of personality as it plays out in Robert Mugabe is not merely because of a cultural predilection to personal leadership, it is related to how power is constructed.

I hoped my Zimbabwean friends could find a way out of the vice of political power. Whether or not Mugabe had the powers they ascribed to him seemed to be irrelevant because they acted as if he and his government had those powers. In the largely Ndebele region of the country where I worked, the persistent shortage of water and the perceived neglect or hostility of the government to local development was the reality. The recent history of repression in the late 1980s (the *Gukurahundi*, in which thousands of largely *Ndebele* Zimbabweans lost their lives and homes) cemented a fear and pragmatism about public complaint and forced resentment under the surface. How much of this changed strategy and how much affected the objectives themselves? Civil society hardly came to halt; it even seemed to thrive as a haven for the irrepressible desire to better material conditions. My Zimbabwean colleagues and friends did not outwardly oppose the government but, instead, pursued social and economic goals within the framework of possibilities, such as building schools and providing seed resources for community projects.

Still, government was always there. ORAP, for example, might build a school but the government would provide the teachers, it might fund a livestock project, but the government created the conditions around which livestock farming was possible. It is no wonder then that the strategy of ignoring the government only works for so long. I observed that, under a veneer of respect for authority and what seemed like profound patience, Zimbabweans were not really waiting but actively constructing a citizenship and society that would, eventually, come to oppose the government they had.

The Filabusiens clarity over a future that should benefit everyone was echoed everywhere I went. Zimbabweans were crafting and creating a politics of involvement, discussion and action. I think of the elderly woman declaring that her contribution (and dream) had to benefit everyone including the generations to come, as a critique of the politics of patronage that would be echoed over and over again in the post-1997 efforts to bring about political change. It seemed to me that a clear political stance, a national democratic vision, if you like, was emerging from the experience of these communities to build for the future and to act on their aspirations.



## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW AND APPROACH

*In pursuing social objectives, citizens are political animals and civil society is a sphere of political power. While some challenge the legitimacy of a political regime, the relationship of civil society to the state is rarely antagonistic and at most times supportive. When does people's power challenge authority? When does it act to dismantle the government or to seek to reconstruct it? While economic and material deprivation certainly motivates citizen anger, is it useful to think of people's power as social construction in the realm of political authority? This project seeks to bring to light how civil society in its struggles for justice and emancipation constructs a people's power capable of challenging political authority. Not all attempts to dismantle a political regime are successful. We can learn much about the limits of people's power through a case in which the political regime was able to fend it off. Zimbabwe is taken to be such an instructive case.*

The front door clearly marked with the well-known name of a Zimbabwean human rights organization was open and welcoming. Despite a climate in 2002 in which human rights defenders were being openly persecuted, there were no signs of increased security here. The calm, empty reception called attention to busier days when the well-worn furniture had seen much more traffic.

The receptionist was pleasant despite the fact that we had not made an appointment ahead of time. She ducked momentarily into the director's office and returned to invite us in. Even though he did not know us and was immersed in a climate of uncertainty and fear around human rights work in which it was rational to react with caution, the director greeted us warmly and proceeded to talk to us for hours about the challenges of human rights in his country, continuing with the interview well after his receptionist left for the evening.

In very sad detail, he described the breakdown in the rule of law over the last two years, how the courts, which had a reputation for independence, were now bowing to political pressure and the ruling party was persecuting, hounding or firing independent judges. It had become very unlikely to get a just ruling in the country, he said. He was clearly miserable and feeling a little lost. "I will tell you, it's no secret. I am also thinking of leaving the country." He paused when he

said this and then asked a simple rhetorical question that stuck with me. “What is a human rights lawyer if there is no rule of law? I am nothing here.”

This project began as an intuition that the answer to a similar question, “what is civil society without formal political power?” was a defensible, “it is still a realm of people’s power.” I had worked for years in a variety of countries where people consciously identified themselves as part of civil society in their pursuit of a broad range of social goals. They even spoke of power and empowerment as things that fundamentally belonged to the people. Where government was weak, impunity common and the barriers to formal political participation exceedingly high civil society seemed a rallying call for many. Granted I was working in the 1990s and 2000s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the first waves of democratization in Africa. At the time, the term “civil society” was in common use by those out of political power; a glimmer of hope that governance could be built from within. But beyond this consonance of practical political strategy and the interests of foreign aid (coupled at the same time with the dismal failures of structural adjustment in which many governments became less capable of bettering the plight of their citizens), there was something motivating and powerful about the use of civil society that attracted not only the disaffected but some of the best minds. I have heard the idea that civil society in these countries is a haven for the government in waiting. It seemed to me that it is much more than this; that it is a source of political power accessible even when all other formal avenues are shut down. Whether the aspiration to change the nature of political power is stated in a social mission or submerged in the motivating subtext that brings groups together, the social objectives of civil society organizations provide a shared set of ideas not only about how the world would be better but also about how we believe it is possible to change it. The question is not only then the one the Bulawayo lawyer posed, (restated: how can civil society act on social objectives (human rights) without government (providing the courts and infrastructure needed for the rule of law), but how can government actually accomplish political objectives without the support of civil society (legitimizing and acting on these objectives)?

Civil society groups struggle to bring about small and large changes on the way to accomplishing their objectives. How does this struggle affect the political sphere? How do their accomplishments add up?

In working largely with organizations in the Global South that are seeking such broad outcomes as an end to poverty, the defense and expansion of human rights or the protection of the environment on which we depend, I felt that civil society had deep claims to the political sphere that were not captured on lower levels of analysis—evaluating the impacts of NGO advocacy efforts, for example—but were part and parcel of the structural relationship that interlinks civil society and the political regime.

Despite enormous volumes of literature produced on the subject of civil society, in my own experience the attempts to tie it down are unsatisfactory. As Chris Hamm argues the belief in civil society has become a secular religion for a better life that has grown in importance as the expectations for a socialist alternative have diminished.

...the emphasis on NGOs and the 'third sector' that was supposed to be an autonomous force beyond the spheres of the state and market was both a simplification and a distortion of the two principle classical strands of civil society theorizing—that which refuses the state versus society dichotomy (Ferguson, for example) and that which identifies civil society with the atomistic world of the market (for example, Marx) (Hamm, 2004).

Michael Walzer in locating attempts to search for the good life in the state or the state as controlled by a cooperative economy, the market or nationalism comes to the possibility of a corrective in the idea that, "the good life can only be lived in civil society, the realm of fragmentation and struggle but also of concrete and authentic solidarities where we fulfill E.M. Forster's injunction, "only connect' and become sociable or communal men and women" (Walzer, 2003, p 313).

This vision of civil society, not as an afterthought but as a place of realization does not forgo the need for the state, the market, capitalism or national identities but it raises the profile of civil society as an imperfect place in which the search for a better future is paramount.

Ideally civil society is a setting of settings: all are included, none is preferred. The argument is a liberal version of the four answers [political society, the cooperative

economy, the marketplace and nationalism] accepting them all, insisting that each leave room for the others, therefore not finally accepting any of them” (Walzer, 2003, p 313).

In my own experience, those who consciously engage with the concept of civil society are quite convinced that civil society provides a position from which the good life can be pursued. This could be a new form of misplaced faith or a reflection of impatience over the slow pace of political reform but social activists do not seem to care. They use their associations intentionally to change the political, economic and social systems that repress them and are often pragmatic about ideological positions on capitalism, socialism and nationalism. The political perspective they embrace is only occasionally one in which the state is in the center—much can be accomplished by acting on the social fabric to change opinions, organize direct action and find ways to meet the goals of a community with as little support or interference from government as possible. Political advocacy, as a specific attempt to change government action, emerges as a strategic necessity but behind it are always the social missions around which groups organize in the first place. Thus Amnesty International members act for the release of political prisoners in order to attain the freedom of the prisoners of conscience and not to gain political power as an end in itself.

Political literature that tries to situate civil society within political developments tends to be frustrated by the moments in which civil society organizations show little conscious interest in directly changing or supporting formal political institutions and then plays catch up to explain the forces at work when civil society erupts to put major pressure on a political regime. I have wondered how civil society would be an effective political force if it is sometimes political and sometimes not. I began to think that part of the problem of understanding the dynamics at work in modern civil societies was the tendency to equate all political action with a state-orientation. The separation into political and social spheres of activity allows us to mark off the world of political action but politics is more than the art of rule, as Walzer notes, the state is expected to pursue a vision of social order and social good.

Civil society associations use their governments to mobilize, educate, engage and integrate. They want to right wrongs and alter repressive practice as well as develop the

underdeveloped. These political programs are translated into formal politics when politicians produce policy and act. Of course, not all social objectives emerge victorious in elections (or coup d'états for that matter) and at any point there are contradictory ideas of “the good” coexisting within civil society.

Politics, formal and informal, is a part of the social universe. While government shapes civil society, civil society must also shape government. Of course, this view is not particularly astounding. Civil society for some observers, like Robert Putnam, is a necessary element for democratization because it pressures and shapes responsive governance. “Government institutions receive inputs from their social environment and produce outputs to respond to that environment” (Putnam, 1993, p 9). On the other hand, it is problematic for Marxists because it undermines the emergence of a working class capture of power.

Neither of these attitudes on civil society focuses on the processes that come from association. People learn and come to understand what is fair and what is not fair, often re-evaluating their understanding of injustice as they see how their actions affect others. The emergence of a society that is no longer willing to tolerate a specific ideology or political regime still seems like a somewhat magical process because civil society harbors alternate and conflicting ideas of justice.

Why did it take over fifty years to dismantle apartheid in South Africa or a hundred years to address state-sanctioned racism after the end of the American Civil War? When repressive political policies seem so clear in historical hindsight, it is easy to forget that they were once considered sufficiently legitimate, not merely through the force of conquest and the imposition of material power but because, uncomfortably, society had not yet come to a critical turning point in its process of self-understanding and, thus, sanctioned the continuation of practices that *unjustly* squelched the ability and capacity of its members.

## People's Power

Since the 1986 Philippines People Power revolution, we have seen the emergence of people's power<sup>2</sup> revolutions, in which people have tossed off dictatorial regimes in favor of something approximating greater democracy. Perhaps, the recurring resort to people's power in the Philippines and the 2011 Arab Spring are among the best known. Such revolutions seem to be characterized by dispersed leadership, the emphasis on democracy and the diverse identities of the people who take to the streets with a clear message against the prevailing political regime. We measure their success by the ending of repressive regimes. While people power revolutions seem to push in the direction of greater democracy and political openness, aligning them with emancipatory aspirations, the broad base of citizen solidarity encompasses many perspectives on what makes a good society. In a people-power moment socialists and capitalists rub shoulders as do groups normally divided by religious, ethnic, gender, age, occupational, etc. affiliations.

What makes people's power a phenomenon of the modern age may be that experience, values and objectives are shared over greater distances and without the lag of time that could stand in the way of simultaneous solidarity in the past. In such a way, texting on cell phones was a contributor to organizational capacity in the People's Power revolution of the Philippines (see, for example, Rheingold, 2003) and the internet is currently enabling hitherto unknown forms of virtual association. On the other hand, the many peasant uprisings of the feudal era were localized occurrences and the revolutionary movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while spread over larger distances, required ideological positions around which to mobilize, share and disseminate broad social objectives. It is also true that never in history was the thin gruel of international norms as thick as it is today, when the belief in universal human

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<sup>2</sup> The term "people's power" or "people power" came into popular use after the People's Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986. A 1989 article on People Power and Development by Alan During argues that community action was a growing and important force, "U.S. policymakers need to recognize that grassroots groups have become national political actors in a growing number of countries. In the search for a Third World policy relevant to an increasingly multipolar world, U.S. policymakers must now recognize that community movements have become too powerful to ignore any longer" During, A. (1989) 'People Power and Development', *Foreign Policy*, **76(Autumn)**..

rights, disconnected to a particular polity, bolsters expectations of good governance and a system, albeit weak, of monitoring and punishing human rights abusers.

There is no denying that technological innovations such as the cell phone and the Internet have sped up change and awareness of injustice. But faster communications with a larger set of people explains how the politically unacceptable is exposed more quickly but not how it became politically unacceptable in the first place. An undeniable increase in the density of internationalized norms in the UN and regional systems has also facilitated political change, by making more available the language and the concepts available to express our outrage over the politically unacceptable. But these international norms, basic human rights and the acceptable action of states did not magically become local norms just because UN declarations have been translated into many languages. Each right is a struggle against repression that must get its content from the efforts to overcome actual experienced repression. We do not fight for a theoretical good but for unrealized aspirations that are sufficiently possible because they are shared and, thus become a social fact. This solidarity, sharing and dreaming are what I have learned to believe is a first fact of civil society. Such ideals are ensconced in the “civil” as recognition that our objectives have meaning in a world of inter-subjective meanings. In Africa the saying goes, “I am, because you are” and the idea of civil society seems to go further to say, “I can because we can.”

On a macro level, civil society is a part of the structure of the modern polity and, can play a number of roles. While it is *by necessity* amorphous as a space for social aspirations, it is clearly delimited by the political rules of the game. But this is not the same as being absolutely defined by those rules, something inferred by those who propose a close relationship between economic capitalism and civil society<sup>3</sup>. In my experience, even in very repressive governments, it

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<sup>3</sup> As Shils remarks, “the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of Hegel’s idea rejected his notion of the pluralism of civil society; it changed his notion of reciprocal autonomy and interdependence of the state and society by making the state entirely dependent on the ruling stratum of society and placing society completely under the control of the state” Shils, E. (2003) “The Virtue of Civil Society”. in V. A. Hodgkinson and M. W. Foley (eds) *The Civil Society Reader*. Lebanon, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.

is impossible to completely reduce civil society to the realm of political control because it is as implicated in the emergence of what is politically possible—by keeping alive social objectives even in very small groups--as it is regulated by the control of the state.

If social interaction happens through thousands of channels and the legitimacy of social objectives is reinforced through actual interaction, then political transformation takes place in visible spaces where groups and associations conceptualize what stands in the way of meeting their social objectives and in the strategies and language they adopt to express claims on justice. Transformation is obviously not limited to their advocacy for political change, while this may rise in importance depending on the role of the state, but is guided by the formulation of their missions and objectives that express what is wrong that needs to be changed.

In this way, my approach to civil society and political authority goes beyond political advocacy or other engagement in formal politics as evidence of political activity. My task is to look for evidence of support and tension between the political regime and civil society in the way in which social and political objectives are actualized on the ground of associative life. It also departs from prioritizing NGOs or other formal organizations as the universe of civil society, arguing instead that civil society has its own eco-system that includes *almost all non-governmental organization around socially legitimated ends*. The type, density and limitations of these organizations are important as part of the mediating social fabric that makes particular social objectives possible. Still it is the objectives themselves that emerge as a force to legitimate one political direction over another.

The meeting point between legitimate political authority and civil society is some sort of social contract that governs what can rationally be expected. Such an agreement is concretized in constitutions and norms by which governments operate. The ruling regimes hold the mantle of authority to the extent that they honor the agreement to provide sufficient conditions for individuals and groups to accomplish their objectives; security, law and order being necessary but insufficient conditions because peace is only meaningful to the extent that one can rationally hope to pursue one's objectives. When these objectives become increasingly impossible to realize,



how and why does civil society come to exert a people power's force against the state? If civil society plays the soft role of legitimating political authority, we should be able to see the social contract as an ongoing process and not a moment in the past.

To find evidence of this legitimizing process, I question how and why social objectives may resonate with the political objectives of the state and how and why they move to a sufficient mass of dissonance with a political regime's claims to authority. Because civil society as I conceive it here is a structure that enables many streams of consonant and competing objectives, I think that the way to understand and embrace it is to tell the story of its journey in this process through the eyes of social actors. I have chosen the case of Zimbabwe as a platform to explore this story partly because I think its political development can tell us much about possibilities that are buried in what we think we already know about politics and partly because the story of civil society and the state in Zimbabwe did not come to a clear resolution it can reveal complexities in the processes in which state and civil society interact.

#### Why Zimbabwe?

For me the question of why explore civil society and political authority in the Zimbabwean context has two answers. The first is that I have struggled as an outsider although also as a friend to colleagues in Zimbabwe to understand the events that led to its unraveling for many years. My personal connection, while in no ways equal to the wonderful theorists and observers who have personally participated in the events of the last two decades (such as Brian Kagoro or Brian Raftopoulos), is something I have drawn on throughout to explore and question. The second reason is that Zimbabwe is an excellent case to see where people's power pressed for change, where it was able to succeed and where it fell short.

#### **How I became aware that change was underfoot**

In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 1997, I chatted with a colleague about the spheres of expanding war to the north and west, in Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Angola. The promise of peace and quiet in the region that had felt so strong and palpable as conflicts were

settled in South Africa and Mozambique was evaporating with the stubborn march to war to the north. I wondered out loud if the circles of conflict would continue to grow like those from a rock tossed in a pond. I could see a map of conflict emanating out from the Congo in my mind's eye. Such circles could easily reach Zambia, I said, hoping my Zimbabwean friend would not find me alarmist. No, he replied, the conflict is already here and it is the end of Zimbabwe as we know it.

Zimbabwe looked nothing like its neighbors in 1997. It had enjoyed significant stability over its 17 years of independence. While its economic future was not rosy, the economy had certainly not collapsed. But my friend told me that its people no longer believed in the government; that neither Zanu nor Robert Mugabe could feed the image of a false country any more. I knew then that my friend had many reasons to be disgruntled. Being from the Matabele people meant that he acutely felt the brunt of the Mugabe/Zanu government that had heavily persecuted them not even a decade in the recent past and, in his perspective, continued to neglect their region of the country. But having fought successfully for many years on the national level for the rights of disabled people—a battle that entailed significant patience and strength—my friend also had a great respect for the power of law and enforcement to help secure protections for vulnerable people.

In my job at the time, directing the Synergos Institute's Southern African programs, I met with many supposed Zimbabwe experts both within the country and without. Every one of them seemed to be blind to the electric atmosphere of opposition that my friend saw so clearly. Over the next three years, as the crisis moved from bad to worse, I thought long and deeply about my friend's clear sight. Somewhat sheepishly, I realized that my own rather mystical materialist idea of ripples of trouble expanding outwards from the banks of the Congo had no way of accounting for the kind and type of crisis that hit Zimbabwe. While there are similarities to its neighbors—the rise of violence; political corruption and the maniacal attempts to keep political power; the dismantling of political, social and economic institutions and the dominance of survival strategies—the battles and resistance were more openly connected with the particular struggle over what the vision for the future of the country should be.

It was important to take seriously how and why Zimbabweans were ready to sacrifice the order and stability of the Mugabe/Zanu regime for change. The change seemed to come from within civil society itself because Mugabe, and his Zanu party, had not changed to my knowledge, nor were they doing anything more awful in 1997 than in 1987. Of course, this point is subtle. Was it a change in the nature of the political regime that caused a reaction within civil society or a change in civil society that made the actions (corruption, patrimonial politics and anti-democratic governance) of the regime unbearable?

For a while, I wondered if the change had been caused by external events. If the end of the Cold War and the new political credibility of South Africa and the, not unrelated, bloody political battles to the north could explain what predisposed Zimbabweans to reject their political leadership and set out on a precipitous and dangerous course. While, I still think that the reduction in relative power is an important part of the story, what I realized was that an attempt to maintain its regional power could not completely explain the loss of faith of the citizens and their invigorated commitment to deep political change. It was as though people had woken up one day and decided it was possible to take things into their own hands.

There are many for whom the impending train wreck of political crisis is explained by democratic deficits and the resulting political mismanagement and corruption—in fact, this is how many of the participants in Zimbabwe's people's power moment would explain their grievances. But when does mismanagement and corruption come to matter? How do people come to a breaking point that makes present political realities untenable? It is clear, and I hope will be clearer as I go along, that Zimbabweans had already broken with their government by 1997. Civil society organizations became overtly political both in expressing the dissatisfaction of the people and in promoting awareness of the injustices perpetrated by its political regime. Their activities were focused on creating political alternatives and opening up a closed political system. But the unwillingness of the government to change—in fact, outright refusal—pushed the country further into crisis. How did this conflict between state and civil society entail the dismantling of the

political system? My feeling was that the answers to some of these questions were very important to moving our understanding of civil society.

### **A bundle of potential lessons**

So why should the texture of civil society in Zimbabwe be instructive? The case for a people's power revolution in Zimbabwe might appear weak because the political regime did not fall in the 1990s and is still holding on today. Would it be better to choose an unmitigated success—such as the Philippines—where a people power's revolution resulted in the changeover of political power? First of all, this is to pre-define success of people's power as the end of a political regime—a win or lose scenario—when the record seems clear that the challenge of re-constituting political authority does not end with the exit of the previous regime but begins as society comes to terms with raw power and continuing injustice. If people's power is exerted through a constructive process, what happens before and after is as important to explore as the demonstrations themselves. In that way, a country like the Philippines has lessons to offer in the struggles that came after the first people's power revolution, which eventually led for a need for people to take to the streets in a second and a third. Rather than seeing people's power as a moment, Zimbabwe helps us to see it as a continuing process that may or may not succeed at any one point.

Still, the country is a basket case today. Why after more than a decade of crisis is the challenge to the political regime unresolved? It is an important illustration that people's power revolutions require the unsettling of the *status quo*, which in the extreme means that challenging the political regime can result in the loss of the basic protections for security and human rights as well as the unraveling of the economy. The idea, then, that civil society can dismantle a political regime through a socially constructive process would seem to be a story that could be told about many places.

But my final reason for choosing Zimbabwe is that Africa is a place of possibilities in which political organization looks like it does in the rest of the world but is also responding to the struggle to “move the center” back home, to take Ngugi's expression (wa Thiong'o, 1993). To the

extent that this is true and we should embrace the ongoing development of African polities, they can tell us much about the possibilities of political organization because they are less committed to a dominant stream of international ideas. These alternatives—such as systems of communal welfare—are possible in the richer and more powerful countries but are less visible because of the dominant political and economic forms of organization. I really do not want to think of Zimbabwe as a particularly *African* case of state and civil society, nor as an exceptional case in the breakdown of the modern state structure. I think that Zimbabwe adequately illustrates the political power of civil society in general and hope that telling its story will produce a narrative about the interrelations of state and civil society.

### **A Critical Approach**

My goal is to explore how civil society exerted people's power against the political regime in Zimbabwe. What were the limits of its ability to alter the political landscape and why did this not result in an end of the regime? In Zimbabwe, how was the government able to oppose people's power effectively enough to ensure its own survival despite (or because of) the resulting large-scale destruction of the country's social and political health?

These questions are relevant not just to Zimbabwe but also to other countries with similar histories and to our understanding of the relationship between civil society and the state. One way of approaching them would be to compare a variety of cases of the emergence of people's power, but this could bury the legitimizing processes and over generalize that which makes the most sense in the context in which it emerges.

Instead I wish to engage deeply with the pursuit of social objectives in Zimbabwe by questioning what was at stake and how social actors interpreted them in the 1997 to 2001 period. I question the political and social objectives within this single case of people power to tell what I hope is a plausible story about how political authority was viewed and constructed by social activists. Such an inductive approach cannot generalize that all civil society will result in people power revolutions or that when it does it will exert this power through a particular form, such as

protests and strikes. But if we can see in one country some of the constructive texture between civil society and the political regime, it should demonstrate immanent political qualities of civil society everywhere.

This project is critical, emancipatory and social constructivist in orientation. It conceives social facts as emerging out of processes that can be measured as the struggle against repression and for greater freedom. In asking how civil society comes to see political authority as illegitimate, I explore where and how the broad objectives of the political regime resonate with the social objectives of citizens. While there is a strong case to be made that shifts in authority correlate to material causes—economic hardship, land ownership, the conditions of workers, the corruption of politicians, the diffusion of technology, etc.—my interest is how civil society views and interprets these material conditions in light of the government's narrative about what it seeks to accomplish.

#### Unpacking social objectives

I take social objectives to be the intentions and aspirations that people express through their association. These objectives are sometimes stated in the missions and goals of organizations but most are probably never clearly stated. They are called on, however, as justification for action. Several social objectives such as, democratization, may implicitly inform much social action. I do not seek to define democratization but to show how it is manifests in the objectives of civil society.

I also do not try to show that all civil society organizations conceive of this progress toward greater freedom in the same way. A cumulative picture of all of civil society objectives is not only extremely difficult but I take it to be unnecessary. Directions and tensions are visible and while these do not sum up all of civil society, the extent to which they are embraced and/or ignored tells us something about objectives that resonated in society as a whole. While there is almost always a counter objective to any social objective, I take it as sufficient to show how particular groups conceive of the obstacles they face. I will make use of the idea of resonance, by which I mean that objectives are reproduced or held by many people, to suggest movements

within society, often that are picked up and communicated by simple statements such as “Mugabe must go.”

In this way, this project sees the emancipatory movements of civil society in the resonance or dissonance of objectives, focusing on the conception of people’s power as a process in which the dissonance of social and political objectives leads people to share the common goal of dismantling the political regime. As such, it will explore how groups within civil society have expressed and pursued their objectives, as both communication and action, as a process in which political objectives are legitimized and, thus, political authority. According to Habermas’ insight:

The revaluation of the particular, the natural, the provincial, of social spaces that are small enough to be familiar, of decentralized forms of commerce and despecialized activities of segmented pubs, simple interactions and dedifferentiated public spheres-- all this is meant to foster the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication that have been buried alive (Habermas, 1989).

The constructive processes in which civil society associations are engaged are often under the surface. Thus, civil society remains a partly buried element in the story of Zimbabwean demise easily discounted as too weak to stop the government from its destructive policies but not understood to be part of dialectical processes of political transition in the direction of a new social contract. A focus on the dialogical component of civil society is warranted as a potential emancipatory force for that which has been repressed. As Andrew Linklater points out:

The recent dialogic turn in social theory points towards a normative approach to community which supports greater universality coupled with a deeper commitment to the wealth of human difference (Linklater, 1998).

Subsequently, in order to unearth process leading to the de-legitimization of the political regime in Zimbabwe, the project analyzes and considers how the dominant objectives of the political regime and the concrete objectives emerging from social groups interact. It will employ participant and external observations that illustrate what is considered to be the "dominant" political discourse and look for evidence of resonance and dissonance with social objectives.

Generalities about "dominant" meanings, such as the political regime’s objective for ongoing liberation, are taken as starting places to question the overall frame within which the

political regime seeks to legitimize itself. These dominant objectives, in this sense, are above the surface, repeated in public speeches and formalized in policy documents.

Since discourse shapes values that lead to structures and behavior (similar to Emanuel Adler's description of a structurationist approach to epistemic communities (Adler, 1992)), piecing together narratives of the social discourse of civil society requires an interpretive methodology, where the researcher places his or her views squarely within the universe of inquiry. In this way, I make use of both my own experience working in civil society and, particularly, in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s as an additional resource in interpreting textual evidence.

Both identification of "frames" and "discourses" are used to ferret out social objectives. "Frames" can help to interpret what is at stake. "Frames are interpretive schemata that enable participants to locate, perceive and label occurrences, selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations and sequences."<sup>4</sup> While extensive use is made of text normally to verify a particular frame, I think what is important to the story is the understanding of actors that they are organizing their objectives into a frame for the purpose of moving forward or staking out a social fact. In this way, my approach is to identify where framed objectives link and break with political authority, not to prove the truth of the claims but to contribute to the story as social process.

Similarly discourse looks at discursive fields by drawing from a variety of texts but also "the spoken words of social movement participants, leaders, opponents and bystanders...." (Johnston, 2002). I have consulted newspaper articles, materials from civil society organizations and essays and books that have reported about the period as my main sources. While these sources are incomplete, often the unconscious ways in which objectives and meaning are reported make stronger arguments for their existence than mission statements and lists of organizational objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> Johnston, H. (2002) Verification and proof in Frame and Discourse Analysis. in B. Klandermans and S. Staggenborg (eds) *Methods of social movement research*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. xx, 382. p. 63, quoting Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:611-39, 2000.



I have also renewed my contact with Zimbabwe through a visit in 2010 and informally interviewed friends and acquaintances to help understand the social objectives at stake. These interviews have helped to point me in directions, but the choice of the direction was, I hope, what the available resources dictate guided by but not determined by what either my friends or I expect to be there.

The one exception I have made to being exclusively guided by primary sources is the Chapter Three discussion of the political objectives of Robert Mugabe and the Zanu regime. Confronted with a mountain of texts, I did not want to make this a study of how Zanu formulated and expressed its objectives. Others have taken on this task with some success. As such, I found rich analysis of Zanu/Mugabe *qua* Zimbabwe government aspirations and I have called on these sources to help build a simple framework for understanding the overall objectives of the political regime. In focusing on political objectives, I do not throw out the idea that the overriding objective of a political regime is to study what it takes to stay in power. As Machiavelli said,

A prince should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study but war and its organization and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands" (Machiavelli, 1950).

But I am looking for pointers that are sufficient to show political resonance and dissonance and illuminate social processes that lead towards or away from the political authority of a regime. Beyond the political theoretical positioning of civil society, the key goal is to tell a plausible story about the flow and dynamic interchange of political values and meanings that are posited as essential to civil society. The study looks at particular moments of conflict, process and resolutions that lead to the shaping of meaning. In short, my approach is to locate social objectives that are reflected back into society and deepened through discourse and action.

### **Outline of the Next Chapters**

Overall, this project starts by reviewing civil society as it emerges in political theory. My exploration then delves into objective-focused interpretations of events to look for the intersection points of the social and political objectives of civil society organizations and individual activists

with those of the political regime. As civil society is by nature diverse, I look for points of entry that reveal something about the aspirations of associative life to show resonance or dissonance with the political regime and to draw lessons about the limits and contours of the political power of civil society.

The second chapter starts by building a theoretical framework around civil society and its relationship to the political sphere. I draw on Locke and Hegel to argue that civil society is an expanding sphere of civic action characterized by the expression and action for social objectives. The power of this relationship can be called upon as a resource for political hegemony but it also exerts a pressure for greater democracy that is constructed through the pursuit of social justice that is produced and reproduced through social interaction. Civil society, thus, while composed of diverse aspirational activity can come to understand a government as repressive and withdraw its support when the political regime is seen as the major stumbling block to the accomplishment of social objectives.

A case is then made that the Zimbabwean political regime as embodied in its leader Robert Mugabe and the ruling party, Zanu, consistently expressed political objectives in the direction of continuing the (interrupted) independence revolution to overthrow white colonial rule and to put the country back onto an autonomous, internally driven development. Chapter Three explores how these objectives were materialized and employed in the nearly two decades proceeding the political crisis. It explores how continuing the revolution justified a particular view of independence that increasingly replaced the former colonial masters with Zanu itself and then became more and more difficult to square with the internally driven search for a more autonomous development. Continuing the revolution also seemed to undergird several strategies in key areas that became frames deployed to explain government policies for protecting against internal and external enemies, Africanization and economic development. Given the revolutionary stance of the government, it asks how and why Zanu became cut-off from its own civil society, which began to disbelieve in Zanu's objectives or its commitment to them and highlight its corruption.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters follow the story of civil society and social objectives. The contours of the growing dissatisfaction with political authority is told through the stories of three organizations—the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA)—that acted as pivot points around which civil society associations pursued social objectives. Each of these organizations had a mass following and a supportive relationship with a network of other civil society organizations and was recognized as a center of alternatives or opposition. In this way, by telling the story of their attempts to pursue social objectives in the period leading up to and include the crisis, we seek to learn about the limits and possibilities in the relationship between civil society and political authority in Zimbabwe.

In the fourth chapter, we start with ORAP, a peasants' movement in the western region of Zimbabwe that developed a narrow and influential set of democratic objectives that resonated (as seen by its large membership) with the desires of villagers to increase their autonomy from the state and other development agencies. Through ORAP and its actions, it can be seen that civil society association was developing empowered citizens in spite of the government's attempts to control all resources. While eschewing any direct involvement with political parties, ORAP was born in a difficult political context when residents of the region were largely identified with the opposition Zapu. Nevertheless ORAP provided its members with a self-empowerment methodology that helped them to create alternatives to government-led development and became an important provider of drought relief services.

Having seen one way in which civil society was carving out a space for greater freedom, we then turn to the labor movement in the country in the fifth chapter. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was able to mobilize broad-based protests against the imposition of new taxes in 1997 that were intended to raise resources to pay veteran's reparations. Coming from a history in which it was largely seen as ineffective at advocating for labor rights with government (and the private sector), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was the focal point for this direct assault on government.

Many of its leaders, and most particularly its Secretary General, Morgan Tsvangirai, helped to channel frustration into a massive work stayaway—resulting in the people’s power demonstrations of 1997 and 1998, which received support across Zimbabwean civil society. This beginning eventually laid the path for the establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which lodged the first real competition against Zanu. Exploring how and why the protests became a focal point for eroding a culture of restraint shows the rapidly changing relationship between civil society and the political authority of the Zanu regime. The protests, however, did not go as far as to topple the Zanu regime, even while there were overt calls for its end. The countervailing force of the veterans, whose cause was a significant part of the framing of political objectives, uncovers the hegemonic structure of civil society through which Zanu was able to re-exert its control.

In Chapter Six, we turn to the efforts that began in 1997 for a participatory process of constitution making to replace the faulty and oft-amended Lancaster House Constitution. A coalition of groups brought together by the Zimbabwean Council of Churches (ZCC) initiated discussions that led to the establishment of the National Constitutional Assembly in 1998. These groups, which included the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions, took the important step of moving directly onto the political playing field with the aspiration of creating a new constitution for Zimbabwe. They had come to the point of agreement that a participatory constitutional culture was a critical missing ingredient in improving governance in the country. The plans would be both to invest in the civic education of Zimbabweans and to engage its citizens in a process of debate and drafting a new constitution. The constitution was a focal point because the ten-year waiting period imposed by the Lancaster Agreement had expired and the government had not moved seriously to draft a new constitution. As it turned out, Zanu thought it could use the pressure for a new constitution to both rebuild social bridges and to meet its own ends in fortifying party strength. It was sadly mistaken. The NCA and other groups pushed the “no” vote against its draft constitution and when it materialized in a national referendum, the resulting euphoria was significant enough to propel a dynamic launch of the Movement for Democratic Change.

Through the aspiration and action of these three focal points for social objectives—ORAP, the ZCTU and the NCA—a picture emerges of a vibrant associative sector that arrives at an impasse where the diversity of its goals and aspirations can only be achieved by reforming the structure of its government.

The final chapter comes back to the question of why people's power in Zimbabwe was not sufficient to bring about the fall of the regime—as it has in other places in the world. What lessons can we learn from the Zimbabwe example? How far does people's power go and what are its weaknesses that can be and are exploited by its government in the name of political survival? Zimbabweans have invented strategies to address the specific repressive practices of their government but the closed political administration was able to maintain control of the political space as its citizens fled both state-sponsored violence and the widespread economic, political and social devastation that followed.

The key goal will be to tell a plausible story about how and why civil society comes to dismantle the political regime. In the end, the challenge is to see “people's power” and the “social contract” as socially constructed processes. Protest, opposition, alternative action and resistance build new awareness and help to focus a demand for political change. Actual exercise of our freedoms brings us to see the effects of our actions on others as well as to experience the ways in which the political sphere is repressive and supportive.

## CHAPTER TWO: TOWARD A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Civil society is a society that has agreed to submit to political rule in order to attain greater freedom. The political regime relies on the power of civil society, exerted through hegemonic, democratic and socially constructed dimensions in order to pursue its objectives. Civil society while not directly a part of the structure of a political regime provides the political foundation on which the political regime sits. It is an open-entry structure, in which people and their communities participate to meet and define their own ends (objectives) and in so doing shape political possibilities. Political authority is the power given to states through consent or agreement that we can call a social contract. Civil society calls on institutions like NGOs, churches, universities and others as resources for its social objectives. These institutions act as magnifiers or repressive agents for social objectives, much as the state does. As civil society is a structural element of a governed society, it can be conceived as a site of power exerted on its partner political regime both by seeking change within the system and by withdrawing its support.*

On 19 February 2011 at the Harare Labour Center, police swept in to arrest 45 people (actually 44 as it seems one of the group was a state informer) who had gathered together to watch footage of events that led to the ouster of the leaders of Tunisia and Egypt. Inspector James Sabhu, the spokesman for the police said that the activists were watching the video “as a way of motivating them to subvert a constitutionally elected government” (Dugger, 2011) (CNN Wire Staff, 2011). The government announced that the activists who included Munyaradzi Gwisai, a University of Zimbabwe Law Lecturer and coordinator of the Zimbabwean International Socialist Organization would be charged with treason, an offense punishable by death.

While 39 people were later freed, the government focused its case on six activists Antoneta Choto, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Edson Chakuma, Hopewell Gumbo and Welcome Zimuto (Bell, 2011). During the trial in March 2012, the prosecutor asked Gwisai if it was not strange for Zimbabweans to meet to build solidarity with faraway movements. “There is nothing odd about it,” Gwisai replied. “No less a person than President Mugabe has condemned other African leaders for not working in solidarity when one of their colleagues was attacked and killed and surely that cannot be bad about the working class in Zimbabwe”(Olende, 2012).

The activists had met to learn from the movements in 2011 that started in Tunisia and then moved to Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen and Syria. The fervor of people's power revolutions took the world by surprise with journalists and political analysts scrambling to understand the people's demands and to identify the leadership of the movements. People's power in the Arab world seemed to defy the conventional wisdom all too accustomed to the idea that political change would come slowly and be mediated through an Islamic religious lens. This myopia obscures grassroots struggles in the Arab world, as in other countries, for a more "open society," and recognition of rights to pursue a wide variety of social objectives. But how does civil society provide a countervailing force for good governance and accountability unless it actually has the power to interpret political malfeasance and bring governments to accountability?

The accountability mechanism for many analysts is the electoral box. This narrow interpretation of civic power holds civil society always hostage to the political regime. Participation in elections is an indisputable vote for the legitimacy of the regime—parties, laws, and government power—but elections are not the only way that civil society relates to political power. As in the case of the Zimbabwean activists, civil society organizations are constantly learning, changing both tactics and their understanding of what is at stake.

In the last 20 years or so, the term "civil society" has been consciously linked to the pursuit of good governance. This chapter considers a theoretical construct in which civil society is more than a passive force for democratic governance; it is also an active site for the pursuit of the good life and, thus, is a political force for action toward the common good that should be understood on its own ground.

Returning to Locke and Hegel we locate civil society within its original emancipatory political framework. Consulting with Gramsci, de Tocqueville and Habermas/Cohen we recognize three capacities, hegemonic leadership (Gramsci), diffuse democratic traditions (de Tocqueville) and social-justice construction (Habermas/Cohen), as dimensions of its relationship to political authority. Building on this, the chapter emphasizes a dual vision of civil society, one that is both constricted by Gramscian hegemonic ideas of thought leaders that enforce dominant values and

still wields a people's power that emerges from the exercise of freedoms (de Tocqueville) as a politically constructive practice leading to a shared understanding of the common good across diverse social objectives to which political authority must ultimately answer.

For the purposes of understanding the structural relationship between civil society and a political regime, civil society is defined as an open-entry structure, in which people and their communities participate to meet and define their own ends (objectives) and in so doing shape political possibilities. The structure is populated by a variety of forms of association, not all of which are organized into formal structures. The formal structures, however, help by providing organizational capacities and continuity to social objectives, they also can become repressive to the extent that they weed out and direct aspirations that do not conform to their organizing logic.

### **Why be Concerned with Civil Society?**

Since Rousseau and Locke theorized a process by which we give up some of our political power in order to gain the security of life and property and de Tocqueville linked the strength of democracy to associative action, the idea that political authority must emerge from the agreement and active assent of the people has had currency.

In this way, this is a story about how civil society becomes a political power, particularly for demanding accountability to some sort of social contract and calling for a new one. The importance of the *social contract* need not be forcefully argued as it has taken a place among what is considered necessary elements for the formation of polities although it is often conceived as a more theoretical and less practical construct. This story looks at the social contract as a living, evolving agreement related to a) how political awareness is developed through associative action, b) how people's power is developed and begins to manifest itself, c) the limits to this power and d) the transformation and re-emergence of people's power in response to both success and failure.

Civil societies are now commonly associated with supposed political goods, exemplifying the hopes that democracy, human rights and good governance can be brought about through the direct action of citizens. Considerable attention has been given to civil society as an important ingredient in democratization (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997). The



idea of civil society has helped us to name social/political forces at work on both the economic and political spheres of activity. The first and important step was to differentiate a civil society from society in general. Civil society emerges in the quest for political organization that will expand freedom. As Locke shows, it is civil because it accepts limits on the freedom that comes to us by nature. As the concept unfolds in Hegel, civil society is a space between the family and the state where people exercise their freedoms.

#### Locke and the necessity of civil society

John Locke proposed that people commit themselves to the project of government to achieve security (general protection, identity, services and rules) that ultimately enable them to act for their own legitimate ends. As Locke argues in the Second Treatise on Government,

The only way whereby any one divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society, is by agreeing with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it (Locke and Macpherson, 1980).

It is the bonds or limits on our actions that characterize the person in civil society.

Communities must have some respect for the inter-relationship of ends and will feel the necessity for laws, rules and the enforcement of them. The first transition for Locke is the movement to a social fabric that can support protections and enable greater freedom; the political state embodies the rules and enforcement of these protections. To secure rights to enjoy the benefits from action in community, people relinquish “natural liberty” to the state with its authority to interpret and enforce rules and, thus, gain:

...a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society and made by the legislative power erected in it; a liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule proscribes not; and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man: as *freedom of nature* is, to be under no other restraint but the law of nature” (Locke and Macpherson, 1980).

In this way, civil society is characterized by a broad shared awareness of the necessity of political authority to secure a more narrow (because activity is limited by the state) but greater capacity to actually exercise and develop freedoms. In Locke’s primordial social agreement, civil society is a social medium that justifies political authority to secure person and property. Civil society can only exist where there is consent to this political authority.

In practice, it is very difficult to withdraw from a social contract. By so doing, a non-consenting civil society, to use an oxymoron, will undermine the authority of the very political

regime that provides, however imperfectly, the enabling framework for its own actions. When and how will a civil society come to the point where benefits of reconstructing political authority outweigh the consequences of withdrawing its support? While human rights instruments and international pressure provide thin protections (take Somalia, Myanmar or Haiti for example) for a “global civil society,” the efforts to dismantle or reform a particular regime from within require significant social resources, courage, commitment and clear sight.

#### Hegel and the ends of civil society

While Locke focused on a contract made in the theoretical past, one of the keys to civil society for Hegel in the Philosophy of Right is the present constantly developing nature of the universal principles that inform political life. This state of development comes about through a dialectical process in which the tyranny of survival dictates that the mind is exclusively occupied with satisfying its needs—it lacks the security to enjoy the fruits of its own labor beyond the immediate present. Doing what one must to survive is an *unfreedom* because the mind is under the compulsion to satisfy basic needs (as opposed to the external unfreedom of physical insecurity stressed by Locke). By only satisfying needs, the particular mind, which has not yet developed into an individual consciousness—reflects the universal into itself and it becomes a “vessel” capable of the development of the idea (the direction of freedom).

The mind that has thus passed into the realm of civil society will be able to expand its area of action through association (complete interdependence). In this free space of activity, humans will both better meet the basic needs of survival and enter into an open space of activity in which they can pursue their individual happiness, their social objectives.

In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends—an attainment conditioned in this way by universality—there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, happiness and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness and rights of all. On this system, individual happiness, &c., depend, and only in this connected system are they actualized and secured (Hegel, 1967).

The important end of civil society is education because it makes understanding possible in the process of freeing the mind. It is the direction that one is willing to take because it creates the ground for a greater freedom, escaping the *unfreedom* of necessity. Education is not separate

from the individual's activities undertaken to satisfy wants and needs, in fact this is what motivates the person to submit to what would otherwise be a rather tedious and painful process. The mind learns how to satisfy its wants and needs in the direction of the ultimate freedom that it seeks but that is, at this point, only an idea.

The disfavor showered on education is due in part to its being this hard struggle; but it is through this educational struggle that the subjective will itself attain objectivity within, an objectivity in which alone it is for its part capable of being the actuality of the Idea (Hegel, 1967).

The mind as particular is only an unrealized essence before it submits to this process. It, then, becomes an individual—with a sense of owning its own ends and a capacity for “infinite self-determination” (Hegel, 1967). Civil society only exists as such in the simultaneous development of the political state because people require the principle of universality upon which the state rests and shapes society, most particularly law which establishes an objective form of justice in which standards are not arbitrarily applied and in which there is some conception, however incipient, of rights. One can posit that the greatest civil society would be one in which these universal principles were the most accessible, stable and capable of reproduction. On the other hand, the more faulty and limited the “state” formed universal, the less capable the particular to realize the freedom that is its end.

What Hegel proposes as a dialectical process of reflection, in which progress in the direction of freedom is the end, is a process in which the particular, unformed essence works with others to construct a world in which it can become an informed and actualized individual, whether or not universal principles are fully accessible.

Citizens, who accept their submission to the state, will chafe against the tension between their awareness of these universal principles and the continuing *unfreedom* of the particular, and, in this way will desire to make the actual state responsive. As the project of expanding individual freedoms, in a multitude of forms, is pursued, it will, through the educational process, inevitably come to understand the *unfree* aspects of society as facts of injustice that must be changed. Civil society is thus an associative space in which people pursue social objectives that represent their desire *both* to exercise and increase their freedoms.

## Dimensions of People's Power & Civil Society

How do people exercise and expand their freedoms? As a realm of free action, civil society organizations enable a broad range of social objectives that express the current objectives of groups in society in general: improvement of social services, watchdog of government and private sector activities, social innovation, protection of vulnerable populations and more.

In terms of the relationship of civil society with the political sphere, three tendencies have been explored for the exercise of civic power: **hegemony**, wherein powerful social forces within civil society control what is politically possible, **diffuse pressure for democracy** in which the exercise of freedom itself is a support to democratic power by both reinforcing its logic and reducing the expectations that government will do for the people and **the construction of social justice** in which the social agora constructs the normative interpretations of the political world.

The interrelation of these three aspects of civil society provides a framework for understanding the limits of people's power.

### Civil society and hegemony

The Gramscian tradition draws from Antonio Gramsci's attempts to understand why progress in Italy from a capitalist to a socialist society had been impeded. Gramsci theorized civil society as a space that exerts hegemonic force over the state by imposing conditions that can retard the flow of historical progress.

In this multiplicity of private associations (which are of two kinds, natural, and contractual or voluntary) one or more predominates relatively or absolutely—constituting the hegemonic apparatus of one social group over the rest of the population (or civil society); the basis for the state in the narrow sense of the governmental-coercive apparatus (Gramsci, 1971).

Gramsci grappled with the question of why the working class had failed to take over the state in Italy, despite what seemed to be conditions conducive for a socialist revolution. He proposed that the regressive (non-working class) elements of civil society, namely the aristocrats, were responsible for impeding progress through the exertion of the hegemonic power of the ideas of the elite aristocracy. Even though the aristocracy was a pre-capitalist form of power it retained

residual power over the social world. Elite social forces of civil society, in this case the aristocracy, mediate and limit what social and political objectives can be pursued. One can conceptualize this struggle as a war, as Gramsci says:

The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as State organizations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the “trenches” and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: they render merely “partial” the element of movement which before used to be “the whole of war, etc” (Gramsci 1971, 243).

The Gramscian hegemonic view of civil society is primarily vertical; power flows from the elite, which has enormous influence over the minds of citizens and wields this influence as a truncheon to discipline those who would think otherwise. For Gramsci, this hegemonic power leads civil society to resist political objectives. It can only be a moral, progressive force when the workers regain control over the state and production.

The state and civil society are locked in a “war of position.” We can extrapolate a hegemonic theory of civil society in which social leaders monopolize social norms. In this way of thinking, actual civil society is dominated by the imposition of the values of its social leaders—social objectives are limited and channeled by the narrow control of the *hearts* and *minds* of the people to serve the interests of the social elite.

Neo-Gramscian analysis emphasizes this hegemonic power over the conceptions of the *common good* held by civil society. The quest for social justice, disciplined by the dominant powers, constructs the limits around what political action is possible. The unit of state power is in the hands of political elites who are not necessarily the visible state apparatus or leadership but are the winning faction in the war of ideas on the turf of civil society. This provides a useful way of conceptualizing the political regime as integrated vertically into the fabric of civil society. Its objectives for society gain power through the exercise of social hegemony to the extent that they reflect the values and objectives of social classes that are able to dominate and lead civil society, in fact, any political regime that does not try to align with the social hegemons can hardly be at peace.

The political party is an important site for the contestation of hegemony because it seeks power by presenting and re-presenting social objectives for the benefit of its actual and potential supporters.

#### Civil society and democracy

While the struggle for hegemony explains much of social control, it treats the medium of control—civil society—as an amorphous mass led by the ideas and objectives of its social elites. The Tocquevillian tradition begins to explain civil society not just as a singular, directed force but as a diverse realm of activity that undergirds the development of political democracy, simply as a place of vibrant activity. As a political observer Alexis de Tocqueville was very interested in explaining the nature of American democracy, he wrote:

Thus the most democratic country on earth is found to be out of all of them the one where men have most perfected, in our day, the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires and have applied this new science to the greatest number of objects (de Tocqueville 2006, Ch VI).

This symbiotic relationship between civil society and democracy is an influential insight taken up by Robert Putnam in his studies of modern Italian and American democracies (Putnam 1993 & 2000). In this tradition, civil society strengthens democracy through the pluralist pursuit of a wide a variety of ends. Civil society is thus a supportive pillar of democracy. The political state accomplishes more by enabling the constant exercise of civic freedom. Through association, civil society associations are participants in the political world, whether or not their association is of a political nature. As Putnam argues from empirical studies of sports clubs in Italy, regions of more accountable democratic governance correlate with the density of civil society organizations and not necessarily with their objectives.

The function of civil society in this tradition is the constant and persistent pressure for responsive governance. As the unseen hand of people participating in the marketplace drives efficiency and results in the optimum supply and production of economic goods, so the participants in civil society create an unseen social hand that results in the inclusion of diverse social objectives in governance. As a companion, to the hegemonic view of civil society, the

Tocquevillian tradition shows how the democratic state and civil society are two sides of a coin. The correlation between associational density and democracy conforms to the Hegelian insight that the division between state and civil society is the expanding sphere of social action.

A flaw in this logic, however, is to simply assume a necessary causal relationship between civil society and democracy. As Simone Chambers points out, analysts in this stream tend to equate civil society organizations that already have democratic values with all of civil society. This is a circular logic that forces us to turn a blind eye toward organizations that do not have “democratic values.”

I think what we can take from the Tocqueville tradition is that strong democracy looks like a vibrant associational sphere and that civil society and democratic traditions are mutually supportive. But the question is still important, as Simone Chambers asks, “Under what conditions or in what circumstances does strong vigorous associational life promote civility and democracy, and when can we expect it to undermine democratic values?” (Chambers, 2002). The vibrancy of associative life provides a measure of the efficacy of the political sphere in expanding the social space for people to pursue what they consider to be just objectives and to participate in the reproduction of political and social value that may or may not require the particular development of political democracy.

#### Civil society and justice

In the Gramscian tradition the tension of hegemonic values with political and social objectives is emphasized and in the Tocquevillian tradition the correlation between civil society and democracy is drawn from action on diverse and localized objectives. The seminal life-world (Cohen and Arato drawing from Habermas) tradition theorizes civil society as a force through which the social processes that construct identities, norms and culture are created and recreated. In this way, associative action and communication construct the justification for political objectives (democratic or not!), and the content that is given to ideas of social justice.

Cohen and Arato identify associations of civil society as the sites in which communicative interaction results in a lifeworld of ethical possibility:

It is here, on the institutional level of the lifeworld, that one can root a hermeneutically accessible, because socially integrated, concept of civil society. This concept would include all of the institutions and associational forms that require communicative interaction for their reproduction and that rely primarily on processes of social integration for coordinating action with their boundaries (Cohen & Arato 1992, 429).

The seminal life world departs from the neo-Gramscian and neo-Tocquevillian traditions in that it proposes no way to judge the content of the constructive power of civil society. Hence the ultimate good is neither the socialist nor the democratic state, *per se*, but is determined by processes that engage people in the construction of ideas of social justice. Civil society provides a process engine in which values and meanings required for judgment are reproduced. Central to the seminal life-world are justice-producing processes that emerge through communicative interaction.

Justice requires actual communication, as Habermas theorizes, guided by the principle that every individual who is potentially affected must be an active participant in determining the correctness of a decision: "Every valid norm would meet with the approval of all concerned if they could take place in a practical discourse" (Habermas, 1990). Communicative process is procedural and must take place in actuality and not behind a veil of ignorance as it does for Rawls, "Any content, no matter how fundamental the action norms in question may be, must be made subject to real discourse (or advocacy discourses undertaken in their place" (Habermas, 1990).

Habermas develops the concept of deliberative politics in which the normative lifeworld (a cross-over with civil society) interacts with the political sphere. With the important exclusion of the private sector that has invaded the lifeworld in its control over economic production, civil society is largely contiguous with the lifeworld. "The results of deliberative politics can be understood as communicatively generated power that competes, on the one hand with the social power of actors with credible threats and, on the other hand, with the administrative power of officeholders" (Habermas, 2007). Through civil society, people produce and reproduce values on the actual ground of argumentation and working with others towards common ends; civil society is thus critical for constructing the evaluative positions through which just or unjust action has meaning.



This actual participation in decisions that will affect us is, of course, practically difficult but has been translated into political policies across the world as the necessity of getting the participation of citizens and communities in policy decisions. Oddly, the move to “participation” in policies that are still determined by policy elites is a hybrid of the hegemonic approach. The objectives themselves are rarely what is tested in exercises of participation, albeit driven by the practical concerns of policy making and the institutionalized process through which policy decisions are supposed to be made by proxies with the authority to represent given by election or force. The agencies executing political policy are, thus, limited in the ways they can learn and their jealousy over the right to represent limits feedback on the objectives themselves.<sup>5</sup>

#### Towards an operational theory

Combining these three perspectives into a theoretical framework on civil society, we see that civil society is implicated in the reproduction of political authority first off as a moral force that is constrained and led by hegemonic values that the political elite attempt to manipulate and represent (Gramsci). Second as a space of free activity in which people grow and exercise their capacity to accomplish their objectives, whether social, political or economic (democracy as in de Tocqueville and Putnam). As the site for communicative interaction, however, it is a constructive engine for the values and objectives themselves (Habermas and Cohen).

In this way, I propose that we can cogently speak of the actual political authority to be government legitimized by its normative resonance with the social objectives of its people as well as its capacity to hold a practical and physical monopoly over the political sphere. The balance between the use of hegemony and participatory policies necessitates clarity and reproduction of political objectives that act as a communicative link between the realm of free action and the vast and diverse social objectives of the citizenry. While these social objectives are limited by politics, the agreement over the justness of these limits is not constructed by the government but by the

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<sup>5</sup> That the lifeworld constructs evaluative positions and, thus, has a kind of power, doesn't mean that everything is continually up in the air, of course. Norms are established over time and people can call on multiple resources reproduced through education and institutions but the compelling agreement over normative positions is continually being produced and reproduced.

life-world processes of civil society. There is then the possibility that hegemonic power can be increasingly imperfectly connected to the life-world process of its society where political objectives can become out of sync with the social world.

If political authority is always referred to the awareness of its society that changes as actual particulars realize themselves then it must also be in a continual state of construction. Original state myths, such as Locke's, provide a constitutional narrative for the present. But each new generation, actualized by the current social structure must commit to the state project as learned through a process of education that makes use of social communication to construct the space for actual people to achieve their objectives. That is, political authority must be continually re-constituted through social processes that give it its properties and capacities.

The three traditions of civil society highlight three different logics of relationships between civil society and government with specific implications for the legitimization of political power. The diagram illustrates the possible relationships between government and civil society as a three-sided figure in which the extreme logics of control (hegemony), support (democratic practice) or mutual construction (social justice) are represented by the sides.

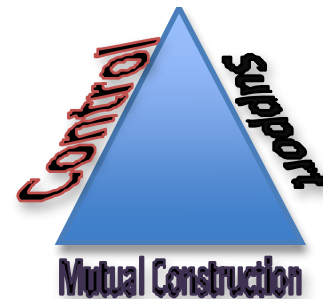


Figure 1 - Civil Society and the State

A political regime sustains its ability to control by staying at the forefront of the dominant political objectives of its society, which provides for its justification, legitimacy and relevance to the society it rules. It utilizes this legitimacy to regulate right action and identify and punish the unjust. It has limited power over what political objectives are dominant, although it can through patronage and its megaphone promote some ideas over others.

The state/civil society relationship is also characterized by mutual support. Political authority is reinforced when the political sphere enables diverse social objectives while restricting as few as it must and in ways that can be seen as just. These social objectives include some degree of direct political participation in the political process itself but the benefits of civil society

are enjoyed as the autonomous production of social goods—from social events to economic production.

Through the supportive dimension, employment of political goods as well as civil pressure results in accountability, better policies and the reinforcement of a commitment to democratic governance. Most people do not need to be convinced to follow law in general while they may protest particular laws. Political rule is as much maintained by government enforcement as it is by the internalized acceptance of the rules of the game across the range of civil society organizations acting for a variety of social objectives. In this way, civil society is a supportive pillar to the state (as much as the state provides the conditions for its action), but this is not to say that civil society will support the actual political regime or all aspects of institutionalized power that define the political regime.

The correctness of political and social objectives is constructed through the third dimension, the continual life-world processes of civil society. Participation in the lifeworld (in which values and meanings are constructed) produces and reproduces the values on which particular activities and political policies are judged as legitimate. If there is significant resonance between formal political objectives and those that emerge in civil society the political regime and its society are sufficiently aligned. On the other hand, if the political regime becomes too disconnected from the lifeworld, its actions cannot be seen as just. Civil society responds by no longer supporting its legitimacy. The relationship is not one of two warring ideologies or political classes, it is one where people's power manifests as a denial of political authority.




	Relationship	Character	Results
<b>Control</b>		<u>Opposing forces</u> The dominant forces of civil society either capture or oppose the political regime	Hegemony/ Civil War
<b>Support</b>		<u>Supportive system</u> Expanding or sufficient freedom reinforces political authority. Increasing repression sparks denial of political authority	Participation/ Democracy
<b>Mutual Construction</b>		<u>Integrated structures</u> Structures are integrated and construct/, reproduce and regulate social values	Judgment/ Justice

Figure 2 – Dimensions of Civil Society and the State

### Elements of Understanding Civil Society

#### An operational definition

It is useful to take an operational concept of civil society that encompasses the control, support and constructive dimensions of its relationship with the political sphere. **Civil society is an open-entry structure, in which people and their communities participate to meet and define their own ends (objectives) and in so doing shape political possibilities.** By shaping, we refer to a) capturing the state in the hegemonic struggle, b) enhancing the participation of citizens and c) better incorporating learning and debate into decision-making processes as we have discussed above. It is worth re-iterating that civil society in this conception is not at all points distinct from the state but is sufficiently separate to recognize the state as the sector of control. “The idea of civil society is the idea of a part of society which has a life of its own, which is distinctly different from the state, and which is largely separate from it” (Shils, 2003).

This definition is similar to one proposed by CIVICUS, an organization focused on fostering the health of civil societies, civil society is “the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market where people associate to advance common interests”(António Francisco, 2007). In CIVICUS’ definition civil society denotes a bustling space, an arena, where common interests can incorporate a broad range of objectives and, thus, are necessarily diverse. UNRISD also uses the structural metaphor of the arena, “Civil Society is a complex social arena, with individuals and groups organized in various forms of associations and networks in order to express their views and fulfill their interests” (Pianta, 2005).

While civil society may sometimes look like an arena with many sideshows and activities all jumbled together, the social objectives of civil society are not contained within such delineated space but like products of the marketplace are put to use in the home and government. The “common interests” of individuals within civil society, then, refers to some “added value” that comes from defining and refining common objectives in association, that is to say that these interests get to be “common” in the first place because of their ratification by lifeworld processes of coming to define the moral content of action.

Civil society’s capacity to build awareness and the will to act against injustice actually make it tremendously powerful, while its action is controlled and channeled through the hegemony of dominant objectives (of the state and also the market). Cohen and Arato develop this perspective, which they see as differing from Hegel’s along the following lines:

First, it presupposes a more differentiated social structure. Taking our cue from Gramsci and Parsons, we postulate the differentiation of civil society not only from the state but also from the economy. Our concept is neither state-centered as was Hegel’s, however ambiguously, nor economy-centered as was Marx’s. Ours is a society-centered model. Second, following Tocqueville and the early Habermas, we make the public spheres of societal communication and voluntary association the central institutions of civil society. Of course, the private, understood as the domain of autonomous individual judgment, is also crucial to a modern civil society. Third, we conceive the institutionalization of civil society as a process that always (as in Hegel) involves a stabilization of societal institutions on the basis of rights (“abstract right”), but also one that has the immanent possibility of becoming more democratic and whose norms call for democratization” (Cohen, 1992).

Thought of in this way, civil society is a central actor in the dynamic process of reproducing a base of values and, thus, in enabling legitimate political objectives. Civil society

supports a government's power to enforce shared norms and create the conditions for action on diverse objectives. In this way, the state interacts with civil society to enforce its own hegemonic power, but it does so because it is aware that this power has its genesis from within civil society.

### **Political authority**

As a term used throughout this study to connote the quality of legitimacy of a political regime that gives it the rational expectation people will follow its rule in most everything, I recognize that political authority is in the eye of the beholder. As Hannah Arendt concludes,

...the moment we begin to talk and think about authority, after all one of the central concepts of political thought, it is as though we were caught in a maze of abstractions, metaphors, and figures of speech in which everything can be taken and mistaken for something else, because we have no reality, either in history or everyday experience to which we can unanimously appeal (Arendt, 1950).

Political authority is the power given to states through the acknowledgement of their legitimacy and the justification of their right to exercise power. In developing the political liberal concept of legitimacy, John Rawls links origins of legitimacy to a constitution that imparts the authority as tradition, religion or charisma have in the past.

Let us say, then, that the exercise of political power is legitimate only when it is exercised in fundamental cases in accordance with a constitution, the essentials of which all reasonable citizens as free and equal might reasonably be expected to endorse (Rawls, 1993).

Given the lack of a working constitution, the demonstrated reluctance to adhere to it or a constitution that is far from reasonable or relevant to the polity, there would be precious little legitimacy to salvage. All these conditions applied to Zimbabwe in 1997. But they also applied in 1987. Clearly, the crux is not just the existence of a constitution but also of a constitutional culture that all arrive at through a constructive/education process. Political authority not only encompasses the right of punishment and management of society but also includes within itself authority for transformation, where politics seeks not just to reproduce society, as it is today, but also to take it in some direction.

In terms of legitimacy, as long as the government enables diverse groups to act towards their own ends as if they can have some hope of achieving them, associations and groups accept

the legitimacy of government to discipline social order and to act for some degree of social transformation. Legitimacy imparts the power to limit civil society but in a way that can be understood to be just—guided by explicit laws and open to some process of social review where it is unclear. Within the political agenda social order and security for the present are paramount but, underneath them, the political vision for the future of the country must also be believable-- there is leadership which is moving in direction in which social injustice and inequity have some hope to be addressed. While the fear of chaos is eventually not enough to legitimize political authority, it is a powerful motivator in the short and medium term.

#### Differentiation of civil society

The civil society must be more than a set of markets and market-like institutions. What does it need to be a civil society? It must possess the institutions which protect it from the encroachment of the state and which keep it a civil society. A civil society must have a system of competing political parties.... It must possess an independent judiciary, which upholds the rule of law and protects the liberty of individuals and institutions. It must possess a set of institutions for making known the activities of government; it includes a free press reporting freely on the activities of government.... These are the primary institutions of civil society because they are the safeguards of the separation of civil society from the state" (Shils, 2003).

Civil society encompasses a number of institutional forms. The common profound conflation of civil society with NGOs is not only misguided, it is dangerous. While NGOs can support a broad range of social objectives from civil society, their institutionalization means they are also driven to survive and will filter out activities and strategies for which they do not have sufficient resources or that could result in a loss of capacity. Practically donors assume that they can support civil society by strengthening NGOs and many studies have an overwhelming bias for measuring civil society as the amount of formalized NGOs and their impact. There is clearly a correlation between NGOs and civil society—as NGOs represent the formalization of objectives into missions and programs but that does not make the universe of NGOs contiguous with the associative sphere of action.

In order to guarantee that social objectives don't fade away or die with the proponents, people create the institutions they need. In this way, the differentiation of civil society leads to churches, companies, unions, NGOs or universities and other organizations that share like

objectives and become embedded in society. But institutions are areas of contestation themselves. Thus, movements within civil society emerge to challenge the objectives of the market, church, etc.

As Cohen and Arato do above, it has become commonplace to exclude the market from civil society. It is normal to think in terms of three “sectors” of activity: 1) government concerned with political rule, 2) private sector concerned with economic production and 3) civil society concerned with social goods. The placement of the market inside or outside of civil society has been highly contentious but there are reasons why we should resist its exclusion. The separation is hermeneutically useful because it makes economic production its own social good, one that needs to be measured in terms of efficiency and output. But it also misses that corporations, however much some may act otherwise, fulfill a social objective (to provide the economic goods we need). The market is a resource that cannot be completely alienated from civil society as its members engage in the “liberty to follow my own will in all things where the rule proscribes not” envisaged by Locke.

It is one thing, of course to impute causes to civil society groups and another to talk about the effects of civil society writ large. The question of whether civil society associations actually have the power to meet their objectives is irrelevant from one standpoint—when people act they do so *as if* they can. We should ask instead what do people hope to accomplish as civil society? Can we even speak of civil society as a whole?

Does civil society, composed of diverse and even conflicting objectives, do anything itself or speak with a unified voice as we hear implied today in appeals to civil society’s opinion or point of view? I don’t think that we can dismiss out-of-hand the intuition that civil society writ large exerts, at times, a force with a direction even though it is not a unified power with clear leadership. But the problem of tying down agency is certainly central to current common usages of the term. One reads in the newspaper statements like “In this context, international *civil society*’s role becomes more relevant to push the stakeholders for a permanent solution to Kashmir” or “A co-founder of Médecins Sans Frontières, a humanitarian-aid agency... Mr.



Kouchner arrived on a wave of popularity and high-mindedness. He told diplomats to spend more time talking to “*civil society*”, not elites...”<sup>6</sup>

The invocation of civil society is generally made in the hopes of balancing the official or governmental view on an issue. Today, the use of the term civil society is most common when speaking about countries thought to have weak political systems. This may have grown out of the diplomatic and foreign assistance trends justified as a push to democracy and accountability. In Africa, it has become routine for reporters and policymakers to seek out “representatives” and “leaders” to speak on behalf of civil society on important issues. This must be partly wrong. Civil society—as a diverse sector of activity for achieving social objectives--has no leader, no representatives and no single identity. Nobody can speak for it. But neither does the “market.” Thus, we say, “the prices were determined by the market,” without evoking the authority of some central agent who *decides* the prices. As a social structure that both impacts and is enmeshed with the state, civil society has an effect but whatever agency it has is a derivative effect of the discourse and action that is in constant flux across many organizations.

### **Civil Society: an African Concept?**

The contribution of Africans (I am not sure if one can call it the contribution of Africa) could be that the weight and constraints of the existing idea- systems tend to rest less heavily on them than on Europeans, and the movements that emerge there—in the larger political arena, and in the academy—will hopefully reflect this. It may be therefore that more coherent insights into options will arise there. But they will only arise if they are not placed in the old cul-de-sac of universalism vs. particularism (Wallerstein, 1998).

Across Africa a strong awareness about civil society has grown in the last decades.

There are two streams of thought here, both of which question the weakness of African civil society, the first by emphasizing that civil society is an imported concept in which organizations have been influenced and shaped by external donors and another that tries to grapple with internal weaknesses in civil society as an indigenous and African fact of life. The stakes in civil

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<sup>6</sup> First quote from Daily Times, “World civil society role vital to resolve Kashmir dispute, experts say,” 16 Nov 2010, Lahore, Pakistan. Second quote from The Economist, “The Quai Adrift,” 11 Nov 2010, London.

society are high, no less than the possibilities for improving governance and finding an authentic African path of development. I suggest that we take civil society as a fact of life that grapples with African contradictions and dichotomies in the global context in which it finds itself and treat weaknesses as we find them interpreted by those who are part of the processes under way.

The term civil society swept the African continent and took shape over the last decades. For example, when European journalists descended on Nigeria during its unrest and potential return to democracy in the 1990s, Obadare says, they brought with them the term civil society re-popularized in the wake of transformation sweeping Eastern Europe from totalitarian leaning communist states. Local actors, even those who were activists in civil society were baffled:

Reporting underground for the TEMPO, the leading anti-military newspaper in Nigeria in the early 1990s, I was asked by a correspondent of a foreign newspaper what I thought the consequences of our struggle...would be in terms of energizing 'civil society.' I could not give the correspondent a coherent answer for it was the first time I had heard about civil society" (Obadare, 2004).

The rapid dissemination and use of the term has been such that it is now quite common across the continent and has created a cottage industry of NGOs that consciously operate as "agents" of civil society on a broad spectrum of social objectives. The new attention on associative action has sparked vigorous debates resulting in a new civic consciousness that seeks to look increasingly inward for solutions. Africa's acceptance and use of the term does not mean that civil society was created where there was none before but that the conscious use of the term serves a purpose by supporting a realm of possibilities.

Civil society has also sparked a development industry, where working with a non-governmental organization can provide a path out of unemployment in a way that is more lucrative at times than work with the private sector. NGOs have learned how to speak the lingo and meet the conditions to raise funding. And many international funding agencies exhibit a kind of blindness to civil society by only relating with creatures of their own making. Reliance on foreign funding not only asks questions about the weak foundations of NGOs, it goes to the heart of the question about how they act as resources for civil society. As Stephen Ndegwa explains, "Local NGOs admit their greatest impediment to their capacity to be long-term contributors to a

vibrant civil society is their dependency on external sources of funding for their operations” (Ndegwa, 1996). Even in recognizing the negative dependencies of such relationships, the linkages to the external world, not just through donors, but through issue networks gives NGOs access to global thinking on democracy and development that make them part of a wider culture of constructing values and objectives. Not only do they import, Africans, through their NGOs, also shape universal ideas of justice in global fora. So while the term civil society may be a relatively new arrival, the social forces it calls on point to the age-old social development of particular and universal ideas of the political good in which Africans have a central localized and global role. As Wallerstein entreats their role should not be relegated to the cul-de-sac of universalism versus particularism.

Ngugi wa Thiongo argues for returning African culture and knowledge to the center, not to replace Western influence but to return it to its rightful place as a resource for Africa, not a continuing experience of imperial domination (wa Thiong'o, 1993). The quest for the right answer, the correct path, the high culture for the African is hobbled if it must always return to Europe to be measured against European scholarship and values. Ngugi's step to revitalizing African processes prescribes cultural processes that locate intrinsic value in labor, commodities, knowledge and communities. The culture of civil society as it is actually experienced resists the dichotomy of dependence on either government or externally generated value systems by acknowledging interdependence and solidarity and consciously struggling to make and achieve the good life out of locally valid understanding and objectives. In this hive of activity, we can see the contours of indigenous civil society.

The possession of indigenous civil society capacity correlates for many policymakers to broad political objectives for democratization, human rights and development/poverty alleviation. For example, the program framework for the UN Democracy Fund established in 2006 after the Doha Agreement states it will focus its “activities on supporting the interface between civil society and the official institutions of democracy...” (UNDEF, 2007). The preface to the 2006 European Union Annual Report on Human Rights states “Human rights policy must be based on interaction

between all relevant actors, public institutions and civil society alike” (EU, 2006)—relevant actors here apparently refers to foreign interests since public institutions and civil society would seem to cover the domestic territory adequately.

Michael Bratton is one of many advocates for the necessity of developing an understanding of civil society as a buttress for democratization in African political systems, where greater democracy is the goal and the take on civil society is informed by the de Tocqueville and Putnam traditions. In this perspective, a strong civil society forces governmental accountability and responsiveness and is necessary to encourage a movement away from authoritarian rule.

The institutions of civil society have a crucial role to play in the consolidation of democracy. At the deepest levels of political culture, civic institutions include the political norms and values that underpin the rules of democratic competition (Bratton, 1981).

But is part of the problem really the nascent state of civil societies? Are civil societies in Africa also best characterized as underdeveloped?<sup>7</sup> Isn't it all too convenient for the imperialist West to just label everything African as underdeveloped? Even though the term in Africa is a recent import, engagement in associative life has no weaker roots than anywhere else. To the contrary, community life on its face seems to be much more vital than it is in places like Italy (Putnam's focus) or the United States with their emphasis on individual interests and professionalized social services.

As Sola Akinrinade and Ebenezer Obadare propose, civil society is very much an African concept. Association is older than modern governments and the emphasis on "voluntary" association may leave out the universe of other identities formed by ethnic or community ties (Akinrinade, 2004, Obadare, 2004). "Civil society...is not an alien phenomenon but has a long history in Nigeria and became awakened from the late 1980s" (Akinrinade, 2004). As Akinrinade

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<sup>7</sup> Bratton argues "...there is prima facie evidence of a nascent civil society in certain African countries. But universal ideas require adaptation to take into account distinctiveness of different world regions, notably in the level of socioeconomic development and in the cultural attributes of different nations and sub-nations. Westerners, projecting aspirations derived from their own histories, are prone to overestimate the prospects for democratic change elsewhere in the world." Or perhaps, Westerners start by thinking democracy is only the particular universe of checks, balances and relationships they have come to know through their own development. At any rate, I think it is reasonable to discard the idea of "nascent" civil society as it is not useful for taking civil society on its own ground.

proposes, the useful question is how have civil societies developed in African states, not whether they exist. Akinrinrade sets out with a conceptualization of civil society that he feels is applicable to the African context, “the realm of the society minus the state: in other words, the realm of free association organized outside of the purview of the state, and, in *the political context*, the domain of independent opposition to the authoritarian state” (Akinrinrade, 2004). This conceptualization differs from the one proposed here—Civil society is an open-entry structure, in which people and their communities participate to meet their own ends and in so doing shape political actors—in two significant ways. First of all, it takes the confusing route of defining civil society as the negative image of the state and second, it may undervalue the inter-linkages between the state and civil society that make them not completely distinct. If we see civil society as both part of and distinct from the state in Africa, perhaps we can better understand the way in which states in general must respond and be responsive to civil society.

In this way, Bratton’s advocacy for the necessity of developing and understanding civil society as a buttress for democratization in African political systems can make sense. Civil society is necessary for the norms and values that force governmental accountability and responsiveness to its people and is a necessary component in understanding what authoritarian rule represses.

The institutions of civil society have a crucial role to play in the consolidation of democracy. At the deepest levels of political culture, civic institutions include the political norms and values that underpin the rules of democratic competition (Bratton, 1981).

Is it, thus, fair to conclude, that the very concept of civil society is imposed, deficient or inapplicable to the realities of African governments? Of course it isn’t. In thinking about a broad concept such as civil society it is sensible to think cross-culturally and across a variety of states and geographic areas. Because a significant cross-section of human perspective still tends to be overshadowed by the social and economic domination of a few countries, it is worth making a conscious effort to bring it to the fore. Beyond remembering that the proverbial West has its own agenda with African civil societies, it is important to take African associative life on its own fertile

ground. This ground can reveal possibilities and alternatives for the development of politics that are of a universal nature and useful to human development. In this way, Roberto Unger argues:

The large marginalized countries of today's world – China, India, Russia, Indonesia and Brazil – represent fertile terrain for the exploration of these possibilities, although each of them now stands inhibited in realizing the potential for divergence. The large involuntary or half-conscious institutional experimentalism that may occur in these countries throws light upon the hidden opportunities for democratic transformation in the rich democracies (Unger 1998, 27).

Unger's call for experimentation is just as cogent for the *small-marginalized* countries.

Less in the spotlight, the imposition of foreign power may be more direct but is also less conditioned by realist power games at the margins. In this way, one might look productively to the ways in which civil society is developing in African nations. This project takes a critical theoretical perspective that the value of exploring the role of civil society in the Zimbabwean crisis is to learn something about the emancipatory potential of civil society.

### **Conclusion: When does Civil Society Deny Political Authority?**

As we have seen civil society, rarely challenges political authority. As a space for acting on social objectives it nourishes the political authority of the regime through exercise of diverse activities. We have taken contradictory views of civil society, as both the site of support for the development of hegemonic power and for democratic freedoms, and embrace them both as true. Dominant values are accessible to the political elite who can use them to support political objectives while they struggle against them when they are incompatible with their objectives. The more the hegemony of values is experienced as a lived obstacle to social objectives the more untenable it is to maintain the support of civil society for the regime. But these values must be socially reproduced. Civil society through its role in deliberative politics acts as a constructive realm whereby people become aware of injustice moving in and out of a constant process of association and action.

At most times a political regime and its civil society are locked in a balance of control, support and mutual construction. The relationship between a political regime and civil society has

considerable play. Even when government represses significant civic action it still provides the security, order and rules that enable some degree of civic action.

It is difficult to predict when tension between civil society and government will erupt into a withdrawal of support for the political authority of the regime because the crisis point relies on a general awareness of a government's repressive nature coupled with a decrease in the hegemonic power that keeps people disciplined to see the world through one set of lenses. In the interim, civil society will shelter dissatisfaction with many facets of government power and, paradoxically, even with the fundamental belief in the right of political power. This structure of diverse social objectives supports the state's efforts to maintain nationalist unity—legitimizing government--when the state's actions support the social freedoms necessary to maintain them, but when these actions become an impediment to civil society's diverse objectives, the state itself becomes the problem.

Even with highly imperfect actual freedom, government is rarely challenged by its own civil society. But, when public awareness grows to understand its government to be the author of *unfreedom*, it no longer accepts the authority of political leadership and a social struggle ensues with the primary goal of deposing the structures and leadership behind political authority. While government continues to be organized around the *status quo* political logic of control, it no longer is legitimated by civil society and it resorts to forceful declarations, arbitrary judgment and secrecy, creating a tumultuous environment in which it almost inevitably further destroys any remnants of trust with its people. Likewise, civil society, in dismantling government's credibility also breaks the contract whereby people can predict sufficient order and stability from the rules enforced by government to meet their own objectives in associating. And indeed, this relationship grows antagonistic. This point of crisis is, thankfully, rare.

The crisis in Zimbabwe, which has not yet ended as I consider it now, has been construed as one of class and exhausted nationalism (Bond and Manyanya, 2002), the egomaniacal power project of Robert Mugabe (Meredith, 2002), the quest for democracy (Kagoro, 1999) and the seeds of political opposition (Raftopoulos, 2009). While these explanations provide

some insight into the events of the Zimbabwean crisis, none explore sufficiently just how civil society became a significant force against the political regime. We take up this issue in the next chapter to lay the groundwork for understanding the formation and pursuit of a political agenda in the country. Within the limits of civil society we have explored, how should we expect its political power to be developed and exercised?



### CHAPTER THREE: HEROES ACRES – THE VISION OF ZANU

*Emerging out of a guerilla-led revolution against colonial rule, the Zimbabwe African National Union became the only post-colonial government Zimbabwe has known. Drawing from the experience of the guerilla war it has been consistent about its commitment to continuing the war for Zimbabwean Independence. This objective, set against the colonial backdrop, has colored the way in which it seeks to develop the country. Throughout its history its efforts to finish the interrupted revolution for independence have resonated with its civil society but became less and less dominant over time as civil society developed in the country. Some specific objectives were independence, Africanization, combating the enemy within and without and economic development. In fortifying the political class to resist settler and neo-colonial forces it focused on establishing Zimbabwe as a single party state and became increasingly closed-off.*

At the Bulawayo outdoor public theater in the late 1990s, Amakhosi Theater Productions and Academy<sup>8</sup>, some friends and I went to see the performance of a play called the Helicopter of Esigodini. The story, they told me, was based on true events that happened to a former soldier who returned to his village, Esigodini, with big dreams. What was truly remarkable was the way in which the actors were able to crystallize the general complicity of continuing dependency through the lack of belief in our own capacities.

In encapsulated form, the soldier had worked in the army as a helicopter mechanic and had decided he would return home to start his own helicopter factory by scavenging and building new helicopters from spare parts. His neighbors not only do not support him but seem angry and threatened that he would waste valuable time and resources on a dream they believed he could never realize. They tell him an African can never build helicopters as if this should be obvious to everyone. As their paranoia escalates, someone tips off the Central Intelligence Agency (CIO), which comes to believe that outsiders as a way of subverting Zimbabwe must be bankrolling the

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<sup>8</sup> Amakhosi under the leadership of playwright Cont Mhlanga was a cultural gem in the Bulawayo township of Makokoba. Its productions not only acted as a springboard for nurturing local actors, playwrights and directors but it tackled many hard political questions. It still exists today although much of its funding dried up in the 2000s and Mhlanga, like many others, was persecuted for his political views and action.

veteran. The helicopter initiative, as a cover for South African espionage, thus, becomes a national security issue and CIO officials torture and interrogate the veteran to find the identities of his South African backers.

The play is a satirical indictment of Zimbabwean society. The actors bring this home at the end as they move out of their roles and begin addressing the audience directly, “Why can’t a Zimbabwean build a helicopter? Who told you this was true? It is nobody else’s fault that we don’t believe in ourselves.”

### **Thinking Political Objectives**

The sense of dependency on others—Rhodesia until Independence, the “Zapu dissidents” until the 1987 Unity Accords, South Africa until 1995 and, after 2000, Britain and the United States—is drawn from the experience with colonial and settler rule. From its emergence as a resistance force, Zimbabwe depended deeply on its unreformed neighbor in South Africa (Dzimba, 1998) and an international system in which it continued to be dependent on Europe markets and aid on the outside. Zanu also needed to protect its power and revolutionary objectives on the inside (Moyo, 1992, Bratton, 1981) particularly from Zapu, which also had claims on these objectives and a similar mandate for nation building.

The unit of analysis here is Zanu, the independence-seeking mouthpiece of a guerilla struggle turned political party when it won the country’s first universal franchise elections and then, in its consolidation of power, increasingly hard to distinguish from the state. While Zanu is not always the same as the state, its profession of contiguity—in its assertion of a one-party state—with the Zimbabwean state is a part of the story of how it gained and maintained its power. Looking under the hood, however, can rapidly reveal that Zanu’s power has never been absolute. Under its rule, Zimbabwe, for example, maintained a remarkably independent judiciary and whether it fully accepted it or not Zanu has been, perhaps imperfectly, confined by the Zimbabwean constitution and the provisions of the Lancaster settlement that led to its own ascension to power.

A useful way to frame Zanu's overarching political objectives is the continuation of the revolution leading to Zimbabwean independence it started in the bush. While democracy, socialism and black/white reconciliation are also part of the framing of Zanu's message, they have been subordinate to the revolutionary mission strengthened and developed from its leaders experiences in guerilla warfare in the pre-independence period. The framing is useful because it underlies the interpretation of justice—such as the rights of veterans emerging from the independence struggle and the continuing dominance of Zimbabwean resources by the European outsider—to the fore.

The Zanu guerilla fighters understood their goal as a transformative revolutionary independence that would end the racist political rule of Rhodesia, characterized by the second-class, subhuman status of Africans and the impunity of the original and continuing theft of their resources by the British settlers.<sup>9</sup> Given the inheritance of the settler economy and the disaster of rapid transformational approaches (such as Uganda's nationalization of white and Indian owned property and Tanzania's *Ujamaa* brand of socialism), the revolution adopted a pragmatic, long-term perspective. As Robert Mugabe wrote in the Zimbabwe News, the official publication of Zanu and ZANLA in 1978,

Our revolution is an ever progressive dynamic process set in the positive direction of achieving both immediate and long- term revolutionary goals. It has a past, a present and a future (Mugabe, 1983).

It was clear in Mugabe's formulation at this early date that continuing the revolution—past, present and future—would require a transformative process in which the Party would carry the burden of inculcating the masses with their own self-interest in becoming a conscious nation of collective workers. He continues,

With our now having created liberated and semi-liberated areas, our task, as we hound and pound the enemy, must be an intensive systemic politicisation programme to disorient the masses in liberated and semi-liberated zones away from a social pattern of

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<sup>9</sup> Terrence Ranger's study of peasant consciousness leading to and fueling the guerrilla war brings him to argue that, "during the war itself peasant aspirations were focused upon the recovery of the land lost to the whites and upon exclusion from the communal areas of administrative coercion. Ranger, T. O. (1985) *Peasant consciousness and guerrilla war in Zimbabwe : a comparative study*, London/Berkeley, J. Currey; University of California Press.

colonialist society and its individualism, and accordingly orientate them towards a new *social order* and *self-reliance* in the following directions...[defense, production and construction, health and hygiene, collectivism, organic unity and the people-army relationship]" (Mugabe, 1983).

The roadmap of the continuing revolution began with the perspective that the masses were incapable of effecting their own transformation--hence, it was necessary to "disorient" them; it would be the responsibility of the Party to lead them from their undifferentiated state (as masses) toward an appropriate, authentic future of collective capacity against the colonial/capitalist vision of individual-serving greed. This view of Zimbabweans as masses is strongly reminiscent of Fanon's view of the underdeveloped consciousness of the colonized:

His consciousness is so vulnerable and so inscrutable that it is ignited by the slightest spark. The great indiscriminating thirst for enlightenment of the early days is threatened at every moment by a dose of mystification" (Fanon, 2004).

As a result, the political elites find themselves in a position of needing to politicize the masses through work and education to a higher state of political consciousness. "To politicize the masses is to make the nation in its totality a reality for every citizen" (Fanon, 2004).

For Zanu, the space of free action, or civil society, was, thus, something to be realized in the future. The party would have to substitute for civil society (since people were unorganized as masses and not representative, in the party view, in anything remotely civil) meaning that all legitimate activity in the party's eyes would have to emerge from its own stimulus. This vision of the new people could serve to replace or discount the moral standing of freely conceived objectives as they actually were, replacing real people with an aspirational form. For example, addressing the newly independent nation on Independence Day 1980, Mugabe said,

As we become a new people we are called to be constructive, progressive and forever forward looking, for we cannot afford to be men of yesterday, backward-looking, retrogressive and destructive ("Mugabe's Pre-Independence Broadcast", 1980).

The first Independence Day speech went on to call for reconciliation with the former oppressors and emphasized the importance of the unity that would bring all together into one country. The policy of reconciliation was important, to avoid an economic breakdown resulting from white flight, but also "to trample on racism, tribalism and regionalism and work hard to reconstruct and rehabilitate our society as we reinvigorate our economic machinery" (Mugabe,

1980). Difference had no place in the political sphere. Progressive independence would require national unity through common cause. And what gave Mugabe/Zanu the authority to move forward?

Only a government that subjects itself to the rule of law has any moral right to demand of its citizen's obedience to the rule of law.

Our Constitution equally circumscribes the powers of government by declaring civil rights and freedoms as fundamental. We intend to uphold these fundamental rights and freedoms to the full (Mugabe, 1980).

Mugabe and Zanu clearly sought to quell the fears of white settlers by accepting the broad limitations of government authority in terms of civil rights and respect for freedoms through the recognition of the moral authority that springs from the constitution, however imposed this was. The constitution and Zanu's treatment of it was later to become central to civil society's challenges to the social contract (see Chapter Six). Zanu's positions are often drawn from statements and decrees of its leader, Robert Mugabe, to such an extent that both internally and externally, his charismatic rule is seen to define the political realm to the exclusion of other actors and systems. The government as one man is something that Mugabe himself is more than happy to reinforce as this statement about his political opponents from the 2007 Independence celebrations illustrates:

At a time when they should be coming up with ideas that can develop the nation, they are busy concentrating on saying Mugabe should go. Ndinopika nambuya vangu Nehand [I swear by my ancestors spirits] that will not happen (Meredith, 2007, p 239).

We can think of Zanu's projection of itself as largely an equation wherein Zimbabwe the state = Zanu the party = Robert Mugabe the Prince. This is problematic, however. Zimbabwe has thought of itself as a democracy throughout its short history even as Zanu continually dominated elections and declared its purpose to establish a one-party state.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> The pursuit of a one-party state has been consistently justified within the context of democratic Zimbabwe to "minimize internecine factionalism." But Sachikonye finds the culture of democracy to be strong in the country and concludes that, "The existence of a civil society whose institutions periodically question the hegemony of the state on specific questions relating to democracy is widely perceived to be an insurance against an unmitigated slide into authoritarianism and autocracy" Sachikonye, L. M. (1989) 'The Debate on Democracy in Contemporary Zimbabwe', *Review of African Political Economy*, (45/46), 117-25.

Zimbabwe=Zanu=Mugabe formulation serves a political purpose, then, in focusing power in a particular party and particular man. The focus on Mugabe can also obscure the social processes that have resisted this brand of concentrated power from the ground. Because so much in Zimbabwe revolved around Mugabe's proclamations and personality, we do not avoid using his framing of events as a stand in for the perspectives of the political regime as a whole, but should be aware that even on this concentrated political field the Zanu regime is a differentiated structure that is not always in sync with Mugabe.

In terms of civil society, we can think of Zimbabwe as having roughly three periods of political transition:

- 1980 to 1997, a period of Zanu's consolidation of a one party state. Civil society organizations rarely challenge the government directly and many try to work with it as the legitimate political authority.
- 1997 until the constitutional vote in 2001, in which the demands for political change are brought together in people's power demonstrations and then a renewal of engagement with the regime. This leads to the inception a new competing political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).
- 2001 to 2011, in which society is torn apart by violence—from land invasions, the reassertion of Zanu's hegemony and economic decline. The MDC makes political gains that finally result in a "unity" government, after an election in 2008 marred by violence and controversy.

### **Constructing Political Authority**

The roots and causes of the Zimbabwean crisis has been the subject of a fair amount of literature over the last decades. Most analysts take for granted the idea that the fundamental objective of ZANU, as it would be for any political party, was to maximize its own power and thereby ensure its survival. Institutional (and personal political) survival serves as the central rational motivation of political life. But beyond power in service of ambition or the survival of the

state is the question “what for.” Within Zanu’s continuing revolution for independence discussed above a fair range of causes for the social crises that exploded in the 2000s have been explored. In the next section we will review how some of these causes played out against social objectives and particularly how they led towards or away from the construction of political authority:

#### Addressing inequity: Bratton

In 1981, Michael Bratton sounded a note of guarded optimism about the potential transformation of Zimbabwe into a viable state with transformative goals. He saw the establishment of Zanu’s authority over the state bureaucratic infrastructure as necessary to address the inherited social inequity. But by 1997, he was preoccupied by the lack of checks and balances as a major obstacle to democratic governance.

In 1980, as Zanu looked forward, it needed to consolidate its control over the administration of government and respond to expectations, which meant very rapidly acting to redress basic social inequities in the country with a focus on the most underserved and marginalized. “...Is it possible to use the power of the state in a capitalist society to create an egalitarian and democratic pattern of development?” (Bratton, 1981, p. 475). With 90 percent of assets owned by either white settler or outside interests, the government’s revolutionary transformational goals were constrained by the need to accommodate settler interests driven by the Lancaster House settlement and the protection of the inherited economic order.

Zanu’s objectives, Bratton suggests, in taking the reins of power were transformed from revolutionary—in the sense of seeking large-scale and rapid economic transformation—to nationalistic. We needn’t see this as a dichotomy because the national consolidation he has in mind is the control of domestic forces through state administration, a necessary condition if the regime is to have any hope of progress on its transformative agenda. As he says,

The new Government probably does not wish to tackle entrenched economic interests from a position of organisational weakness; reform and reorganisation of administrative and military institutions are first required. It is unlikely that the difficult task of restructuring economic production can be achieved in the absence of a well-disciplined and participatory administrative machinery (Bratton, 1981, p. 454).

Zanu needed actual power in order to pursue its transformative agenda. It, thus, had to balance or accommodate its policies to the existing social and economic interests, which meant a far more conciliatory approach to the white settler population than happened in many other African countries. Its transformative objectives necessitated a pragmatic, political stance. As Bratton puts it “The Z.A.N.U. (P.F.) leadership set itself the dual task of winning political independence and restructuring the economy along egalitarian lines” (Bratton, 1981, p. 448).

Zanu’s pragmatism tempers its revolutionary objectives. It must both redistribute resources and guarantee continuity in ownership and production. These considerations find expression in *Growth with Equity*, the name of the first development plan, which embraces both settler capitalism and the question of redistributing economic benefits that had been concentrated under colonial administration. “The Government is still searching for the political and economic consensus that will provide *both growth and equity*, and *both stability and change*. The emergence of a development strategy is a process, not an event” (Bratton, 1981, p. 473).

By 1997, Bratton would still see Zimbabwe as an emerging democracy but showing the danger signs of Zanu’s unchecked hold on power. The potential for democratic transformation in Zimbabwe was retarded by neo-patrimonial habits and institutional weakness (lack of built-in checks and balances that make it possible for individuals to manipulate the system for their own advantage).

The multiparty systems in Botswana, Senegal and Zimbabwe are all imperfectly democratic in these respects, and when unchecked, their leaders show marked tendencies to lapse into neopatrimonial habits. African multiparty systems can be thought of as hybrid regimes in which the formal rules of electoral democracy vie with informal personal ties of “big men” to define and shape the actual practice of politics (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997, p. 82).

Civil society is for Bratton an institutional check on antidemocratic power because of its interest in defending the democratic order. But it is a plural civil society, “composed of a high density of voluntary associations and a wide diversity of communications media” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997) that is correlated with the incidence of democratic transition. Thus, civil society is too weak for Bratton in Zimbabwe (as in much of Africa) to support democratic transitions, lacking both diversity and density. But this diversity and density of the visible civil



society organizations, most particularly formally registered and recognized NGOs is derivative of the democratic openness of a government, whether the government has created the financial, legal and secure conditions for formal citizen action. Taking the existence of a robust sector of sanctioned organizations to be indicative of democratic support and pressure in a society may miss the more interesting question of how and why civil society started to develop these sorts of institutions in the first place. Civil society and the Zanu-led government shared the cause of addressing social inequity and while the authority over both meaning and program is deeply invested in the government, civil society organizations grow out of activists and civic groups to address a diversity of issues.

#### Uneven development & exhausted nationalism: Bond & Manyanya

For many, the advancement of African socialism was to be the antidote for inherited inequity in Zimbabwe. Providing a class-based analysis, Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya hold the Zimbabwean government up against its socialist promises. Writing in Zimbabwe's *Plunge* in 2002, they posit that Zimbabwe's post-1997 crisis can largely be explained by the economic and political constraints on its historical development.

Zanu's capitulation to the neoliberal Washington agenda in 1990 was a final nail in the coffin of its socialist aspirations and evidence of its internal corruption while its own nationalist objectives were torn apart by the contradictions between self-serving politics and the good of the country, as Bond and Manyanya say "exhausted nationalism" and no longer able to mobilize the majority of its citizens. Bond and Manyanya are centrally concerned with the interests of labor and do not mention civil society by name. They go as far as to cite the conflicts over aspirations for values of human rights and democracy as nebulous and the distraction of an emerging middle class. The "multi-class" composition of the opposition dilutes the clear interests of labor.

In sum a cross-class alliance composed of organized labour, the constrained petit-bourgeoisie, church-based critics, students, some sympathetic business liberals and various other activists emerged around issues of accountability and abuse of public funds, fueling a growing sentiment that after two decades in power, Zanu could quite possibly be voted down in the 2000 parliamentary election (Bond and Manyanya, 2002, p. 74).

They do not entertain that such a broad social alliance also suggests something beyond the monstrous idea that Big Business and Big Labor would get into bed together against the better interests of labor. The emergence of the MDC is problematic for Bond and Manyana because it is not accompanied with a clear national ideology, i.e. socialism. Worse, it the MDC does the bidding of the capitalist white landlords who see the political opening as an opportunity for cementing a neoliberal economic future, in sync with the Washington Consensus, for the country. As a result, the MDC, born out of the labor movement, incorporates business and middle class objectives against meeting workers' interest, that is, national, interests.

The problem is competition over class interests: the elite, political class was bankrupt in its promises and the middle class had already dug in to a role in protecting its privileged access to resources on the backs of the poor and marginalized. As they quote Mugabe from a 1989 remark,

There exists among the membership of...Zanu a minority, but very powerful bourgeois group which champions the cause of international finance and national private capital, whose interests thus stand opposed to the development and growth of a socialist and egalitarian society in Zimbabwe (Bond and Manyana, 2002).

The actual motivation of primitive accumulation—in terms of capturing assets through government intervention not economic production—provides a stark contrast to the government proclamations on development and equity and contributes to the perceived contradictions that morally bankrupted its official policy.

As Party privilege was a fact of life of the post-independence years, it was at the very least tolerated or suffered by Zimbabwean citizens. But this raises the question of what changed to make the contradictions inherent in Zanu's policies morally intolerable to a broad swath of civil society (students, church groups, business, labor, et al) in the late 1990s. Zanu's monopolization of power suggests not just that it used violence and intimidation to destroy its opponents but that its revolutionary/nationalist mission (as Bond and Manyana see it an objective of socialism in which the land would be re-distributed) was significantly resonant within civil society. On the political playing field its opponents did not elucidate a compelling alternative vision because Zanu's transformative goals were not the problem; it was the go-it-alone way in which Zanu pursued them. Zanu and Zup (Zimbabwe Unity Movement), as opposition parties, while they

survived, largely agreed with Zanu's central vision—the quest for African socialism and resistance to internal or external control—while stressing their intentions to promote a multi-party Zimbabwe.<sup>11</sup> The persistence of claims on multi-partyism, despite Zanu's efforts to squelch them, shows Zanu's monopolization of the state never completely resonated either within the party itself (political opposition increasingly emerged from disaffected party members who either became independent or founded parties to challenge the Zanu monopoly) or within civil society.

Underlying the compelling analysis about the dual effects of abandoned socialist goals and exhausted nationalism is the story of broken promises. The political crisis of the 1990s is explained by, on the one hand, the fact that the regime was no longer believably on the side of the workers who it had thrown under the bus with its economic policy and had mined the pursuit of nationalism to the point that its nationalist goals could no longer bring together people either.

#### Unity and corruption: Kagoro & Raftopoulos

Nationalism and the pursuit of unity are recurrent streams within the framing of political objectives reported by analysts. The pursuit of unity plays out in Zanu's message over time as a *strategic* necessity to accomplish its goals. Zimbabwe is at war with a tricky enemy--the entire framework of Western hegemony--that is able to infiltrate, steal and control. Internally, any contenders to political power (Republican Front, Zapu and Zum) were a threat to its ability to set the agenda. For its defense, Zanu maintained a social army—party members—with priority access to resources. Not only did Zanu become interchangeable with government but also, as the guardian of the revolution, it privileged distribution of resources to those associated with it. As Brian Kagoro has recently written:

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<sup>11</sup> Dissatisfaction with the one-party intentions of Zanu created much of the support for other parties in Zimbabwe but at least until the rise of the MDC, opposition parties did not succeed in disseminating an alternative political platform. In the case of Zapu, it could mobilize the same revolutionary credentials as Zapu. Sachikonye points out that Zum managed to get 30 percent of the vote in 1989 largely from not being Zanu, "There does appear to exist a constituency for ZUM. It challenges the hegemony of the united ZANU party. It condemns the one-party concept as undemocratic and as a protective shield for corrupt elements within the political leadership....Yet there is nothing in ZUM's platform that makes it more radical or socialist than the party it seeks to discredit. The ideological position of ZUM is ambiguous and amorphous" Ibid.

Zanuism as a political culture became a pervasive feature in all spheres of Zimbabwean life. Civic, economic and social spaces became captive to the hegemonic politics of absolutised perceptions and positions. Perceptions and positions, which made difference and innovation an intolerable and very often risky enterprise. Herein lay the foundations of the despotism that now plagues Zimbabwe. A despotism that seeks to homogenise national opinion, conduct, perception and thus turning Zimbabwe into a nation of accomplice and patronage governance. The social forces that advocate this system claim the liberation struggle as their private sector. The criterion of admission into this sector is, first the tribe, then the region and last but not least 'war veterancy' (Kagoro, 2010, p. 99) .

One way or the other, resources had to be repatriated from the enemy.

...keep in mind that in the Gramscian sense, the Zimbabwean crisis has also resulted in the reconstruction of the post-colonial state in order both to provide the modality for and to consolidate the accumulation drive of, the ruling party elite in the country (Raftopoulos, 2004, p. 160).

The monopolization of, at least, media resources was consistent with the transformational struggle in which Zanu continued to engage "to develop an intellectual and cultural strategy" (Raftopoulos, 2004, p. 161). Personal enrichment of party members is, thus, a strategy for maintaining the unity of the political elite in the Gramscian sense to keep the upper hand in the continuing war of liberation. As a means to an end, personal accumulation makes perfect sense to the party faithful although it comes with a risk of undermining Zanu's moral authority of Zanu. As Kagoro observes,

The major emphasis on national unity bereft of freedom and justice only served the purpose of covering up the contradictions in the society. When used in this sense unity became a self-serving ideology, concealing the inequities of power in the post-colonial society (Kagoro, 2010, p. 109).

The necessity of unity helped Zanu to turn a blind eye to its internal corruption even while those outside its privilege would come to understand the elite political class's ever growing stock of expensive cars, farms, lucrative contracts and veterans' payments as raw primitive accumulation and the pursuit of power. Power and wealth are required not as ends in themselves but in order to do something, in this case to transform a Zimbabwean polity into an African state. This theme of constructing a society is picked up by Brian Raftopoulos:

As the crisis unfolded, various social forces called on repertoires from both the past and present to construct their version of events. The ruling party drew on a combination of revived nationalism that privileged its role in the liberation of the country, prioritized the centrality of the fight for land, and demonized all those outside the selective 'patriotic history' it espoused. It also represented its stance as part of a longer history of pan-

Africanist and anti-imperialist struggles on the African continent and globally (Raftopoulos, 2009, p. 202).

Since Independence, the government of Zimbabwe was consistent in its message of unity as one-party rule. The 1990 elections that pitted the upstart Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) party against the Zanu political machine was a case in point. Even a nationalist hero such as Edgar Tekere, who had broken off from Zanu to found ZUM, did not have sufficient power to overcome his rivals on the political stage.<sup>12</sup> As Christine Sylvester points out, the frame of unity, despite its contradictions, worked for the ruling party (Sylvester, 1990). Zanu claimed political divisions were a luxury the country could not afford. As Mugabe told a group of school children in 1990, "We have to have peace, and we necessarily have to decide together as a nation and people because if we are divided into groups of tribal factions and regional groups we will have quarrelling and fighting amongst ourselves" ("Zimbabwe ZANU chairman reportedly dubs multi-party system "unaffordable luxury"", 1990) (Maier, 1990). Many people shared the view; as I heard from a number of friends, nobody could replace Robert Mugabe, ostensibly as there was little to differentiate Zanu from Mugabe. This point was usually made as a rhetorical question, "Who else, who else in Zimbabwe could take the place of the old man?"

The idea that the ruling party had lost its way by 1997 is a theme running through analyses of the post-1997 crisis. But whether or not Zanu had in fact made mistakes, it had not fundamentally changed its objectives. As Zanu's position had hardened and its justification of its own struggle for absolute control of material resources and the political agenda advanced, it had increasingly insulated itself from the demands of civil society, it could hardly have been expected to turn about face and embrace people's participation or scrutiny.

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<sup>12</sup> Based on the results of the 1990 elections in which Mugabe won 78 percent of the vote (about 42 percent of the electorate because of the low turn out) and ZUM managed to squeak out only 2 out of 120 contested seats, Mugabe claimed a mandate for the one-party state, Borger, J. "Mugabe claims mandate to form one-party state." Financial Times, April 2 1990.

### Inclusion/exclusion and civil society: Dorman

Increasingly isolating itself from political debate within civil society was a hallmark of the party. There was little distinction between criticism and debate. The experience of persecution and the danger of political involvement explain the quiet political voice of civil society organizations, but their reticence to stand up to government does not mean that they lacked political consciousness.

Sara Rich Dorman relates in her own experience in Zimbabwe in the 1990s that NGOs avoided politics altogether. Arguing that NGOs are characterized by a politics of inclusion in which they are largely co-opted by the state she concludes, "The politics of inclusion incorporated NGOs firmly with the ZANU (PF) regime. NGOs were vulnerable to co-option because of their roots in the liberation war and their commitment to the government's agenda of development" (Dorman, 2001, p. 41). Zanu did not need to suppress all independent voices, bringing them into the party fold was sufficient. Others would self-correct or avoid encounters with the government altogether.

The shared "roots in the liberation" meant that civil society was in fact not just forced into a quiescent attitude but tacitly supported building from the common experience of combating colonial occupation and racism, which explains why social objectives would be sufficiently resonant with the political perspectives espoused by Zanu. In this sense, political complacency is certainly not absence of political engagement. The growth of the number and type of organizations, the self-organization of rural and community groups and the emergence of pressure on government for a variety of rights proves that civil society was fulfilling some roles that were demanded of it.

Zanu built its hegemony on the inclusion of independent voices into the political machinery, something it effected with NGOs vulnerable to co-option because of their roots in the liberation war and their commitment to the government's agenda of development (Dorman, 2001). But as NGOs pursued internal social objectives of civil society that necessitated at least neutral

relations with government, one can think of their close linkages with government not so much as co-option but as sensible strategy.

Collaborative strategies with government, however, entailed limited feedback on internally generated Zanu policies. Ironically because of his future role as chief interlocutor for Zanu when he became Minister of Information in 2000 Jonathan Moyo points out Zanu's isolation from political debate in a quote he takes from a speech given by Mugabe to Zanu's National Consultative Assembly in 1991. The strict discipline of the party was meant to "elucidate" decisions without airing any disagreements publicly,

[our Central Committee] and this National Consultative Assembly are organs in which debate of any interest to the party members can take place, with a divergence of views being permissible as a feature of our democratic process; but once we have debated and concluded the debate on the basis of majority decisions, those decisions become binding on us all; to adhere recalcitrantly to your own position and seek to enunciate it out in the public is a demonstration of indiscipline verging on revolt (Moyo, 1992, p. 325).

Each of the perspectives on Zanu discussed here agree that the struggle for power (survival) is a central explanatory variable in Zanu actions but in a context in which it seeks a transformational revolution over the long term with a national consolidation necessary to achieve it. Civil society is a positive force in pushing for democratic openings for all but Bond and Manyanya, and even they do not deny its democratic aspirations. Kagoro, Raftopoulos and Dorman also begin to explore the civil society role in constituting moral authority. In each of these accounts civil society emerges as both complicit in the hegemonic project that is central to Zanu's political strategy and, increasingly, as a site of resistance. In Bratton, Zimbabwean civil society is still largely imminent potential (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997), as its strength relies on its density and diversity.

### **The Promise of Independence**

We will explore the dominance of Zanu's leadership in relationship to civil society in Zimbabwe in the sections that follow, beginning with a discussion of how the struggle for independence was embraced and used. This broad struggle developed through a series of specific aspirations:

- Towards national unity, particularly around symbols of patriotism and an authentic African past
- Against internal dissent that could even potentially stand in the way or question Zanu policy and power
- Against external power, such as the Apartheid government of South Africa that stand-in for the enemy settlers, at least until the mid-1990s
- And for a development strategy, originally socialist that would serve these ends by increasing the capacity and ownership of black Zimbabweans.

To identify these streams of inquiry should not close off other significant implications of government objectives and our goal is not to comprehensively explain Zimbabwean history but to investigate how government and civil society danced together, looking for contradictions and correlations between social objectives and the government's program.

Much of the international media coverage of the Zimbabwean transition in the early 1980s was focused on the simmering violence, the exasperation of the white settlers who had lost their African prize and the possibility of a Zimbabwean economic miracle that was not to emerge. What would independence mean, what projects for the transformation into a fairer society would be pursued and how would the new government empower social and economic objectives that had been squashed in the past?

Independence came to Zimbabwe on April 18, 1980, when the transition period came to an end with the lowering of the British Union Jack in Rufaro Stadium in Salisbury before dignitaries from the community of states. This negotiated independence was, however, marred by a sense of incompleteness as the downfall of Rhodesian UDI was won in a hasty settlement and not on the battlefield. The Lancaster House solution promised to make two Zimbabweans, a private-property recognizing continuation of settler power and a political regime won through universal suffrage and, thus, with the capacity to represent and struggle for an authentic and legitimate African state. In this way, the Lancaster settlement set the stage for *imperfect* independence, as a contradiction, in which whoever controlled the Zimbabwean government would enjoy political rule



but only by maintaining much of what had been built by decades of settler privilege. The enemy once fought on the battlefield would, therefore, still need to be confronted in the factory and the field, despite the victory won over the control of the state.

Independence appears in the terminology of *Chimurenga*, a Shona word meaning “a collective struggle” that came to embody the aspiration against colonial dependence. The first Chimurenga was the Shona/Ndebele revolt against the British in 1896/1897, the second was the bush war against the settlers culminating in the establishment of Zimbabwe in 1980 and the third would be conceptualized by Zanu loyalists as the struggle against Western values that threatened to end Zanu rule and, thus, the promise of the revolution in the end of the 1990s. The continuing struggle evoked by the term has currency not just within Zimbabwe but also across post-independence Africa (Raftopoulos, 2004). As Paul Nyathi remarks about the post-1997 crisis, other political leaders in Southern Africa have

hesitated to criticize the ZANU PF government because it has managed to portray these events as a fight against a renewed threat of colonialism, as a “Third Chimurenga (revolution) in which a small Third World nation finally teaches the colonizer Britain a lesson and takes land back from the whites (Nyathi, 2004).

Independence had meaning not simply as the problem of political (black) versus economic (white) control of the destiny of the country. Overcoming impediments to freedom also meant altering the inherited system that colonized the African mind in addition to its land so that social and economic injustices could finally be addressed. Independence was a return to something lost, going back home.

Shortly after Zimbabwean Independence in 1980, a reporter from the Boston Globe, in an attempt to discover what this freedom entailed to Zimbabweans found Betty Chikove hanging her wash in Mabuku Township outside Harare. “If I had wings I would fly like a bat,” she told him, “I can't guess what is in store, but the war was so hard on us. Now we can walk standing up again. No more curfew, no more passes. We can go home. I'm looking forward with confidence” (Lockman, 1980).

In speaking of going home, Chikove was referring to her rural home in the Marondellas (Marondera after 1982) where she fled with her family to escape the violence of the war.

Violence, insecurity and terror displaced around 1.3 million mostly rural Zimbabweans and decimated agricultural production (Bratton, 1981). Many thousands were directly traumatized by the violence. During her interview, Chikove pointed at a young woman who came from behind the house, "That child there was tortured by electricity," she was raped by an electric cattle prod, "she has no mind now. We brought her here and tried to get her a doctor but we had no money" (Lockman, 1980).

Independence for Chikove entailed a return to home; government was to both facilitate this going home and provide for basic needs. Her stress on returning home was echoed in the government's policy priorities to return the country to normalcy. Pointing to the tension between Zanu's agenda for economic transformation and its economic conservatism, Christine Sylvester provides this quote from the Transitional National Development Plan of 1982:

The triumph of liberation has given the people and Government of Zimbabwe an opportunity to create a new order, to rid the Zimbabwean society of vestiges of exploitation, unemployment, poverty, disease, ignorance and social insecurity.... While the inherited economy, with its institutions and infrastructure has in the past served a minority, it would be simplistic and, indeed, naive to suggest that it should, therefore, be destroyed in order to make a fresh state. The challenge lies in building upon and developing on what was inherited, modifying, expanding and, where necessary, radically changing structures and institutions in order to maximize benefits from economic growth and development to Zimbabwe as a whole (Sylvester, 1985).

Already Zanu's approach was pragmatic, seeking to provide the conditions for continuity in reconstruction by "building upon" its inherited system. As Jonathan Moyo writes about the first two years, "As might have been expected, Zanu-P.F.'s pragmatic outlook at the national level invited allegations from the party's fringe on the left that the 'revolution had lost its way', and that its leader had changed his mindset from socialism to capitalism" (Moyo, 1992). While Zanu's political objectives were transformative--as in Mugabe's declaration of the need to "disorient the masses," its pursuit of them through a gradualist reform strategy would avoid the shock of foisting independence on a traumatized people.

Government agencies were left in tact while the large goals of the provision of free education and repurposing of health and agricultural programs to serve black as well as white populations were underway. But achieving Independence through government restraint was

largely resonant with the social objectives of the Zimbabwean population emerging from the war and now looking to be left alone by their government.

Chikove explains,

"People can't just come up and tell you to tell them everything anymore. Now that we are free, we can just say 'No more questions' to anybody. In the other time black people didn't have the right to keep their privacy. You could lie but you couldn't say no more questions" (Lockman, 1980).

Chikove's comments should be understood as referring to her desire to end the interview with the journalist but they are also interesting in how strongly they link independence to the state of being left alone, not to be bothered. The colonial experience of government had been for villagers like Chikove an intrusive, external repressive force that relocated communities, stole their land and cattle and forced them to become cheap labor. Independence was to be the end of this meddling.

Independence as the return to normalcy with the modest goals of adding value to the lives of citizens without transforming them into something else resonates with the experience of many who set out in 1980 to be left alone to carry out the family and community objectives at home that were interrupted by the war and the colonial legacy. The white settlers had not just taken the land and resources away from the African population; they had pursued a state based on their own privilege and interests alone creating an entrenched, uneven development (Mtisi et al., 2009). The new independence promised to right this wrong but was also replete with contradictions. How could the government both incorporate the freedom to "go home" and pursue social transformation?

For Zimbabwe, Independence in the 1980s implied government restraint. Zanu needed to provide the stability and social services required to rebuild the tattered social fabric. As Thomas Mapfumo, also known as the *Chimurenga* musician sang about the end of the war, "The drum has sounded. The chief who does not sleep, war is over in Zimbabwe. Life is back to normal in rural areas. Old people are happy to go back to the reserves" (Mapfumo, 1984).

This aspiration for the expansion and security of the private sphere is easily missed because Independence also raised expectations around material advancements that required

positive action and, at the very least, the end of the normalized deprivation that African communities suffered in the colonial years. Again Mapfumo,

Give us somewhere to sleep in Zimbabwe, Give us some food. Give us some clothes. That is happiness. That is what the people want. Look its confusion in Zimbabwe. Conversation at the busstops. Confusion because of hunger.... We are eating hyenas. That's confusion. Conversation at the markets (Mapfumo, 1984).

Meeting social objectives required a change in which state institutions would move from repressor to benefactor. Mugabe's disorientation of the masses would not come through another shock but through the availability of tools for self-development, particularly education, health and the provision of basic services. In the first two years of independence, the government saw 140 percent increase in school enrolment, an economy that grew by almost 15 percent and added 60,000 jobs as people returned home (Hawkins, 1982). The masses would be led but they would also lead by expanding their own opportunities.

Independence unleashed particular social objectives that also had political implication. Social objectives for righting the ongoing repression of women and pursuing women's rights and equality were developed through female guerilla fighters' experience with the discriminatory machismo of their male comrades (Staunton, 1990). The aspiration for women's rights asserted itself on the political playing field even as new political institutions were in a formative phase. For example, member of Parliament from Manicaland and deputy minister of posts and roads, Naomi Nhiwatiwa, at the opening of a Red Cross health clinic in 1981 (speaking in Shona):

Let it be the law of the land that women be paid the same salaries and men for similar work, that husbands and wives live together in the same house, that child-rearing be given the same status as professional work (Lockman, 1980).

The Department of Information declined to publish her remarks at the time, an indication that she had hit a nerve and an illustration of how in the 1980s women's rights were an early issue of contestation within Zanu's objectives.

We have been expected to be sexually passive, otherwise we were considered prostitutes or bad girls. Well one of the freedoms we have won is the freedom to express biological need, which is as important to life as air, sleep or food (Lockman, 1980).

Nhiwatiwa sees the lack of freedom as being a social not a political issue. In this way, she highlights a problem of African culture, something that Zanu cannot directly address while

“leaving people alone.” The struggle for independence had a social intent and used political structure and logic, without opposing it. For example, Agnes Mapfumo, who began as a domestic worker and became a leading skills-trainer helping to form the Zimbabwe Craft Cooperative in 1980, said in 1987,

We started at the peak of the war when things were very difficult. Although the war was very hot in the rural areas we never stopped, and the freedom fighters understood what we were doing.... Independence doesn't bring all the answers.... Although we participated very actively in the liberation struggle, after Independence most women are still excluded from planning and decision-making. They are also excluded from taking up challenging positions aimed at effecting change... (Bond-Stewart, 1987).

The sort of resonance that supports a government's political objectives is not the same as the wholesale enthusiasm for these objectives. Women like Mapfumo, began to focus on what they could do outside of the sphere of power in which they acknowledged their own disadvantage. Her area of work was to "respond to the demand" so that the young people she worked with would solve the problem of unemployment themselves. She acknowledges the value of the generalized Independence struggle while being clear that for the specific emancipatory objectives of women independence as autonomy and self-improvement is paramount.

Also strongly illustrating the resonance of the general political Independence struggle and the specific movement for women's emancipation in 1987, Cornelia Mzaca Nkomo, who was working in the ranks of the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (later discussed in Chapter 4), emphasizes the way in which the struggle opened her mind:

I increased my awareness when I joined the struggle. There were promises of equity but there were times when men were regarded as bosses. For example, very few women were trained in the air force and artillery. Why? I wanted to. There was something wrong somewhere. We had more possibilities than we had at home, but not enough. Men were supposed to cook. They agreed to do little things like helping with cooking but they didn't agree with big things and we couldn't question them.... To women who read this book – you must learn to be critical of everything, even what we say. You should think for yourselves and improve on the ideas of others. You should encourage debates about the real problems facing women, and come up with concrete solutions (Bond-Stewart, 1987, p.15).

It was the participation in the struggle that helped Nkomo to clarify for herself the continuing injustice to women in Zimbabwean society. In this way, the emerging women's movement not only validates the struggle for Independence as political objective, it sees itself as

developed and developing hand-in-hand with this struggle. The independence struggle is formative to its own consciousness of emancipatory objectives. The struggle has taught Nkomo that social justice will not be given to women. It must be part of a painful journey that includes a self-critical (and politically critical) standpoint. Independence, as a state of freedom from dependence that must be attained through personal struggle, thus resonated with women's rights groups in Zimbabwe while they did not want a largely male dominated government to fight their battles for them.

Zanu's idea of independence was not the same as the expanding private sphere, or a growing and vibrant civil society, with its diverse struggles for independence but rather the construction of a unified national transformation around itself and away from the past dependence on the powerful forces of Western capital. As Margaret Dongo reflected in an interview with the BBC in 2006,

I've been a member of the central ruling party and also a member of parliament for 10 years, and I've held a number of senior positions, some of them that involve policy making. You find that the policy-making process in this country, especially by Zanu PF, does not leave room for consultation. The whole thing has been outlined, created...designed like a dictatorship. One person will come in and say, "Mr. Mugabe, you know the people who are making life difficult for us? Tony Blair and the Americans. I think it's better for us to put in a law so these people can't play around with our minds, and we can do what we want (Margaret Dongo, 2006).

Besides the pure power motivation of politics, the narrow pursuit of Independence as the dependence on Zanu, that is the government, for development is drawn from Zanu's own interpretation of its leadership in transformation. The party is not a catalyst for transformation but the agent that guards against the re-imposition of external control. Independence is a stage in national development. It must be sacrificed for the greater good of reconstruction in the terms that will be set FOR the masses BY their leaders. Elliot T Manyake, Minister for Youth Development emphasizes the link between imperfect independence and the pursuit of gender justice in the 2004 National Gender Policy:

The quest for social justice, equity and respect for human rights anchored on democratic principles spurred us to fight for our independence.... Our society has been described as highly unequal in terms of race and gender. These two factors impact on income distribution, political participation, power relations, access to, control and ownership of economic and productive resources. This situation continues to haunt our development,

especially human development efforts which are aimed at addressing issues of equity, social justice, human rights and democracy by putting value and worth to each person's contribution to society at all levels (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2000).

The plan, written in 2004, is a very conscious attempt to reinforce the relevance of the political struggle for independence to the woman's movement and, thus evokes the linkage between racial and gender equality as central. This is a blatant attempt to evoke the parallels between the women's movement and Zanu's intentions to continue the Independence struggle. For much of its history, Zanu could count on the reproduction of the Independence frame within diverse associations as they sought both to bring in new members and protect their rights to autonomous action, as we have explored with some particular expressions of women's aspirations above.

In centralizing the role of struggle, national independence remained ever something that had to be won. At the same time, national independence was the return to normalcy—something of a past before the imposition of colonialism. Zanu let people re-create their own lives while ensuring the party was there to do it for them. In this climate, political objectives strongly resonated with civil society associations, viewing real independence as a product of the political struggle even as they suffered the contradiction between the quest for autonomy and the government's penchant to reduce it. The contradiction would play out on a variety of levels. First the struggle was to be transformed into the promotion of a shared sense of national identity. As is discussed in the next section, it would not be just any unity, however, but one that was manufactured and secured by Zanu. The struggle for Independence also had enemies both, internal and external. The construction and response to these enemies was a tool in Zanu's arsenal to justify vigilance for its continued existence as the guardian of Independence. Finally, the political economy was another site of contention. Outwardly, tolerating and benefiting from the capitalist enterprises of settlers and foreign investors, Zanu set the conditions for economic development and, particularly, for the development of a political/economic elite closely connected with the party.

## Promoting national unity

Zanu has used the cause of building national unity to exclude pretenders to political power and narrow the field of who belongs to the polity and who does not. Its vision was a country of loyalty unified under its leadership, which initially put out an olive branch to its former, white repressors. As Mugabe told a Boston Globe reporter in 1982,

We are one people with a single loyalty. We have set an example at the upper levels of government. Why can't we create it at the political level as well? It's part of our transition. We want to be a democratic nation within a single-party system (Driscoll, 1982).

The credibility to act and the capacity of Zanu to mobilize resources in the trenches of its struggle required order and discipline around the Party's central role in Zimbabwe. Keeping the rank and file behind this vision legitimized actual violence and repression and required vigilance in maintaining a monopoly over political dialogue. How was unity to be constructed and maintained? In the early years, unity was associated with the process of reconciliation, which would bring the people together as one to understand and act as one on national, collectivist and socialist goals. As Peter Yates quotes the Minister of Labour and Social Services from a 1980 article in the Herald:

It is on the foundation of the principle (of reconciliation) that we are finding it possible to transform groupist objectives and inclinations into collectivist, popular and socialist objectives and aspirations....Our people as a whole are quickly transforming by accepting the principles of (national) unity and reconciliation (Yates, 1980).

In her review of history education in Zimbabwe, however, Theresa Barnes notes that the association between unity and reconciliation was short lived, with reconciliation being reserved for the Black/White division, resulting not in unifying at all but in perpetuating the division. Unity was actually pursued, however, in the joining together of Shona/Ndebele as the Africans, excluding other ethnic groups (Barnes, 2004). To the extent that the school history curriculum reflected the prevailing political view, this is suggestive that Zanu's conception of citizenship came to be limited to a single patriotism for the Shona and Ndebele. Extirpating this difference, also led to a decade of repression to which we shall return below.

The telling of a national story, in which Zanu is the privileged liberator of the Zimbabwean people, was used regularly in rituals such as Independence Day celebrations and whenever a



state hero died and found his or her way into Heroes Acres. In this repetition of a story the primary enemy of the African identity was the white settler, who continues to repress through profit seeking and ownership at the expense of the Zimbabwean worker and continuing to impose imperialistic, European values incompatible with a return to the African center. The land is at the center; the return of stolen goods stymied by the two-faced English who are blamed for never fulfilling their promises to shepherd its return after the Lancaster settlement.

After the 1997 crisis, patriotism as loyalty to the party of liberators resurges at the center of Zanu hegemony. Terrence Ranger in 2004 discusses how patriotic history has been employed in Zimbabwe in the political crisis to serve the needs of Mugabe and Zanu-PF:

Within Zimbabwe, 'patriotic history' has seemed indefensibly narrow, dividing the nation up into revolutionaries and sell-outs, in the spirit of Didymus Mutasa's remark that he wished that only the seven million revolutionary Zimbabweans could remain, or of Robert Mugabe's demand at the 2003 Heroes Days ceremony that the opposition must 'repent' and declare its commitment to the continuing revolution before any unity talks could begin (Ranger, 2004).

Patriotic history has its limits "You could have too much history if a single, narrow historical narrative gained a monopoly and was endlessly repeated" (Ranger, 2004). The problem as the government began to see at the heightening of the political crisis after 1997 was that an alternative history of independence in Zimbabwe was taking hold with Zanu and Mugabe as the central repressive force, standing in the way of aspirations for human rights and participatory government. Ranger quotes Zanu-PF Information Secretary for Bulawayo, Sikumbizo Ndiweni, "The mistake the ruling party made was to allow colleges and universities to be turned into anti-Government mentality factories" (Ranger, 2004). The independence struggle in which the government engaged was around vigilance to the continuing revolution. Thus, Zanu could mobilize support for itself through the rules of the game of war and the independence values it felt comfortable in monopolizing. "Each presidential candidate should produce manifestos which spell out clearly that they are going to uphold Zimbabwean values and heritage and restore a sense of patriotism among Zimbabweans," from a 16 February 2002 Herald article (Ranger, 2004).

Zanu was able to rally its base because its own version of nationalism was not yet dead. It still had power to assert itself.

The election, therefore, was history versus 'the end of history.' Tsvangirai was mocked not only for having failed to understand history, which amounted to more or less the same thing. 'The depth of his knowledge of our history is so shallow that is frightening,' wrote Olley Maruma (Ranger, 2004).

Zanu was in touch with the authentic African perspective, which would protect the African space from the "bogus universalism" of the western oppressors, now in the guise of the British and Americans and the entire edifice of globalized values. This was not a new strategy; it had been a mobilizing force behind Zanu-PF's efforts to consolidate its power dating from Independence. What was new in its response to the late 1990s crisis was the vehemence of Zanu's efforts to define and isolate its enemies. This was more than a diversionary tactic. It was a consistent and rational strategy based on a return to Zanu's work to unify Zimbabweans under the revolutionary cause.

More than power was at stake; the question really was whether the revolution would be interrupted. Zanu must reconnect with its social support—the veterans or unemployed youth inclined to join the struggle—both to rejuvenate its troops and to re-establish its authority with its civil society. The call to unity served the purpose of building an actual allegiance to Zanu's objectives, but for an increasingly small portion of the population. The veterans and landless, as they were without resources, were willing to use violence to assert the primacy of the land cause.

#### Eradicating the enemy within: *Gukurahundi*

Symbols and social support have been employed alongside violence to eradicate difference and the enemy within. A horrific example is Mugabe's use of the 5 Brigade to terrorize the Matabele regions of the country until 1988, when a unity accord dismantled Zapu, Zanu's main competitor. The government campaign against dissidents (that led to violence and repression focused on the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces) stands out as an extreme example of Zanu's use of violence to eliminate alternative political objectives. Called by the government *Gukurahundi*, from a Shona word meaning the summer rain that washes away the chaff, the cleansing of political opposition has roots in the simmering violence that continued after Independence among resistance fighters that were not integrated in the new Zimbabwean army.

After the Lancaster agreement, Zanu agreed to integrate Zipra (the military wing of Zapu), ZANLA (the military wing of Zanu) and the remnants of the Rhodesian army into a Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA).

By September 1980 only 10,000 former guerillas had been integrated into the ZNA and 22,000 guerillas remained in the 14 rural assembly points formed under the provisional administration led by the British. Angered by the government's attempts to move them closer to urban centers and not seduced by the prospects of returning to the agricultural economy some of these bored and worried soldiers became violent (Borrell, 1980).

The fighting often took the form of inter-party violence with guerillas lining up along Zipra/ZANLA divisions. An investigation into two early incidents of violence in November 1980 and February 1981 among Zipra and ZANLA factions, the Dumbutshena Report, was never released but the Director of Public Prosecutions later said the November 1980 clash in which fifty men were killed was caused by the "unprovoked action of ZANLA and the use by them of heavy weaponry" (Dzimba, 1998). The insecurity and violence and Mugabe's retaliatory dismissal of political members of Zapu from the government and the ZNA, is cited as a cause behind the wave of Zipra desertions and the ensuing lawlessness as some dissidents began to pillage and terrorize villages largely in Matabeleland (Dzimba, 1998).

The violence served to bring to the fore several levels of social divisions: it exacerbated fears that the Ndebele sought conditions to reassert their dominance over the Shona; it undermined Zapu's case for peaceful coexistence under a multiparty solution, and in providing an opening for South Africa's clandestine meddling in destabilizing the country through the creation of a "super Zapu" force, it legitimated the use of violence against dissidents that Mugabe would exploit.

*Tribal* identity seemed to many at the time to be a significant challenge to national unity and was certainly underlying Mugabe's reference to loyalties.<sup>13</sup> The Rhodesians had manipulated

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance, news reports from the time such as this one in the Christian Science Monitor, "Tribal rivalries grew rather diminished during the war and while Mr. Mugabe has brought five Patriotic Front men, including Mr. Nkomo, into his Cabinet, there is dissatisfaction on both sides"

and heightened distrust between the country's two largest tribal groupings—the *Shona* and the *Ndebele*—and it had always been in their interests to break any shared identities among them while using their cultural and political institutions to maintain control. The settler government used but it did not invent the contesting ethnic identities, *Ndebele* nationhood was also promoted and sought by the *Ndebeles* themselves (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

The Ndebele people had settled on the southwestern plateau in Zimbabwe sometime after the 1840s in a migration that split them away from an Nguni offshoot of the Zulu tribe in South Africa. For Zanu, the *fact* of the historical Ndebele invasions could be used to justify the repression of its rival Zapu because of the purported danger of Ndebele aggression and unfinished conquest even though separatism was certainly not the only strain, and probably not the dominant one, of political objectives among the Ndebele. Nevertheless, it was convenient for Zanu's pursuit of single-party power that the two parties, Zanu and Zapu, garnered support along the divisions of this separation,<sup>14</sup> with Zanu associated with the *Shona* majority and Zapu with the *Ndebele* minority.

Inter-tribal violence raised questions of ethnic difference in the country and was thus to be opposed in the quest for national unity. As Eppel remarks even though it was framed in the language of crushing Zapu dissidents the real purpose of the *Gukurahundi* was to stifle a potentially legitimate seat of resistance in the *Ndebele* homelands.

There is a continuity in approach by Zanu PF over the decades: apparently legitimate fronts for political repression have been maximally exploited in government propaganda—then, the need to crush dissidents, now, the need to redistribute land—and the large grain of truth in this rhetoric has silenced that international criticism that could have changed the situation” (Eppel, 2004).

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Borrell, J. "Zimbabwe troubled by outbreak of political violence." *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 1980, 1-1.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Tony Rich's analysis of the 1980 elections in which he argues that Zanu's win in the 1980 elections was not primarily caused by ethnic divisions. Rich, T. (1983) *Legacies of the Past? The Results of the 1980 Election in Midlands Province, Zimbabwe*. in J. D. Y. Peel and T. Ranger (eds) *Past and Present in Zimbabwe*. Liverpool: Manchester University Press, pp. 52-55.

Tribal exceptionalism could not to be tolerated. But the danger of Zapu went beyond its links to the Matabele and their different claims to nationhood. Zapu's political legitimacy also sprang from its corner on the market of legitimate claims to the struggle for freedom in the country, which put it in direct conflict with Zanu. Many had been awoken to the idea of independence through Joshua Nkomo, Zapu's leader, for example, Mishek Sebanda a preacher from Nkayi who grew up in Bulawayo (in Matabeleland South) describes his own support for Nkomo.

Nkomo is the one who started this freedom thing when he was with the National Railways. We used to go for our meetings after work. He is the one who made us realize that things were not equal between the races because we, the blacks, were segregated by the whites and the Coloureds.... We supported Nkomo right up until his death (Staunton, 2009).

In this way, Zapu was a viable opposition. Mugabe saw a way to silence it for good by playing on the need to expunge the violence of the dissidents. This *fact* employed by Zanu to legitimate a decade of violent repression eventually led to Zapu's demise and cemented Zanu's hegemony.

In 1983 Mugabe used the 5 Brigade to launch a campaign purportedly against Zapu's reputed military capability but actually against the civilian populations of Matabeleland South, North and Midlands. The justification was the *discovery* of secret caches of arms in 1982 (CCPJZ, 1997). Maintaining arms stockpiles in secret locations had been a policy of both Zipra and ZANLA as a hedge against the resurgence of the Rhodesian Army and the potential failure of Lancaster to come to a workable political solution. But Zipra weapon stockpiles bolstered fears of Matabele exceptionalism and quest for power. Interviewed after having his passport confiscated and being prevented from leaving the country on state business in 1983, Zapu leader Joshua Nkomo said,

I have a feeling they are using the dissident problem to crush Zapu. They want to get at Zapu and eliminate Zapu and impose a one-party state. (Cowell, 1983)

It is ironic that Nkomo himself was not a member of the *Ndebele* tribe but came from a minority tribe called the *Kalanga* that lives among the *Ndebele* but are more closely related to the *Shona*.

The campaign rapidly escalated from 1983 when the 5 Brigade, which had been trained by North Korean forces, began to murder and terrorize villagers. In 1997, The Catholic Commission on Human Rights and Justice released a report on the atrocities that documented and counted thousands of deaths and abuses. As the campaigns were carried out in secrecy, the total number of deaths, torture and beating victims may never be known but conservative estimates are about 30,000 deaths (CCPJZ, 1997). While the campaign was intended to wipe out support for Zapu-linked dissidents, its scope was horrific, including the withholding of food, brutal torture, sexual violence and intimidation. The report gives eyewitness accounts that illustrate both the apparent irrationality of the repression and the fear it engendered:

On the 10th June 1983 at 4 pm I was taken from my workplace in a Puma vehicle, along with 2 others who worked for another store in Tsholotsho. We were taken to Mbamba Police Camp, about 40-50 km away. When we got there we were separated. My friend and I were accused of telephoning Bulawayo to warn our masters to stay away, because the killers (the 5 Brigade) were still there. The 5 Brigade had made it known that they wanted to kill my master, Y, and my friend's master, K. They had gone to hide in Bulawayo. I was beaten and lost 4 teeth on the spot, and 12 others after this. My friend was tied with his hands and feet together. They would hang him head down and feet up until he was paralysed in both hands and feet. He died from this in 1993. From 1983 he was on and off in hospital (CCPJZ, 1997).

Such occurrences were not tied to any actual dissident activity. Although, it is possible that such snares caught some of the actual dissidents, the real point was to establish guilt as a commitment to an Ndebele identity, speaking the language and identifying with Ndebele symbols and pride. People were beaten or tortured for not speaking Shona or for varying types of allegiances to Zapu. In the dozens of remote villages where the 5 Brigade carried out its activities, daily life was violently disrupted and the point seemed to be merely the demonstration of the overawing power of the military. The following report about Commander Jesus illustrates the tortuous attempts to explain the regime of pure fear as a legitimate political response to organized violence:

Commander Jesus said he found his boys doing nothing - beating up people instead of killing them. He did not mind thousands of people being killed. "You are going to eat eggs, after eggs hens, after hens goats, after goats cattle. Then you shall eat cats, dogs, and donkeys. Then you are going to eat your children. After that you shall eat your wives. Then the men will remain, and because dissidents have guns, they will kill the men and only dissidents will remain. That's when we will find the dissidents" (CCPJZ, 1997).

The *Gukurahundi* did little to stop the dissidents, who were already disassociated from political society and largely without greater political objectives—there were probably never more than 300 of them anyway (CCPJZ, 1997). By 1987, even as unity talks were underway between Zanu and Zapu, dissident attacks continued<sup>15</sup>.

What the *Gukurahundi* did accomplish was to force Zapu to give up its pretensions to compete with Zanu on the political minefield (and thus to dismantle a separate seat of political legitimacy). While only a few internal voices within Zanu have ever acknowledged the extent of the repression of the *Gukurahundi*. Joshua Nkomo later would say explicitly that he agreed to merge Zapu with Zanu in the 1987 Unity Accords as the only way to end the government-sponsored terror in Matabeleland. In this way, the *Gukurahundi* succeeded in eliminating Zapu once and for all while disciplining pockets of difference in the minority tribe. This strategy of fear plays an important role in forcing a narrow channel for legitimate political voice in Zimbabwe.

Considering the goal of the *Gukurahundi* as the disciplining of Ndebele nationalist aspirations, it does not seem to have been in the interest of the Zimbabwean government to fuel Matabele separatist sentiments over the long run by taking away their security nor to approximate itself too closely to its own largely Shona roots, but it had the authority to wipe out legitimate opposition and, thus, used terror as a means to enforce political unity around itself. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni remarked, “Gukurahundi violence provoked radical Ndebele cultural nationalism as well as radical Ndebele politics that sometimes contested the whole idea of a unitary Zimbabwe state” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

Raw hegemonic power was certainly the intended outcome of the *Gukurahundi*. The campaign had to be secret, precisely because it violated the constitutionally guaranteed contract of rights and the Five Brigade, thus, reported directly to Mugabe and not to the army. By pushing underground any resistance to national unity under its flag, however, the government reinforced a

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<sup>15</sup> The Catholic Commission report documents that dissidents murdered 16 people on a farm in Matobo a month before the Unity Accord in December 1987. Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, (CCJP), (1997) *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace. Report on the 1980's Disturbances in Matabeleland & the Midlands.*

generalized message of the paramount nature of national unity, and warned any who would oppose its complete hold on power.

While the composition of Zapu had only loosely mirrored Matabele ethnicity, the hidden war served the purpose of repressing the legitimacy of Matabele-linked political claims; its purpose was, thus, not the remaking of ethnic identities but the suppression of opposition to national unity, packaged as the legitimate goal of eradicating dissident activity. Zapu and communities who might conceivably disagree with the primacy of the unified identity under Zanu were silenced, while the actual extent of violence was guarded to minimize solidarity with Matabele grievances but also because it undermined the rights of actual citizens. The idea of the *Gukurahundi* as a battle against dissident elements of ZAPU resonated with civil society's bottom line of security and order but, only because the government's version of events was all that was reported until 1997.

Many Shona Zimbabweans chose simply not to believe the rumors of government-sponsored violence raging through the Midlands, Matabeleland South and Matabeleland North, and to buy the legitimacy of government action against dissidents (Eppel, 2004). To publicize the actual violence under the 5 Brigade in the Ndebele regions would be tantamount to the public opposition that would bring back retribution.<sup>16</sup> The use of violence to eradicate internal enemies to its project of Zimbabwe has thus also reinforced opposition to it, which paradoxically strengthens the truth of the danger of internal opposition.

#### Guarding against the enemy without: Apartheid South Africa

Overcoming the dependence of the Zimbabwean state on South Africa and Britain was a central part of Zanu's platform. South Africa as the last remaining holdout of racist domination also wanted to shape a future Zimbabwean state from the Rhodesian settler regime, as it was the strongest state in the region that could offer any opposition. South Africa failed to bring about the

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<sup>16</sup> Largely underground, the Ndebele have developed their own approaches to particularism, including the development of a United Mthwakazi Republic "that symbolizes the desire for a restored pre-colonial state" Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2009) 'Nation Building in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Ndebele Particularism', *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*.



emergence of what it defined as a moderate state in Zimbabwe, one that would deny support to South African liberation movements and that would become a part of its planned Constellation of Southern African states (Dzimba, 1998). As the new political landscape emerged after 1980, South Africa resorted to a policy of overt containment of the Zimbabwean threat through occasional military incursion combined with economic control—Zimbabwe relied on both South African ports and markets—and clandestine activity. In this way, South Africa became the clear threat and danger to Zimbabwean independence. Mugabe declared in 1987,

We are not militarily at war with apartheid, but apartheid is at war with us. And militarily, economically and socially, we are paying an enormous price (Mugabe, 1987).

South Africa represented, however, not just a threat to Zimbabwe but the embodiment of continued African repression in the region and, thus, for Zanu, opposition to it formed a part of Zimbabwean political objectives. Seen from the lens of maintaining its own internal dominance, South Africa was a source of ever-present danger (the other) through which Zanu commanded the vigilance of its own society. But its leadership in opposing South African *Apartheid* worked not only because of the external danger but because it resonated with civil society's belief in expanding freedom.

The persistence of internal and external enemies forms a significant part of the identity of any state because of what Campbell calls "discourses of danger" that help to unify the people around a common cause (Campbell, 1998). In conceiving of the South African danger, Zanu was responding to South Africa's real threat but also acting upon the shared experience of racial repression. Many Zimbabweans had experienced South African Apartheid first hand working in the mines<sup>17</sup> and many others shared family, friends and other work experiences with their South African neighbors. Given the alternative of the Zimbabwean reconciliation policy, Zimbabwe provided an example to the world that African states could come to a political solution that included both black and settler populations. In this way until 1995, the struggle was pursued with

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<sup>17</sup> In the 1970s at its peak, South Africa hosted more than 600,000 migrant workers from the region. And under UDI, South Africa became by far the largest trading partner and investor in the isolated Republic of South Africa. Dzimba, J. (1998) *South Africa's destabilization of Zimbabwe, 1980-89*, New York, St. Martin's Press.

the Mugabe taking a leading role in the Frontline States in standing publicly against South African Apartheid.

Mugabe became more convinced that his country's apparent success in creating a prosperous non-racial society was one of the most important reasons for South African destabilization.... Mugabe viewed the elimination of Apartheid as fundamental for maintaining a non-racial society at home as well as supporting the pan-African ideal of racial equality (Dzimba, 1998).

This quote from Kenneth Kaunda, the president of neighboring Zambia, illustrates Zanu's use of its moral example against South Africa, "Our former enemy and your ally the former Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith is now living in peace in Zimbabwe under the dynamic leadership of Comrade Mugabe, the man he detained for ten years." (Meldrum, 1986)

The struggle against Apartheid ended in 1995 in a pyrrhic victory. South Africa, by regaining its legitimacy as a regional power, pushed Zimbabwe out of the limelight and reduced Zimbabwean influence in the region. This vacuum of prestige was visible. Multinational corporations and regional embassies picked up roots from Harare and relocated to Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town, some returning and others merely seeking to take advantages of new opportunities. To the extent that South Africa had been a useful reality for maintaining loyalty against an external enemy, this leg of support for Zanu's power (and Mugabe's influence) in the region had simply disappeared. A mere three years later, Zimbabwe would officially enter into the war in the Congo, which many see as a raw attempt to capture its resources. In light of its lost enemy in South Africa, it makes sense to consider that it needed a new enemy. This was not to be found in the confused mess of the Congo. A more effective strategy would be to go to the heart, as it would do in remembering land injustice and the whites and their surrogate in Britain and the United States.

#### Seeking economic development and socialism

Outside of the first few years of significant growth and its ability to expand social services, Zanu's economic credentials were hardly superlative. But there were also bright spots in its economic management, such as its success in the 1980s in expanding education and health services and its management of drought relief that averted widespread humanitarian disaster.

The point here is not which economic policies would have led to prosperity, it is how Zanu had the political authority to pursue the economic policies it did. In this way, we must deal with two sticky issues. The first is did Zimbabweans expect and did the government promise the imposition of a standard socialist economic ideology? And how was the promise of land reform central to its authority?

### **Zanu and the socialist promise**

For the African population of the new country, the fixing of property rights amounted to little positive protection as it had been largely excluded from capital formation and land ownership by 1980—having been pressed onto communal reserves by the government and exploited as cheap labor by the farmers and industrialists. The new government confronted this reality by committing to a medium to long-term objective of achieving the return of the stolen land under a socialist framework that was consonant with collective ownership.

What we would like to see established is a system which brings land ownership of the People as a whole. This means the state will act as the custodian for the whole People and all land owned by foreigners, some of it is not really managed by their owners or by its owners... (Mugabe, 1978).

The People, the object of Zanu's economic plans, inferred the African population of Zimbabwe. White ownership would be transformed by gradual, increasing incomes and black empowerment.

Zanu's main economic objectives as stated in the first government policy document, *Growth with Equity*, remain constant: to "achieve a sustainable high rate of economic growth and speedy development in order to raise incomes and standards of living of the people" (Benson Zwizwai, 2004). The economic goals, however, set in its plans (the Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP), the First Five Year National Development Plan (FFYNDP), the Second Five Year National Development Plan (SFYNDP), the Framework for Economic Reform (known as the Economic Structural Adjustment Program or ESAP), the Zimbabwe Program for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) and the Zimbabwe Millennium Economic Recovery Programme) were not met.

The government argued that its approach to socialism was constrained by the Lancaster agreements that provided blunt protections on minority white property ownership through constitutional protections to minority (white) interests for the first ten years. Among these were (1) guaranteed representation of white MPs in parliament and (2) the sanctity of private property, a mechanism that assuaged white settler fears of immediate take over of their property. Both the British and Americans made oral promises at Lancaster House to aid the future Zimbabwe in the compensation and fair market purchase of white-owned farms properties.

It is important here that the “socialist” state envisioned by Mugabe acts for the interests of the collective and decides the proper management and use of land. Socialism, in this sense, captures the “collective ownership” that would gradually replace “private ownership” but it is problematic because capitalist industry and agriculture production continued to be a mainstay of the country (Williams, 1983). The major transitions would have to wait, but Zimbabwe could build from expansion.<sup>18</sup>

Development stands next to democracy as the most overused and abused term across Africa, employed as an obvious end to which all energy must be devoted and popping up regularly in government speeches and press as an exhortation and rallying call. Zimbabweans would have to, thus, work for the development of the country and development would come from the profits of capitalism. In this way, Zanu’s eventual capitulation to an economic structural adjustment program by 1990 is not so surprising while it was viewed as a nail in the coffin of its socialist aspirations.

Despite Zanu’s use of socialist rhetoric, its main objective in economic management was mostly hands-off. Capital resources would be gradually transferred to the black population. But the more these resources came into the hands of the political elite the better, because the

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<sup>18</sup> With high, over 10 percent, growth in the economy in the first two years, this perspective may have been easier to sustain in the early 1980s, but even then, as Williams points out the logic that the white owners of the economy would be any more willing to part with their profits in the future than their assets in the present was essentially flawed. Williams, G. (1983) *Equity, Growth and the State*. in J. D. Y. Peel and T. Ranger (eds) *Past and Present in Zimbabwe*. Liverpool: Manchester University Press, pp. 52-55.

fundamental problem was not just the advancement of generalized black interests but the contradiction between Zanu's political control and its exclusion from the economic control of its society. In this way, the goal was not just to expand incomes; it was to build the resource base of the party.

On the economic front, then, Zanu's attempts to bring the economy under its control left little room for capital expansion as resources were used for political patronage. This outcome was acceptable to the extent that it led to a relative loss of economic control of non-Zanu elements. Resource transfer to patrons of the Party also points to a consistent interpretation of Zimbabwean socialism as the repatriation of resource management in the hands of the centralized authority, namely Zanu leadership.

The capture of productive resources in the hands of the political elite would be increasingly seen as outright corruption by much of the civil society as it became clearer that not everyone shared in black empowerment efforts. The limitation of economic opportunities afforded outside of the party structure laid bare corruption. The awareness of corruption was however smoothed over by the increase of state services and overall wealth until 1990 and because rural civil society counted on the government to balance the power of commercial farms.

The combination of promise of change in redistribution of existing resources, namely land and basic necessities through welfarist policies, and the pragmatic stance that continues economic production through existing modes leaves intact social relations and is resonant with "being left alone." But it also limits advancement to the political sphere where resources can be captured and are to a great extent spent in maintaining the political (warrior) class. Land redistribution would hang over as an unfulfilled policy and a prerequisite to achieve economic justice in the country. The worsening economic conditions of the 1990s, as Bond and Manyana argue, not only gave the lie to the development plan of the government but also to the idea that reconciliation policies had succeeded to build the conditions for a socialist transformation. Even as the government's own broken promises and corruption were front and center, the largely white settler classes had spent a decade protecting their own interests.

The governmental success in the 1980s in investing in the social infrastructure created the conditions (primarily education, health and re-establishment of rural economies) for an expanding political consciousness. As civil society increasingly took Zimbabwe for a political fact, it was able to evaluate Zanu for its actions. In this way, efforts to effect positive changes against specific objectives were less and less isolated from each other. Coming together in networks and coalitions for a variety of causes acted to strengthen local work; it also protected groups from political persecution.

### **Overview of Civil Society in Zimbabwe**

Associational life—certainly not consciously aware of itself as a civil society—provided succor to African populations from many of the worst aspects of Rhodesian colonization and gave birth to the conceptions of independence that mobilized young men and women to take to the bush. In the 1980s, civil society developed in the country largely in parallel to government objectives but a distinctive shift begins in the 1990s.

While NGOs are merely stars in the universe of civil society organizations, they certainly are among the most visible associations and have become increasingly an important part of the landscape. An exact count of NGOs in Zimbabwe is hard to come by, but the number seems to be somewhere between 500 and 2000 throughout the two decades of independence.<sup>19</sup> The Southern Rhodesia Council of Social Services was founded in 1962 to represent the interests of NGOs (or welfare organizations), changing its name to Voluntary Organisations in Community Enterprise (VOICE) in 1980, and then ten-years later to The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO). NANGO categorized Zimbabwean NGOs as having mandates in the areas of disability, elderly, children, youth, environment, women and gender, human rights, health and poverty alleviation (Mukute and Maranga, 2006). It cited the

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<sup>19</sup> In 1992 Ann Muir estimates more than 800 NGOs (Muir, A. (1992) 'Evaluating the impact of NGOs in rural poverty alleviation: Zimbabwe country study', *ODI Working Papers*, 1-138.) in the country, NANGO calculates the number of NGOs at more than 2000 by 2006 (Mukute, M. and Maranga, T. (eds) (2006) *Zimbabwe NGO Corporate Governance Manual*, Harare.. )

development of NGOs in the country in three generations that, interestingly, roughly correspond to its own development:

- Pre-1980, a first generation of relief and welfare focused organizations
- 1980, a second generation of development organizations
- 1990, a third generation of advocacy organizations
- (Mukute and Maranga, 2006)
- 

NANGO cited two factors for the shift into the third generation of policy advocacy for NGOs, the movement from socialist to market-driven policies and Zimbabwe's increased participation in United Nations global conferences. Around the middle of the decade it notes that NGOs engage in policy advocacy in response to major policy failures (Mukute and Maranga, 2006).

Sarah Dorman suggests that the new policy-advocacy NGOs also emerged in relation to a new set of problems that civil society wanted to solve, such as HIV/AIDS.<sup>20</sup> She observes that before 1998 NGOs in Zimbabwe were not consciously critically of government. "In general the government was neither avoided, nor perceived as an opponent" (Dorman, 2001. p. 125). NGOs were not apolitical, however, even if one takes a very restrictive view of what constitutes political action. Organizations and groups were active for social change and advancement that would permit their members to enjoy the fruits of liberation. These groups either provided or pushed for greater justice in the form of services or change of practice. As my friend Livion Njini, who had been an advocate on the behalf of disabled people for the National Council of Disabled People of Zimbabwe (NCDPZ) and later one of the first leaders of the Community Foundation for the Western Region of Zimbabwe, boasted, "We won parking places for disabled people before they did in Britain."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> She also mentioned homeless people and women's rights but it is hard to see on the surface how these are new issues. Dorman, S. R. (2001) *Inclusion and Exclusion: NGOs and Politics in Zimbabwe*.

<sup>21</sup> Even in a 1986 paper, Njini (then called Nyathi) points out that the NCDPZ does not provide services, "The operational programmes of the organisation are geared to campaigning for equalisation of opportunities, i.e., access to all community services available to the general public. As a voice of all disabled Zimbabweans, the Council plays an important role in the process of liberating the nation's disabled persons" Nyathi, L. (1986) 'The Disabled and Social Development in Rural Zimbabwe', *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 1, 1-5. This clarity

Still the emergence of a third generation of NGOs that consciously employ policy advocacy signaled an important shift in political awareness. Civil society organizations had learned the government is deaf to some of the objectives they pursue. Even where, as with the unions, the case had been made that there was no reason to oppose government—the socialist government was on the side of the worker—the realistic pursuit of social objectives started to require not just helping the government to do the right thing but applying leverage to shift its direction. The culture of collaboration, as Dorman calls it, may have shielded an understanding of the great gulf that had actually begun to grow between civil society and its government.

In fact, the country had, by 1996, such an aura of stability and advancement that the United States Agency for International Development had placed it on a list of 10 countries around the world that could be “graduated” from US assistance. (The USAID FY98 Congressional Presentation, 1998) and would later scramble to strengthen its support of human rights organizations.

The dangerous limits on criticizing government, however, were clear. A degree of invisibility and a shield of neutrality were necessary to get things done. This “culture of restraint” permeated associative culture and was accepted by many Zimbabweans, who nevertheless, found channels for expression and action. It could be heard in the words people used to describe things that needed to be changed. The words “hope” and “wait,” overused in common dialogue suggested to me a pervasive sense of powerlessness and while “hope” for change still rumbled of the limits of Zimbabwean patience it also accepted that the government was out of the control of its people.

With the political field, fortified off from direct assault, the fundamental problem remained. One could not wait on government promises, whether it was for water in Matabeleland or for the emergence of a black entrepreneurial class to develop the industry and business the

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about advocacy clearly predates the emergence of third generation NGOs as described by NANGO and Dorman and suggests that the early adoption of advocacy strategies was driven by need, particularly of the most marginalized communities in the country, such as the disabled who were extremely cut off from participating in society.



country needed. This growing disbelief in and impatience with government promises characterized the political stance of civil society into the mid-1990s.

### **Conclusion: The Autopoietic State**

The first decade of political development in Zimbabwe drew from the authority of Zanu as a liberating force supported by the resonance of its political objectives even where the fit was imperfect. The continued struggle for Zimbabwean independence enabled the expansion and consolidation of Zanu power—through building unity, eradicating internal enemies, guarding against external enemies and economic development policy—major challenges that justified for many the creation of a strong, central authority and imparted Zanu with sufficient power to maintain its aspirations for a one-party state. Pursuit of these objectives drove the party-cum-government into the creation of a closed, autopoietic system increasingly deaf to the growing diversity of social objectives. The limited perspective of the political elite was cut off from the key nutrients of the social objectives being pursued on the ground.

But Zimbabwe's civil society was developing alongside the political regime in the 1980s. People did not need to agree with Zanu's particular actions as long as they could largely embrace the reasons for its action as they also sought an ideal of Independence that had both transformative and pragmatic aspirations. Even Zanu's efforts to eliminate opposition and monopolize resources were largely given a free pass in the 1980s because of its accepted leadership in the struggle.

The chapter positions Zanu/Zimbabwean political objectives not as primarily anti-democratic *per se* but as closing off political space for goals other than those consonant with its own. While Zanu maintained leadership over much of Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s, already significant fissures and flaws in its authority began to show themselves, around corruption, economic vision, abrogation of human rights and its increasingly exclusionary approach to governance. Zanu's core authority remained unchallenged as political competition, where it existed, revolved around whether one party should be endowed with all the power of the state

and not whether Zanu's political objectives themselves were desirable. In fact, even where political opposition emerged—opponents tried to out-Zanu Zanu in the framing and construction of their messages, leading them to reinforce Zanu's political hegemony.

The rest of the story has two critical components: 1) questioning how and in what way the government had lost political authority by 1997 and 2) asking why this was sufficient to extend an irresolvable crisis but not to bring about its resolution. We take up this strain in the next three chapters that follow elements of the construction of civil society opposition, first through a grassroots development movement that sought to locate the initiative and ownership over development in grassroots communities, second through the initiation of strikes over new taxes on workers and others that bloomed into an expression of people's power and finally through the positive attempt to reconstruct the social contract by focusing on the process of participatory constitution making.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DO IT YOURSELF DEMOCRACY – ORAP

*The Organization of Rural Associations of Progress (ORAP) grew out of civil society efforts to help rural peasants become agents of their own development. As a grassroots empowerment effort, it embodied the ideals of grassroots, bottom-up democratization and focused on creating the conditions to empower villagers to accomplish their own social objectives. It laid the groundwork for opposing imposed policies by pursuing locally legitimate goals and making use of government resources as needed. While ORAP helped shape more democratic expectations and provided a refuge for the accomplishment of local objectives, it worked with the government to pursue development programs and initiatives for its constituency and avoided direct confrontation. In this way, it remained largely on the periphery of government opposition starting in 1997. The indirect strategy of offering a political alternative to top-down development ceased to be as effective in creating a refuge for ORAP members and associations after 2000 when ORAP also suffered sanction from the Zanu government for its independent efforts in drought relief.*

Around 1999, I had the opportunity to bring a program officer of an international foundation to meet a vibrant community group that had been working for years as a member of the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). After a drive from Bulawayo, we passed through long corridors of acacia trees sprouting their new leaves and arrived at the outskirts of a rural village in Matabeleland South. A group of mostly woman dressed in colored scarves poured from a compound of grass-thatched rondavels on our entrance. Each sang together in a harmonious welcome expressing in the isiNdebele language their pleasure in the meeting and their hopes to share what they had learned about community development. After a tour of their poultry and garden projects, we sat together under a giant tree that offered shade against the afternoon heat. They began to show us stuffed toys made from sisal they planned to sell to earn income for their other projects. Almost shyly they offered them for sale. The program officer I brought sat stiffly and politely complemented them on their work. As we left, she leaned over to me and said, “I wanted to buy one of those, but as an outsider and a donor, I did not want to give them false hope that I would support them.”

Outsiders often see villagers or peasants as primarily objects of development or as dependents on outside assistance that is necessary for them to improve local conditions. This reinforces a development conundrum whereby assistance, even of the most well-meaning variety, is often the very medium in which dependence is reinforced. At the same time, donors talk about building and strengthening rural participation in the development process. In whose development processes should they participate? Do they really own the development process, when their donors do not engage with them as equals—for instance, in buying a simple stuffed toy?

ORAP, launched soon after Independence in 1981, stands out for its practical methodology that looks to reestablish villagers as the drivers of their own development. Begun as a development approach, it resonated with the government's objectives for rural development but also provided a refuge for community autonomy and action. Over time the democratic leaning implications of its approach created a civil site of resistance to the government's attempts to monopolize the development agenda and formed a critical perspective on the political regime.

### **Rethinking Development**

Sithembiso Nyoni and others launched ORAP to foster development by adding support to localized initiative and knowledge. ORAP grew from something called the Rural Development Coordinating Council (RDCC), changing its name soon after to better reflect its emancipatory methodology. The idea was that development must be owned and the initiative of those who are to be developed. How could this be put into practice?

The group began by stressing that development should be a process led by the dialogue, knowledge and understanding of villagers as the subjects of development who could better build from their own assets, cultural knowledge, ideas and material resources than from imposed development projects. It soon began to put in place a movement structure that grew over the next twenty years to provide material and technical support for initiatives originating from smaller groups. Many of these community groups, such as women's clubs, that joined ORAP pre-dated its formation (Mattocks and Steele, 1994, p. 58). The associative ground was fertile because

community-based organizations had already been active, often as a way of reducing negative impacts of colonialism or settler policies but also to accomplish a wide range of local goals from burial societies to agricultural groups. These small groups were not a focus of national development policy—except where they fit the definition of collectives Zanu sought to support as a path to socialism—and largely flew under the NGO and government radar (Wekwete, 1990, p. 2). ORAP found a natural constituency among some of these groups with whom its take-the-initiative approach strongly resonated. ORAP objectives stand, thus, as a window on the social and economic objectives of the region and how these objectives related to political authority.

Nyoni had earned a masters degree in rural development and carried out fieldwork in her home region in Zimbabwe. Having formerly worked with the YWCA on women's development programs, she had learned that merely teaching skills and coming with the answers to development challenges was ineffective (Bond-Stewart, 1987). It was important instead to see effective development as an ongoing dialogue in which the answers are arrived at together by all involved in the process. From the very beginning ORAP's approach rested upon a strong emphasis on empowerment that demanded real power rest in the hands of those who were to be developed. Furthermore, ORAP understood a problem with the concept of empowerment itself. The power to act and change one's situation Nyoni felt was not something that one could be given. The only way to really empower another was to give up one's own power and share in the challenges of another. As Nyoni said in 1994,

You can only empower people when you disempower yourself so that you feel what it means to be powerless. Then, with those who feel powerless, one works out a strategy to get somewhere. Power exercised is power lost. Power shared is power gained (Dube, 2004).

Shared power was carefully suffused throughout ORAP's structure. Its brochures and literature emphasized the organizational structure in which family units are organized into village development groups and then regional associations. The organizational chart consciously inverts the hierarchical structure, putting the myriad of family units, composed of five to ten people in the lead, at the top of the diagram where one would normally expect to see the top governance structure of an organization (Nyoni, 1987).

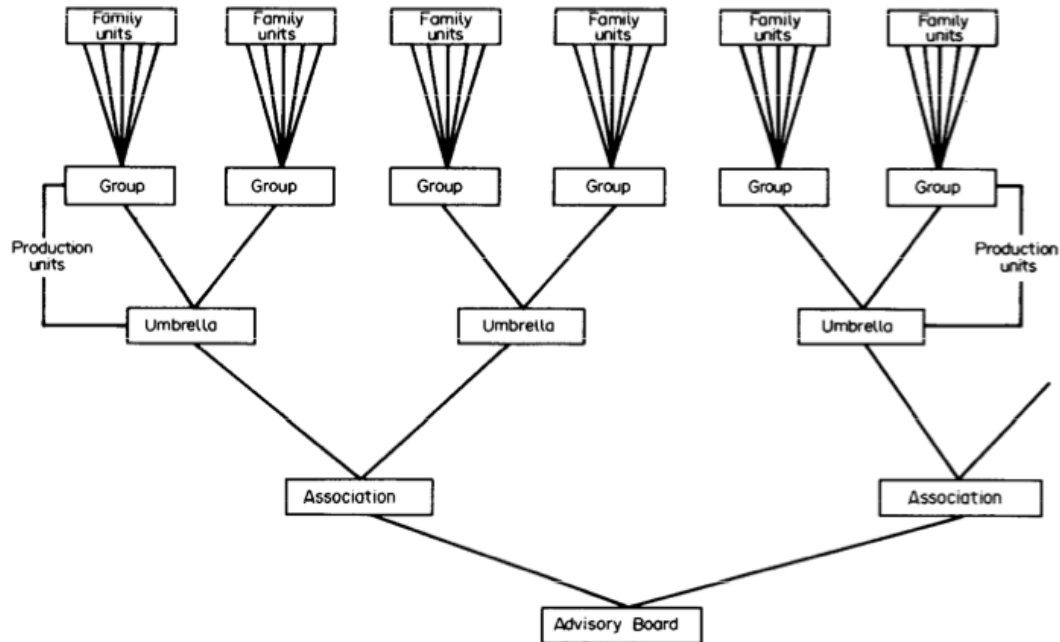


Figure 3 - (Nyoni, 1987, p. 54)

In this graphic depiction ORAP's role as a supportive foundation for community action is clearly to add value to the work of its members by creating associative support structures all the way up the associative chain. In this way, the more local and close to a ground a structure is the more it can count on various levels of support. Family units have the honor of leading their own development processes counting on resources, knowledge, resources and solidarity from groups, umbrellas, associations and the ORAP advisory board (where the staff and organizational structure are also lodged). This organizational structure was well known by both staff and ORAP members who held ORAP's management accountable to it.

ORAP structure was paired with a development philosophy that was repeated by staff members and mobilizers to the extent that it was regularly communicated and incorporated into all activity.<sup>22</sup> As a philosophy, ORAP's message is distinct because, first, it was communicated in Ndebele (not English), the language of most of the groups with which ORAP works and second, it

<sup>22</sup> As Sibanda reports, ORAP members embraced the "ORAP family approach" confirmed by their internalization of its terms in 'groups' discourses on development and their hopes, and in interviews in which members describe the ORAP approach. Sibanda, A. (2002) 'Voicing a Peasant Alternative: The Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) in Zimbabwe', *Peasant Organisations and the Democratisation Process in Africa*, 1-13.

emphasized that local actors must decide their own relationships to government, capital and other development agents. The central tenets of the philosophy are:

*Zihluze* - Examine yourself  
*Ziqoqe* - Mobilize yourself  
*Zenzele* - Do it yourself  
*Zimisele* - Commit yourself  
*Ziqhatshe* - Be self-employed  
*Zimele* - Be self reliant  
*Qoqelega* - Little by little...save and invest or mobilize resources (Dube, 2004)

By 1983, ORAP had 300 affiliated groups and by 1987 this had doubled to 600. In 1987, it also counted on 800 family units that would grow to 4000 by 1990 (Sibanda, 2002). The number of actual members of ORAP in the 1990s seems to rest on largely interpolated data, and is put at half a million members (InterAction, 1998) to 1.5 million members (Jones and Kurey, 2000). This fuzziness with accounting for members, I remember as being a fact of life from within ORAP. To my knowledge ORAP maintained no database of members, no member cards and few scribbled notes with names were maintained within the main headquarters. At the time, I supposed that this was due to the potential risks its members could suffer although I was also suspicious that that the swollen numbers were really about increasing the support from ORAP's donors. The greater the number of members, the greater the support. Whatever the case, with the recent background of the *Gukurahundi*, I don't think it is surprising that ORAP was reticent to record member information.

The sheer quantity of its programs -- drought relief and food distribution, small dam construction (Give-A-Dam), improved kitchens, support for village initiatives, microcredit, Zenzele college and the creation of a community foundation, among others—attest to a significant breadth of involvement. At the same time, its bottom-up, participatory approach was imminently fundable and it was in the enviable position of attracting donors. As Tomson Dube reported Nyoni's approach to donor funding:

When she looks at donors, she sees people of goodwill who want to share resources with others. In this case, donor money is good money.... When donor conditionality stops people from being themselves, it becomes a problem. ORAP has been careful and has still to be careful as to what donor money it receives. It has to be money that is liberating, not money which generates dependency (Dube, 2004, p. 83).

An important aspect of ORAP's methodology is dialogue in which rural villagers make their own decisions and build from their own knowledge, while they could call on ORAP for support (Dube, 2004). To make this happen, ORAP recruited official village mobilizers who were responsible for staying engaged with groups in their areas and acting as a voice of the movement. Mobilizers were supported by field staff working out of the main ORAP compound on the outskirts of Bulawayo. The largely educated and city-residing field staff of the NGO was open to criticism for not sharing the same challenges of the groups with which they worked. ORAP compensated for this by deferring power over its activities to a board composed largely of members chosen by the development associations and through emphasizing staff and management linkages with the rural areas. The challenge was to transform into a participatory culture in which village members would be empowered to do for themselves, as Nyoni remarked:

I am now coming to a very sensitive issue. I am a little disillusioned. *What is the meaning of participation in a society that doesn't allow participation?* You can encourage women to participate but that is not the issue. The issue is to create a society where everyone participates as equals. Most African societies are not participatory by nature. Am I realistic to expect participation? (Bond-Stewart, 1987).

#### ORAP's track record

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ORAP was recognized locally and internationally for its development philosophy. In 1993, Nyoni won the Right Livelihood Award for her work with ORAP. The award is known as an alternative Nobel Prize that honors and supports those "offering practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today" (The Right Livelihood Award). Even ORAP's relatively small efforts, such as a Grameen Bank-like microcredit program were positively evaluated outside of Zimbabwe (Iserles, 2003). The creation of Zenzele College in partnership with the School of International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont and BRAC in Bangladesh, ensured that ORAP's perspectives were increasingly known in development circles (after the US State Department issued a travel advisory for Zimbabwe, the SIT partnership had to close down because SIT could no longer insure American students whose payments made up a good bit of the College's income (Dube, 2010)).



In Zimbabwe, ORAP's challenge was the translation of its philosophy into actual benefits for the population it served. A series of droughts in its region (1982-1984, 1986-1987, 1991-1992 and 1995-1996 (Musemwa, 2006)) diverted a lion's share of its energies to providing emergency relief to drought stricken villages. Partly the importance of its drought relief program to ORAP (starting in 1992 with a proposal to UNDP) was that opened up significant financial and material support from international agencies, (Dube, 2004) but the importance also derived from the need to show immediate assistance in the communities where it worked. It was important to remember this because in a practical sense, the scope of its drought relief efforts tended to dwarf its other programs tying up much of ORAP's infrastructure and capacity in emergency work. Evidence of this was clearly visible in the parking lot of drought relief vehicles that rumbled through its compound in suburban Bulawayo. Responding to emergency needs, interestingly an area of contention with the government that did not want to dilute the impact of its patronage monopoly in rural areas, was key to maintaining credibility with its community and an area of vulnerability as ORAP relied on the government's agreement that it could distribute food in the rural areas. Relief activities stretched across a broad sector of programs:

ORAP members have worked to alleviate the affects of drought, which affects southwestern Zimbabwe every three to five years, on average. Through programs designed to ensure a stable water supply (such as through building dams and improving wells and boreholes), to store food following good harvests, to transport food from surplus to deficit areas during hard times, and to develop and popularize the use of drought resistant strains of crops (including indigenous varieties), ORAP prevents large human and animal migration during droughts which can result in additional pressure on the small amounts of land remaining arable during difficult periods (Annorbah-Sarpei et al., 1993).

It is, however, the self-accomplishment of personal, family and community objectives that differentiates ORAP from a drought relief agency that merely provides food and goods to communities that cannot produce for themselves. In practice it is difficult to separate the material support ORAP channeled to communities over two decades from the accomplishments of the communities themselves because its constituents demonstrate ownership of the ORAP identity.

Irene Ncube speaks highly of ORAP's various programmes. She says that the ORAP Food Security, Rural Livelihoods and Water Development department extended loans to the people to purchase dairy cows. The villagers also have small vegetable gardens. Ncube referred to the Dema Family Water Project, which was jointly constructed by the

community and the ORAP department of Water development. Here there is a water tank which can hold 9000 cubic metres. The water is used for homes, small vegetable gardens and medium-scale irrigation schemes (Dube, 2004).

By 1995, ORAP's departments mirrored many government social agencies—water, education and drought relief—as well as taking on profit-making and income-generating functions, such as the purchase of a petrol station and hardware store, and involvement in agriculture and other community-owned enterprises. As a CSO behemoth, its institutional demands occasionally drove what was often called “ORAP the NGO” (to distinguish it from the larger movement) into conflict with its own community managed board, which took seriously the responsibility to make the major decisions affecting their own areas.

ORAP's development paradigm sought to mend the mistakes of “top-down” power models,<sup>23</sup> the paradigm was clear about its interest in the wholesale reduction of dependence. As such, far from avoiding power and politics, ORAP was immersed in a fundamentally political approach to development. It was banned for a period during the *Gukurahundi*, but had succeeded in building a mostly collaborative relationship with the government. And, yet, at the same time, it was moving forward an alternative political approach—one that would expand citizen participation and strengthen the link between democratization and political authority.

### **ORAP and Political Authority**

ORAP's reach into the rural areas made it a serious political force in the very areas that Zanu counted on for the support of its hegemonic control, namely rural villages. Quite possibly, one of its saving graces with government was that its activity focused on the Ndebele hinterland, as opposed to rural constituencies in the rest of the country. Zanu's hold was not as strong in the region because it had been a Zapu stronghold and was part of what Dorman called a perceived

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<sup>23</sup> As Sibanda says, “ORAP strongly believes that if meaningful development is to take place, rural people have to be the masters of their own destiny and, therefore, they need to reverse the ‘top-down approach to development through their own ‘bottom up’ strategies” Ibid.

tribal threat to Zimbabwean unity (Dorman, 2001).<sup>24</sup> As we saw in Chapter 3, the *Gukurahundi* campaign of the 1980s targeted Matabele difference. For Zanu, then, ORAP was an alternative power base that, while not a direct competitor, claimed a significant rural constituency.

### **Building a refuge for political participation**

Nyoni and ORAP staff were highly conscious of ORAP as an alternative political space. The goal of empowerment was about developing the capacity or power of rural village groups to meet their own objectives. As Nyoni said in 1987, “Development is about giving people power, not power in the negative sense but power in a human sense” (Bond-Stewart, 1987). The negative sense, one would presume is control over others for the sake of control rather than the accomplishment of socially validated objectives. ORAP sought to grow individual and collective capacity to set and meet objectives without undue dependence on the formal, political space.

Once you open up a tiny window for people to see who they could be, even if it is later closed, that can no longer be taken away from them. I want to work in rural development where people question themselves and their history, and create a present and the future...I hope that women see themselves building an alternative society, created and moulded by them, by people who want to live fully (Bond-Stewart, 1987).

ORAP's goals were, thus, very political from the beginning. It pursued the struggle for independence from the bottom up, referring back to the culturally accessible Ndebele concepts of *Zenzele* and *Zimele* even while the act of speaking Ndebele was being openly persecuted under the *Gukurahundi*. In this way, ORAP embraced the same goals as Zanu for expanding independence but denied the centrality of the party or of party politics to constructing freedom for others. Because of its access to government programs, such as drought relief, and its development goals, ORAP inhabited a political pocket in which the government's monopoly remained imperfect. Of course, ORAP was not the only alternative development organization in the country. Others like Environmental and Development Activities (ENDA) and Silveira House

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<sup>24</sup> Dorman quotes Mugabe from a 1981 article in the Herald, “If you show divisionist attitudes the enemy will come among us and will destroy us. Our forefathers fought together during the first Chimurenga war and it is our duty to be united as well.... Dissidents still have shallow mentality (sic), because they are encouraging tribalism in the country. Zimbabwe was not liberated for any one tribe and it is pertinent that she remains united” Dorman, S. R. (2001) *Inclusion and Exclusion: NGOs and Politics in Zimbabwe*.

employed participatory methodology and had similar goals to build on the knowledge and goals of rural villages (Mattocks and Steele, 1994). Alternative development initiatives like ORAP provided, thus, a refuge for community organizations from top down patronage to pursue their development objectives and attracted funding of a significant scale to carry out income generation and drought relief programs.

While it would be hard to reconstruct all of the social objectives of ORAP members at this time, it is clear that they agreed on the tenets of self-driven development and wanted to minimize the debilitating reliance on patronage and centrally controlled development without directly opposing Zanu. Left alone, Zanu's misguided directives could be more safely ignored because of their irrelevance to real development initiatives spearheaded by the communities themselves, "The history of development efforts to date has shown that these "recipients" are apt to ignore or positively reject such patronizing dominance from the center. Development must be of the people and by the people themselves" (Nyoni, 1987). The direction, as resonant with the ongoing liberation objectives of Zanu, would be the liberation of the colonized mind:

Development for us became the liberation of a people: a struggle which brings social, political and economic changes. Development became a process which involves the poor in the thinking, deliberating and strategizing for change (Nyoni, 1987, p. 52).

While Nyoni was the face of the ORAP movement, its empowerment goals were interpreted and employed by both staff and community members of the organization. The identity of the ORAP movement as an alternative space to meet political goals, to strengthen the power and capacity of villages comes out strongly in their language and perspectives. As a 1994 paper quotes Livion Njini, then ORAP administrator, who went on to become one of the founders of the ORAP-created community foundation on which I was working:

Self directed development is not easy, for our people had been conditioned to believe that they are not able to think for themselves and were not allowed to take part in decisions and discussions about their lives. Therefore, unless they take control of their development process, in terms of how and who should do it, development cannot take place (Mattocks and Steele, 1994).

## **Space for dialogue and education**

Both ORAP's philosophy around power and control and its structure worked for the democratization of development politics. By inverting the decision-making control of local initiatives, it was able to offer villagers an active experience in participatory democracy and supplement this with processes for ongoing dialogue about development priorities. While, ORAP, like other civil society organizations, very carefully avoided political confrontation in the 1980s, its efforts to relocate decision-making from the government or large donors into the hands of those who had both little access to this power and few material resources reduced the negative impacts of government policies and taught people how to govern themselves. As Connie "Thandi" Nkomo, who directed ORAP in the late 1990s and early 2000s, said:

I believe development has to do with making decisions. When one is able to make a decision one is empowered... at independence, communities felt disempowered and the regime of that time made them believe that they could not think for themselves or solve their own problems (Dube, 2004).

Nkomo's implicit criticism of the government's approach to development—her words could also be taken to refer to the former colonial regime, but the point is applicable to the fledgling government—was made in the midst of a difficult time for ORAP in the early 2000s. At this time, tension within ORAP was growing as it was across the country. While it attempted to counter the top-down patriarchal mode of development there was something new in its relation with the government, a growing sense that the government was a problem standing in the way of equitable development that actually could not be ignored or managed.

## **The Alternative Collapses**

By 1995, ORAP was a well-known and vibrant movement and Nyoni was already a local political figure, respected for her development work. While its liberation approach had resonated with formal political objectives (i.e. the quest for independence), its empowerment messages around development were also creating spaces in the rural areas for independent political debate and analysis that was outside of the party-political apparatus. Even though, ORAP was on the margins of the political structure, and careful not to oppose the Zanu regime, the independence

vision it offered in Zimele, Zenzele (etc) was one in which the government was not in the center and therefore a threat to which Zanu would respond by seeking to neutralize ORAP's independence.

It is not surprising, thus, that the threat from ORAP autonomy was addressed by approximating its leadership, Sithembiso Nyoni, closer to Zanu power. In this way, Nyoni was asked in 1995 to become a government minister (Dube, 2004). From my own observations, I believe her decision to accept the invitation did not come easy. People within the ORAP network told me they understood Nyoni's invitation to be a square attempt to bring ORAP under political control. Nyoni herself recognized this, however she felt that participating in the government would help her to spread ORAP's message of empowerment and work on a larger scale. With access to government resources, she could provide significant support to communities in the region and could also better protect ORAP. Nyoni entered government as Deputy Minister of Public Construction and National Housing in 1995, was moved to the office of the minister of state in 1997 and appointed a non-constituency member of Parliament and Minister of State for Small and Medium Enterprises Development in 2000 (Nyamutata, 2009). Nyoni's departure from ORAP also provided the opportunity for cultivating new leadership. The leader chosen to replace her, Connie "Thandi" Nkomo, had worked with Nyoni for many years.

From the point of view of ORAP's tolerance and support of political objectives, the moment represented a turning point. Its leader's ascension into a government portfolio was hard enough for the group to manage, polarizing many with the suspicion that she was joining the enemy. For her part, ORAP's new executive coordinator, Nkomo, attempted to mend and repair the fences by emphasizing the positive aspects of Nyoni's governmental portfolio while stressing the continuity of ORAP's objectives.

[Nkomo] says that she had been skeptical about having an NGO activist involved in politics but then came to the conclusion that development is politics (Dube, 2004).

Nyoni's ascension to government portfolio would certainly make it harder to maintain a distance from the political regime; however, ORAP's relationship with government had already been collaborative and overtly symbiotic. Up until around 1995, ORAP as a movement sought to

mobilize even government resources for community development; the relationship was largely a collaborative one in which ORAP saw itself as naturally assisting government to be responsive to communities. As Grace Moyo, an ORAP staff member, told Sarah Dorman, “We are the hand of the government to help it boost the people” (Dorman, 2001, p. 123). This is not to say that ORAP simply supported the government. It focused the accomplishment of its political objectives through ongoing grassroots dialogue in a way it believed was consonant with its empowerment approach and by seeing government as a resource that could be used by communities. ORAP internalized democratic/transparent governance in itself, rather than investing in the transformation of the formal political sphere. “[Phineas Sibanda, an ORAP member] observes that today people are involved in development because of ORAP’s transparent methods” (Dube, 2004).<sup>25</sup>

ORAP didn’t just swallow political overreach and violence (such as the *Gukurahundi*) that went against the grain of its own empowerment objectives; it acted as a refuge for persecuted communities to continue working towards the accomplishment of their goals. Here we see selective resonance of government objectives in the practical work to meet social objectives. ORAP communities invited the government’s attempts to improve services, such as water provision on which they relied.

While the ORAP Water and Environment Evaluation Report of 2001 highlights that the provision of water is a basic right to the people to be provided by the government of the day, it further acknowledges that this requires large amounts of resources which organizations like ORAP can try and compliment government’s efforts (ORAP, 2001).

The “government of the day” is a rather amusing expression since Zanu is the only government ORAP had ever known but it certainly shows that ORAP saw its objectives as going beyond Zanu. ORAP was both well connected politically and jealous of its space for autonomous

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<sup>25</sup> Nyoni clearly sees ORAP as a democratic alternative based on local realities and challenged by the continuing imposition of outside agendas and values. “This is a very democratic structure, which facilitates people’s participation all around. On paper it could be a perfect example of a people’s movement. But it does not operate in isolation.... Self-colonization and the rural elites emerge, individualism creeps in, universalism is often imposed on us both from our national government and from the international donor community.... The rural poor are part of our nation and our only hope for bringing about change” Nyoni, S. (1987) 'Indigenous NGOs: Liberation, self-reliance, and development', *World Development*, **15**, 51-56.

action. Its tentacles stretched deeply into government structures. In 2002 Harold Sibanda, ORAP Coordinator of Training, surveyed ORAP members in two districts, Filabusi and Umzingwane as part of a case study on the NGO role in policymaking. He found that many ORAP groups were intimately linked with the state. As many as 77 percent of ORAP village leaders were active as political leaders in some government structure, 81 percent acknowledged receiving government support and only 22 percent of its members in these associations identified the state as an obstacle to their development objectives (Sibanda, 2002). Many of the challenges they saw were related to bureaucratic inaction but they also cited the high cost of irrigation water that members saw as stemming from the national government's lack of follow through on its promises to implement a solution to the region's lack of access to water. Given this picture, ORAP and its members maintained significant links and ties with formal power, largely through practical development and did not see it as the main obstacle to accomplishing their objectives.

On the other hand, ORAP from its initiation avoided anything that could be seen as politically partisan. While it rarely criticized the government, part of what brought people together was a shared feeling the government was neglecting their interests, and that they had to take independent initiative to be full participants in the development process. Taking the reins of community development was a positive way to channel resistance to disempowering political policies that fortified citizen dependency on the state. This party neutrality would become harder to maintain in the post-1997 crisis period.

With Nyoni's entrance into the government in 1995, ORAP moved away from its delicate political balance of separation and engagement even though she herself stressed that she was not a part of ORAP in her official capacity. Nevertheless, Nyoni had embodied the empowerment objectives for many who were now confused about ORAP's ability to shelter them from the patronizing development policies of Zanu. The alternative political/development space it had worked so hard to expand over fifteen years had moved closer to national politics. As a practical approach, ORAP's work did not change. Members emphasized continuity and continued to espouse the same development philosophy. The board created a new honorary president's



position for Nyoni, to both honor her continuing importance to the organization while creating a degree of separation from direct management and decision making, and both she and the staff stressed the positive benefits for the movement from her new position. Some donors raised concerns. At least one told me that it could not support the fledgling community foundation we had launched as an ORAP initiative because Nyoni continued to serve on its board. While Nyoni herself was aware of the implications of her government role with potential funders, she felt strongly that this role was about the expansion of ORAP's empowerment approach and that it was possible for ORAP's independence and connection to government to coexist, because of the consonance of political goals to uplift rural communities. As Dube reports his conversation with Nyoni,

She is proud that the world can look and say ORAP grassroots women produced a leader, a Councilor, an MP and a Minister. For her, ORAP is an organization that recognizes people's power. People's power is a force that enables one to act, to change a situation. Empowerment is about life and helping people to take care of themselves (Dube, 2004).

#### Returning to education

But for ORAP staff and members maintaining ORAP's independence from Zanu the party was also a priority because they wanted to protect the autonomy and freedom they had won through their empowerment efforts. ORAP's civic education efforts provided an outlet for this.

ORAP had been involved in civic education efforts for many years. In fact its attempts to create a development dialogue from the beginning should be seen as a dialectic approach to emancipatory citizen education. In its 2001 Annual Report, ORAP describes its objective as "to advocate and lobby for broad-based (civic) progressive change in rural communities according to the priorities and needs of the grassroots communities themselves" (ORAP, 2001). ORAP's goals were certainly not to challenge Zanu's one-party state through civic education but they were about democratization through increasing the power of "grassroots communities themselves." ORAP's hands-on involvement in civic education was carried out through development dialogues in its community associations. While ORAP did not play an overt role in the street protests that erupted from 1996, many of its members, graduates of these development dialogues, did. The

Matabeleland states were to become a place of strength for the opposition as well as the urban areas.

The civic education dialogues made ORAP a legitimate voice in “bridging the rural urban gap” (Gumbo, 2002) and led it to participate in the February 1999 National Working People’s Convention that grew out of the discontent. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions convened the Convention to:

...map out strategies to protect workers from the biting economic conditions, after a government ban on all forms of collective job action, by beginning to put into place a strong, democratic popularly driven and organized movement of the people (Dansereau, 2001).

The Convention provided the basis for a democratic vision that sparked the founding of the Movement for Democratic Change as a political party later in September of 1999. ORAP’s self-driven development approach is reflected in some of the key resolutions of the Convention, particularly

“that measures be taken to restore a **people driven process** towards social development, **that mobilises and organises capacities within communities** and that matches them with complementary inputs from the state, according to agreed and legally defined standards...” (MDC, 2004), emphasis added.

The problem to be solved here was to restore community empowerment, indicating that the groups participating in the convention had come to see the reconstruction of government as necessary to the accomplishment of self-driven development. While ORAP as an organization had been largely silenced from opposing the political regime, the principles of the movement found broad agreement and served as one of the justifications for seeking a change in national politics.

#### Aftermath

By 2000, the Matabeleland region had become very politically active and was soon to be a region of strength for the MDC. ORAP used its links to government to try to defuse the growing conflict between the government and civil society organizations. Building on her government role, Nyoni held a meeting in Bulawayo in 2000 with NGO leaders in the region in which she explored the mistrust between government and NGOs (Dube, 2004). Nkomo, her replacement at ORAP,

on the other hand, moved more directly into the fray. She saw the empowered poor as an alternative to political malfeasance, "Poor people's efforts are a bright spot in the darkness occurring in the rest of Zimbabwe" (Jones and Kurey, 2000).

ORAP, however, was dependent on the government for its hallmark food security program. Its ability to distribute food and relief in the rural areas was endangered by the government's closing off of rural villages to outside assistance, carried out largely through its control of the registration process, but also by the growing grassroots persecution of families that supported the MDC by Zanu youth members and veterans.

In October 2002, during the run-up to elections in Insizwa, Zanu politicians tried to give political speeches during a scheduled ORAP food distribution, thus implying its food distribution was a result of Zanu patronage. In the ensuing conflict, Zanu youth ended up confiscating ORAP's three metric tons of maize and distributing it to their supporters. The World Food Program, on whose behalf the assistance was being distributed, responded by cutting off food distribution for three weeks (Human Rights Watch, 2003) ("Violence & politicisation of food aid continue", 2002).

ORAP's response was to stress that its food aid was *apolitical*, as it struggled to maintain its capacity to act in rural areas. ("Zanu PF hijacks food aid distribution from WFP", 2002). The link, however weak, between the MDC and ORAP became a point of contention for Nyoni by November 2002 when she faced accusations that ORAP was "manipulating food aide" on MDC's behalf in Insizwa (Mutsaka, 2002). ORAP was caught in a political snare that would reinforce its dependency on the government and discipline its political action, even as the loss of funding and growing difficulties in carrying out its objectives would strip it of its vibrancy throughout the decade.

As ORAP attempted to conduct its activities in the face of political change and crises and a new drought that affected the region in 2004 and 2005, it found itself facing the opposition of Zanu mobilized youth and veteran's groups involved in land invasions. By 2004 ORAP had withdrawn from many districts, apparently impacted by political sanction and the food situation

was worsening (Kwinika, 2004). By 2005, ORAP had mended its fences with government sufficiently to be allowed to distribute food. But it had gone too far and was accused in Tsholotsho of enabling political speeches by Zanu officials, in contravention of an October 2004 high court injunction for ruling party officials to stop using food distribution as a political strategy during election periods (Nkosi, 2005).

The emergence of the land disturbances directly affected ORAP groups by creating upheaval in the rural areas and in the reduction of rural farm jobs. Despite its own internal pressure to take action on the land issue (Sibanda, 2002), neither ORAP nor its members had ever taken an active role in land redistribution. Nyoni acknowledged this difficulty in 2002, "When we talk of the land issue, it is not an easy issue as some of us fought hard to get some pieces of land" ("Consultant Slams Sidelining of Women in Land Allocation", 2002).

Nyoni herself remained important to Zanu throughout the period of crisis. After she lost an election in 2005 and was given a non-constituency post in the lower house of parliament, The Zimbabwe Independent remarked in 2005,

She does not need to win an election to remain in government. She appears to live a charmed life in which the presidential crane is always at hand to pluck her from the political scrap-yard, which is where the electorate in Zimbabwe believes she belongs" (Nyamutata, 2009).

ORAP still exists today. While it may have an important role to play in the future, it did lose the support of some of its strongest supporters who no longer saw it as a viable vehicle for their social objectives and certainly not as the promise of an empowering alternative to the political regime. The point, however, is not the final relevance of ORAP or its outlook to rise again. The point is that it was crucial to reproducing locally accessible political ideas--Zimele, Zenzele, etc.--that had concrete meaning in terms of real and immediate aspirations. These values resonated strongly with villager women because they offered a space for resistance to the development dependency in which Zanu was complicit. As such they became more enfranchised and more empowered to act on their own objectives.

### **Conclusion: The limits of alternatives to political authority**

The development challenges and philosophy that drove ORAP and its membership were sufficiently resonant with Zanu's ongoing struggle for independence to secure its survival and coexist with political objectives. Regional frustrations over exclusion from government priorities (particularly the long delayed Matabeleland water project) found an escape valve in the diversion of attention to community-led initiatives (as opposed to actively pursuing State power) even while ORAP's do-it-yourself philosophy and methodology sought to return the power over development back to the communities.

ORAP reinforced the government's authority by pursuing seeking liberating approaches that would address the injustices of colonialism, inline with the continuing struggle for independence; by strengthening local development initiatives and by providing for the democratic participation the government did not. But the ORAP development approach, while it was not opposed to the government's policies was never the same. It required the transference of power to the most marginal of the population built on a commitment to direct democracy that not only necessitated citizen participation in their own development but insisted on their power over these initiatives. In Nyoni's words, "What is the meaning of participation in a society that doesn't allow participation?" ORAP's response was to fill in the gaps for an alternative that provided:

- 1) A political refuge in which the participation vacuum was filled by direct engagement of community groups in decision-making processes and leadership over their own projects. The ORAP initiative sought to weaken the dependency of communities on government not by cutting them off but by developing and acting on the objectives they conceived.
- 2) Space for democratic dialogue and education in which both expectations and the meaning of development and participation were developed by groups themselves. Being an active participant in one's own development was an educational process that changed people and their expectations for the organization of political society. As Nyoni puts it, "Once you open up a tiny window for people to see who they could be, even if it is later closed, that can no longer be taken away from them."

By 1997, as the government moved to incorporate ORAP into its own structures, the contradiction between Zimbabwe's highly centralized political authority and the growing demands for accountable governance pushed people into the streets to demand the transformation of authoritarian structures. There is no evidence that the ORAP movement played a direct role in these events but, during this time, it became more active in pushing for change through civic education efforts and joined with other groups in the National Working People's Convention in 1999. The ideas for which ORAP groups had struggled so hard would emerge as central to the motivations and visions "to restore a people driven process for social development..." as stated by the National Working Peoples Convention. Political authority had to come from the people.

Nevertheless, ORAP was effectively kept from transforming into a more effective force for advocacy and change. The selective collapse of the rule of law during the veterans' invasions of farms and the resulting persecution of MDC supporters by Zanu members weakened community power and autonomy. As its food security programs became increasingly difficult to carry out, its social programs became even more difficult (and some, like Zenzele College, had to be scrapped) in the polarized society in which independent power centers that were not aligned with Zanu were persecuted by the party stalwarts and their allies.

As Dube writes in 2004, "By contrast, in Zimbabwe today, institutions of governance have been removed from people's development and daily lives. Power and leadership is seen as separate from the people. Leaders exercise power. They do not share power (Dube, 2004). The meaning and exercise of power itself is contested. Once the crisis moves into full force in the mid-2000's ORAP can no longer maintain the place of refuge, nor the space for dialogue and education because its *apolitical* stance, adopted for institutional survival, directly contradicted its core objective to support the transfer to and strengthening of community power.

## CHAPTER FIVE: PEOPLE'S POWER AT LAST - THE ZCTU

*The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) began its own existence as an attempt of the Zanu government to bring the labor movement under its wing. Its close approximation to the government began to change around the end of the 1980s and accelerated with the imposition of the country's first structural adjustment program in the 1990s. Seen as the abandonment of socialist goals, the ESAP weakened the legitimacy of Zanu's objectives for labor. As a result, ZCTU began to lead more effective work actions and participated with the churches and human rights organizations in efforts to reduce the negative impacts of the ESAP. It was a ZCTU strike in 1997 against new taxes to pay for veteran's benefits that brought the country to a standstill and that was the first decisive demonstration of people power, leading to more and more calls for the resignation of Mugabe and an end to the Zanu-led government. The expression of people power catalyzed by ZCTU counted on wide participation of civil society with protests in all the urban centers. While it did not result in the dismantling of the political regime, it called into question the legitimacy of government action and seeded a new political movement.*

On December 9, 1997, the day broke with many streets in the normally busy towns of Zimbabwe deserted; commuter routes abandoned, the bright sun illuminating the sidewalks outside of silent factories and retail shops shuttered and silent for the day. The call for mass action kept many home from work and sent thousands to rally in the streets. Up to 30,000 people marched in protest in both Bulawayo and Masvingo (Bulawayo is the second largest city in Zimbabwe; Masvingo's total population in 1992 was only around 52,000 people) ("People's Power At Last", 1997). Protesters also filled the streets in Gweru, Chigutu, Chinyohi, Chinredzi and Gwanda. In Harare, the only site of violence, protesters were met with tear gas when they tried to assemble in Unity Square. Police used dogs, rubber batons and even a helicopter to disrupt them and some protesters responded by throwing rocks or rioting ("Zimbabwe now police state -- analysts", 1997).

Much of the news coverage of the day focused on the violence in Harare<sup>26</sup> but the remarkable story is that people overcame fear for the most part to express their discontent peacefully across the nation. Many observers blamed the violence on the attempts of Home Affairs Minister Dumisa Dabengwa and Police Commissioner August Chihuri to stop the protests in Harare. For example, Welshman Ncube, a well-known law professor at the University of Zimbabwe who later joined the Movement for Democratic Change, publicly criticized their rationale:

Even more astounding is when the police commissioner, who should be a custodian of the law, eventually got served with the order but had the audacity to summon a Press conference and refer to the court order as a so-called court order reflecting his utter contempt for the courts.... Worse still, Dabengwa in the true fashion of a despot, confidently declares that the police can shoot people at demonstrations but the question is shooting people for what and why ("Zimbabwe now police state -- analysts", 1997)?

The High Court had issued an order to the police on Monday afternoon, a day before the protests began, not to interfere with the protests in any way. The police chief later claimed that he had not been aware of this order until noon on the day of the protests, when police and protester confrontations were well under way ("Hell hath no fury like a government on its last legs ", 1997).

Moral outrage was wide-spread, tapping into a broad discontent among students, women's groups, social justice activists, business owners, transport drivers and many others who no longer believed in the absolute power of the government to raise their taxes without debate. Placards at the protests, spoke against the divisive tactics of the political regime "Don't blame whites for your failures," "He is trying to please his ruling clique for their own ends, not for the benefit of the nation as a whole," and claimed a space for a new type of unity separate from the Zanu's quest for a singular national unity with itself at the head, "Mugabe has no support among the real people so he is going to buy the war veteran's support at the expense of the working people. The central committee is a clique which suppresses the masses" ("Muckraker: Who's fooling who?", 1997).

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<sup>26</sup> See for example: Shaw, A. "Violence erupts as police fire tear gas." Associated Press, 9 December 1997b., "Policeman hurt, vehicles burned in violent Zimbabwe demos." Agence France-Presse, 10 December 1997.



Almost overnight a sense that it was possible to change and improve the country's politics began to sweep across the land. Large scale participation in the stayaway and protests of a broad swath of Zimbabwean society—certainly including most of its towns and cities—is often underplayed or presented as acts of solidarity with workers (Alexander, 2000, Bond and Manyanya, 2002, Saunders, 1997) but the protests clearly went beyond labor concerns by mobilizing a wide and diverse cross-section of civil society. Transport drivers and businesses ferried workers and others free of charge into the city centers (Kunene, 1997) or blocked people from going to work or shops. Members of other groups, such as students, protested or stayed home even when they were not among the 50 percent of the Zimbabwean work force with formal employment. Reports of white business people and farmers closing their businesses provided the seed for the government's persistent argument after the event that the white community had been behind the actions in order to propel their own interests.

### **The Stage for People's Power**

The days leading up to the mass actions reveal much of the contours of public discontent. Government's decision to fund veterans' benefits immediately emerged from veteran's protests in the first half of the year. In early 1997, government froze the Veteran's Compensation Fund amid widespread allegations of rampant corruption and fraud.<sup>27</sup> Allegations that non-veterans, the politically connected and Zimbabweans living abroad were receiving payouts from the fund for ailments supposedly connected to the Liberation War led to the formation of the Chidyausiku Commission (led by Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku who would later be chosen to chair the Constitutional Commission).

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<sup>27</sup> "The unexpected high figure, age of some of the claimants and purported beneficiaries and alleged abuses of the War Victims Compensation Fund recently led the Government to suspend further disbursements of funds under the facility and order investigations into the allegations and come up with a water tight policy on who should qualify." Quote from The Herald, 18 April 1997 in Mhanda, W., (2011) *The Role of War Veterans in Zimbabwe's Political and Economic Processes. SAPES Trust Policy Dialogue Forum.* pp. 1-15.

In July, veterans in the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) under the leadership of Chenjerai Hunzvi, immersed in a half-year struggle to win the compensation promised them, disrupted an African American Summit in Harare ("War Veterans Disrupt Summit", 1997) and in August a protest during Mugabe's speech at the annual Heroes Day celebration was called "an unprecedented lack of respect and discipline" by Joseph Msika, Zanu chairman, who went on to say that while the government would ignore the demonstration it would hurry to make sure the money due them was given to the veterans ("Mugabe Shaken by Unprecedented Protest on "Heroes Day"", 1997). This did not stop the veterans who later that week invaded and took over Zanu headquarters holding hostages for the day and taunting the police whom they argued should refuse to be used by these people "who are enjoying the fruits of our sacrifice" ("War Veterans Ransack Mugabe's Party HQ", 1997).

Mugabe announced his intentions that month to make good on the looted fund by providing \$4 billion in immediate and long-term assistance to veterans groups ("The worst is still to come", 1997, Wetherell, 1998). This promise baffled Zimbabweans who wondered where the money for this would be found. The suspense built up over the next weeks. Speculation raged. Rumors, such as the idea that this money might be raised from the Post Office Savings Bank in which pension funds were kept, raised temperatures even further. By October, the World Bank expressed its own displeasure by withholding aid payments, soon to be followed by the International Monetary Fund, until it was clear how the government planned to finance its promises.<sup>28</sup> Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa said,

We will have to do a juggling act but I must confess this is a serious problem.... We would need to look at some cuts with both recurrent and capital expenditure, and we would also look at other sources like outside financial markets. Social stability has a cost ("Zimbabwe government admits war veterans pensions a serious problem", 1997).

Not only did the veterans get fulfillment on the promises made to them but Mugabe signaled that he was going to finally take new action on the land issue, quite possibly a threat at

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<sup>28</sup> The World Bank would disburse 60 million dollars in December and the IMF would agree to re-enter negotiations for an Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, both concerned about the damage to the Zimbabwean currency. "World Bank releases 60 million dollars for Zimbabwe." Panafrican News Agency (PANA), December 23 1997.

this point meant more for the international financial institutions than for domestic consumption. In the interim, the government also moved forward on its intention to repatriate white-owned farmland by drawing up a list of more than 1700 commercial farms to be confiscated in the beginning of November that amounted to 12 million acres or about 44 percent Zimbabwe's commercial agriculture ("Whites despair over Zimbabwe farm seizures", 1997). A beleaguered stock market agitated over the land seizures and Mugabe's promises to veterans reacted immediately. On November 14, otherwise known as Black Friday, the stock market fell by 7 percent in its single biggest one-day loss and the Zimbabwe dollar lost 70 percent against the US dollar ("Zimbabwe stock market in record plunge", 1997).

Finally, the suspense ended with a shock in November when Murerwa announced a comprehensive tax bill that laid out a plan on how to finance the commitments to veterans. The bill included sales tax and fuel and electricity levies as well as a 5 percent increase in income tax to raise the money for 50,000 veterans to receive a one-time payout of Zim\$50000 (about US\$1500) and a Zim\$2000 monthly pension to begin in March of 1998 ("Date set for mass protest", 1997). The imposition of a levy for specific purpose was not without precedence. For example, in the face of a 1992 drought the government had imposed a 5 percent temporary development levy, which was later made permanent. The proposed new taxes were different in that they elevated the interests of a minority (the veterans) above those of others groups.

While most Zimbabweans are not against the payment of gratuities and pensions to ex-combatants, they are opposed to the manner in which the government is trying to raise the money by further burdening the already suffering masses. Zimbabweans are actually among the highest taxed people in the world ("Enough Is Enough, Zimbabweans Tell Mugabe", 1997).

Mugabe and his ministers would have a difficult task keeping the party faithful behind the bill. On November 27, Parliament blocked Murerwa's attempts to fast track the bill so that taxes could go into effect before the December recess. Not only were the normally quiescent parliamentarians deeply concerned by the tax provisions, they sought to openly debate them. Margaret Dongo, a veteran herself and a rare independent Member of Parliament said, "We cannot sacrifice the 11 million people [country's total population] for the sake of satisfying the

concerns of a few thousand [war veterans]" ("New taxes to raise additional revenue to pay war veterans in Zimbabwe", 1997). Still Murerwa did not budge. He did not really need the Parliament to impose the new levies because the Finance Ministry in Zimbabwe is empowered to set and collect taxes without Parliament's approval. By November 29, the Finance Ministry announced in a statement that petrol and diesel would go up in price by 3.9 and 5 percent respectively and taxes on all goods and services by 2.2 percent ("New taxes to raise additional revenue to pay war veterans in Zimbabwe", 1997). Already, the ZCTU was launching into action, announcing its intention to organize mass action, as ZCTU's Gibson Sibanda said, "The government's total disregard for the plight of its people has undermined its legitimacy" ("New taxes to raise additional revenue to pay war veterans in Zimbabwe", 1997).

As confusion was growing in the capital, despair and anger began to move like wildfire across the land. With Zimbabwe's dismal economic performance, how could the government demand more revenue? Why did 50000 veterans deserve assistance any more than the roughly half the country, or six million people, who lived below the poverty line (Human Development Report Zimbabwe, 1998)? And how could the government be trusted with more money when it was implicated in the looting of the pension funds to begin with?

One of the ironies is that Mugabe and Zanu clearly felt they were being responsive to veterans groups who had won their success by taking to the streets but seemed to show little awareness of how their actions would be more broadly judged. It was hard for anybody to understand how things could go so wrong so quickly. But what could be done? Opposition politics had been largely crushed, with ZAPU, the last dinosaur to go down, the few small parties were in no position to lead an effective opposition. The Parliament, perceived as waking from its slumber, neither had the track record nor the trust of the people to represent their interests. In fact, outside of Zanu's fifteen years of monopolization of power, there was very little leadership on political issues. Or so it seemed.

Actually, there were several sectors of civil society that had become increasingly concerned about the political environment. For one, the ZCTU had begun to grow more and more

skeptical of its partnership with Zanu around socialist objectives, particularly after the adoption of the ESAP in 1991 doused socialist hopes with a comprehensive neo-liberal economic approach that according to ZCTU saw real salaries fall by 60% from 1990 levels (Saunders, 1997).

While the ZCTU by no means rocketed to strength on the backs of its efforts to advocate for workers, it had become increasingly savvy about what to expect from government and was coming off the back end of a successful series of labor actions (this will be picked up again below). The ZCTU took on the challenge of organizing and leading a worker's response to the new taxes. It built up support in the days before December 9, by rallying workers across the country. ZCTU western region chair Milton Gwetu speaking to workers in Bulawayo was reported as saying on December 3, "All workers must not go to work on that day [December 9], because we want to map out strategies to force government to stop implementing the intended levy" ("Tax-Weary Zimbabweans Plan Mass Action Over Levy", 1997).

What nobody expected was that the ZCTU's call would be so successfully answered across Zimbabwe. It was rapidly picked up and interpreted across civil society, not merely in solidarity with workers but also as a way of expressing widespread discontent with corrupt and authoritarian governance. ZCTU president, Gibson Sibanda, cited this corruption directly,

"It is morally wrong for government to buy the latest Mercedes Benz vehicles at every summit held in the country, yet they cannot pay the war veterans from available treasury funds, without taxing workers" ("Some 30,000 Workers Join Demonstrations In Bulawayo", 1997).

Morgan Tsvangirai clarified that ZCTU's objectives went beyond the working class to organize on behalf of the economically and politically disenfranchised, "You can remove leaders, but not the cause. This is class warfare, between the haves and the have-nots" (Mutasah, 2010b). Other groups picked up the anger over corruption. Reginald Matchaba-Hove of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) argued that it was the unilateral action on the part of the executive to press through taxes that was unacceptable in a democratic society ("Discontent emerging over veteran's levy", 1997). David Chimhini, ZimRights executive director, is paraphrased as saying on December 5, "it was high time Zimbabweans should resist being treated as chickens or personal property of those in power and reject any attempts to effect

further taxes" ("Date set for mass protest", 1997). At a rally on December 10, Hopewell Gumbo, NUST university student representative said (rhetorically one imagines) students should burn American-made Cherokee Jeeps that were recently acquired for government ministers and governors ("Some 30,000 Workers Join Demonstrations In Bulawayo", 1997).

Mugabe and his ministers were not completely deaf to the public outrage in the run up to December 9 but they were unbending when it came to renegeing again on their promises to veterans. While parliament was able to scrap the five percent income tax—thus relieving some of the pressure, the government persisted in imposing the new levies (Gadaga, 1997) and thus showed it was unable or unwilling to understand the magnitude of discontent over its *authoritarian means* as much as the *content* of its actions.

### **A Nation on Fire**

Anger surged in the week before the strikes. On the one hand people were simply revolting against the burden of the new taxes but on the other they began to question Zanu's authority to tax—because the new taxes were perceived as benefitting only the veteran's interests and were not publicly debated. Given the centrality of the veterans to the framing of liberation, dissenting Zimbabweans prepared themselves for the expected challenges to their patriotism, particularly by invoking the government's failures to live up to its own liberation goals.

Ben Hlatshwayo, a senior political lecture at the University of Zimbabwe who later became a high court judge, for example, in a 5 December editorial invokes the liberation song, *Nzira Dzemasoja* (The Principles of a People's Soldier or Leader), as an indictment of political leadership:

These are the principles of good leadership  
- *Kunenzira dzemasoja, dzekuzvibata nazvo*  
We must not loot the people's property  
- *Tisave tinotorawo zvinhu zvemasi yedu*  
Return everything taken in need  
- *Dzoserai zvinhu zvese zvamunenge matora*  
Consult the people and respect their views  
- *Taurai zvinetsika muruzhinji rwevanhu.*

Hlatshwayo writes succinctly three reasons why Zimbabweans should question the new taxes: 1) the lack of political debate and accountability, 2) the belief of Zimbabweans that veterans are “no worse off than the rest of the population” and 3) the injustice of giving all veterans the intended benefit regardless of need (Hlatshwayo, 1997). The lack of accountability was evident in Zanu's attempts to cut off even parliamentary debate. The Mugabe/Zanu power had finally over-reached itself, not merely by failing to engage Zimbabwean society in a debate over the need for new taxes but in sidelining its own institutions.

The discomfort over the privileged position of veterans is somewhat more complicated in that the centrality of veterans' claims to patriotic political goals had been long established (Kriger, 2003) and, as we saw above, was acknowledged by ZCTU and ZimRights, even while these groups expressed their grievance with the government for its patronage of the veterans. Veterans had enjoyed the perception of privilege and were not immune to the brewing resentment, which was, however, directed against the government and not them. The call for a more measured approach to help the veterans was an appeal for the end of government corruption and a rational debate.

Another major source of discontent is often cited as the slump in the economy and the imposition of the ESAP in 1991 (Muzondidya, 2009, Bond and Manyanya, 2002). The follow up on ESAP was being negotiated in 1997, which made the timing of the imposition of new taxes extremely unfortunate for a damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't political party. Ameliorating the effects of ESAP had emerged as a focal point of civil society coalitions (seeing the launch of the Ecumenical Support Services, for example). Workers saw their real wages decline in the 1990s and the economy as a whole suffered, achieving an average growth of only 1.8 percent in GDP, well below the ESAP target of 5 percent (Human Development Report Zimbabwe, 1998), making government development language hollow. Social support services that were a hallmark of government success in the previous decade had begun to become less accessible and more expensive, exacerbating the distance between the government and many civil society groups that were committed to progressive social objectives. A Social Development Fund set up in 1991 to

ameliorate the negative impacts of the ESAP saw a decline in donor funding after 1992 and did not reach a majority of qualifying households (Human Development Report Zimbabwe, 1998).

Both the World Bank and government of Zimbabwe touted the success of implementation of the ESAP but as Bond and Manyanya remark:

If ESAP was largely implemented, and if the implementation was unsatisfactory, the subsequent period suggests that the political costs and social instability generated by ineffectual international economic integration are substantial. Zimbabwean society followed the trade union lead and in late 1997 re-awakened from a deep post-independence slumber to demand socio-economic and political reform (Bond and Manyanya, 2002).

The period of the ESAP was not marked only by economic decline but also by the public perception of increased dependence on the global financial institutions offering some political cover for Zanu even while it undermined belief in its ability to make the country independent of the control and domination of outsiders. Its capitulation to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund was seen as the continuing ability of outsiders to call the shots (community theater under Ngugi wa Mirii, for instance, emphasized this imperialist control ("Obituary: Ngugi wa Mirii: Modern African playwright", 2008)).

While people identified personal enrichment as a trapping of power, the sight of ministers in their Mercedes and Jeep Cherokees became harder to tolerate in the midst of ESAP-inspired austerity and reduced economic growth. What had become of the socialist promises for economic justice in the country? ZANU only seemed to understand a fair distribution of resources as the protection of the corruption of its members and the reward of the veterans. It was either simply ineffective or specifically incapable of mounting an effective plan to strengthen the economic freedoms of the majority of its citizens. For example, in the lead up to December 9, Givemore Magongorere, the head of the Public Service Association representing the majority of civil service workers, said, "The time has come for government to show total and practical commitment to reduce its prodigal expenditure by cutting down the bloated cabinet and streamline its activities right at the top" ("Tax-Weary Zimbabweans Plan Mass Action Over Levy", 1997).

So while the economic decline, abandonment of socialism and government mismanagement and corruption sparked the discontent that erupted in December, it was also the



betrayal of trust and the yearning for accountable, democratic governance that was upfront in people's minds. For many people, government no longer represented all Zimbabwean interests but could only be explained as organized around the pursuit of the personal enrichment of the political elite. The destruction wrought by ESAP was not the focus of the December protests but it was never far away in people's minds as a reason not to trust the government's intentions and actions on their behalf.

ESAP too, which has weakened the labour movement to some extent, this time played in their favour. People who have previously ignored calls for protest, minding their own business, and fighting to make ends meet, finally discovered that it was only through collective action that they could get their message across to government ("People's Power At Last", 1997).

In this way, on December 9, ZCTU surprised everybody by unleashing a broad base of dissent and anger that formed a movement hoping to sweep away authoritarianism in Zimbabwe and replace it with something more just and democratic. The economic conditions and the injustice of the proposed taxes were the agents that spread discontent so widely but it was the shared belief that the government must be stopped and that it no longer acted legitimately, which reverberated through the street protests.

On the days of the stayaway, the government seemed eerily disconnected, as though it did not realize the extent of the challenge. While it sent police against the protesters in the capital Harare, it did nothing in other cities. The police commissioner himself may have been more interested in keeping Unity Square and Parliament in Harare secure for a planned State of the Nation address by Mugabe ("The worst is still to come", 1997). This address itself is interesting in that Mugabe used it to stress the need for collective responsibility to improve the country's economy and announce that the next stage of the economic plan (after ESAP) called the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (Zimprest) would bring inflation down to single digits (to say this was not to happen is an understatement) and would begin to accelerate the privatization of parastatals (something the World Bank had been pushing for) ("Mugabe Delivers State of the Nation Address", 1997). However, the irony of the positive, forward looking speech given with no reference to the tumultuous events transpiring that day was

not lost on Zimbabweans, “How could he call it the state of the nation address when there was no mention of the fact that the nation was on fire?” (“Arrogance at its Worst”, 1997).

As dramatic as the people’s power demonstration was for Zimbabwe, where it is an understatement to say that such events were uncommon, Zimbabweans did not resort to violence. They did not oust Mugabe in effigy, pull down hideous statues or erect tent cities. The majority of protests were largely orderly. It was as though the people had never heard themselves speaking and it would take time to decipher their own message. But this message was heard. And it would set rolling a deep and committed challenge to Zanu’s power.

The mass action was also largely quiet. While there were protests, many people simply stayed home on December 9 and 10. Most of the demonstration of people power took the form of withdrawal in a massive boycott of work and life as usual. There is little in the way of analysis about the scope of the stayaway, although the use of stayaways as a safe way to express political dissatisfaction would be repeated by ZCTU a number of times over the next years.<sup>29</sup> In the climate of fear that stifled opposition to the government, staying home became an accessible dissent tactic for Zimbabweans. As a powerful expression of discontent it woke the government up to the dangers that lay in front of it. At the Third National Party Conference held in Mutare from December 5, the anger and anxiety among Zanu party members was palpable. Even though the Vice-President started with the regular warnings about the need to follow the party line, alluding to the practice of discarding dissenters during the liberation struggle, party members were in no mood to acquiesce to the new taxes. As Mugabe spoke about his intention to raise a five percent income tax levy, shouts of “*Haditi*” (which means we don’t want) rose up from the floor (“New culture develops in ruling party”, 1997). In response, Mugabe instructed Murerwa to cancel the levy and find another way to raise the money for the veteran payments. The conference went on to bring up issues of expanding democracy through direct election of appointed seats in Parliament and even the idea of electing the Politburo. The sense of winning a victory was

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<sup>29</sup> At three different times in 1998 alone, ZCTU called for stayaways and continued to use the strategy up to 2007.

palpable. Moses Mvenge, MP for Mutare Central said, "This is a victory for parliamentarians who would have faced the wrath of their constituencies if this levy had passed. These are signs of changing times" ("New culture develops in ruling party", 1997).

The income tax levy was discarded over the weekend but the price and sales taxes increases were still set to go forward and the ZCTU-sponsored strike was not called off. Still the rallying point was not the increase in taxes, *per se*, it was anger over political corruption and a political elite no longer seen as even pursuing broader social objectives outside of its own interests:

A wave of national resistance beginning with MPs, then party delegates to the Mutare conference and ending on the streets of every important centre in the nation on Tuesday, conveyed to Mugabe and his cosseted coterie that they no longer enjoy a scrap of popular confidence and that furthermore they are now widely regarded as the political vultures we have long known them to be ("The worst is still to come", 1997).

December 9 demonstrated that Zimbabweans could wield a broad people's political power capable of cutting through patronage politics. Many who stayed away had little or no connections to a union, business owners participated by closing up shop, students skipped school and while many associations and communities acted in solidarity, participation was an individual choice that many made as a small act of courage. The protests and stayaway stripped the Zimbabwean regime of much of the loyalty it had commanded in the past. As protester Claudius Mutere said about his decision to challenge Zanu's political authority, "We are saying 'Down with Mugabe'. We are fed up with him and Zanu (PF). He has exploited us for 17 years. He must go" (Raath, 1997).

By mid-day on December 10, it was already apparent that the Parliament, at least, had felt the pressure and was willing to respond. Members of Parliament blocked an attempt to adjourn until January arguing that the tax problem must be resolved first ("Zimbabwe News Roundup", 1997). MP Edward Mabodza said, "this thing will not only oust the government...but us as well. Let's not play with fire where there is no water" (Shaw, 1997a).

Later in the week, when Murerwa announced "the levy and fuel prices will be scrapped so that we can reduce the burden on the taxpayer" (Kunene, 1997) and left in place only the sales

taxes, people began to re-appropriate the idea of independence for themselves, with the party on the outside or even the problem to be overcome as in this unattributed quote, "Now we are truly independent *tavakuzvitonga zvakazara* (we are totally ruling ourselves). What happened on Tuesday was a sign that Mugabe's honeymoon in this country is over" (Kunene, 1997). Even while people were still savoring the possibility of challenging the government and were beginning to entertain the eventuality of changing the situation, attempts to re-establish the primacy of Zanu's authority were under way using the pulpit of government and the brute force of repression. For example on December 11, Morgan Tsvangirai was assaulted by a group of six men and two women in his offices who hit him over the head with chairs and a coffee table ("Brutal assault on Tsvangirai", 1997, 'I will continue,' says Tsvangirai", 1997). Whether or not the attack was ordered as a political strategy, the event has been symbolic of the no-holds barred tactics the government would adopt in the long days of crisis that lay ahead. Police Commissioner Chihuri and Home Affairs Minister Dabengwa had been the first government interlocutors joining with veteran's leader Chenjerai (Hitler) Hunzvi in accusing Tsvangirai of conspiring with the white community to organize the mass protests ("Brutal assault on Tsvangirai", 1997). Such foreshadowing of the government's return to blame the white settlers and its strong return to its veterans' base laid the foundations of the next chapter in Zimbabwean history.

The veterans hold a privileged place in the story of the continuing struggle for independence, as they do in most nationalist movements. They had been there at the beginning and had sacrificed themselves for the good of the country. As such, while small in number, their support was important to maintain the political hegemony of Zanu. How did it come to pass that such an important bridge to civil society, the veterans, had been passed over and neglected and why was it so vital to get their support back?

#### What the veterans wanted

Over the two decades since independence, veterans had become less and less central in Zimbabwean society and outside of their symbolic importance to the continuing struggle may seem like an unlikely and dwindling group (as many were simply dying of old age) for government

to turn to strengthen its hegemony. Veterans were from the beginning one key to expanding and maintaining political power for Zanu. Independence, after all, grew from the sacrifices these men and women made in the field. In a country where the policy of reconciliation and integration (the creation of a single military and civil service) in the 1980s demanded fundamental trade-offs, the Zipra veterans initially provided Zanu with a group it could trust to see things its way. Its interests were their interests. But honoring and privileging veterans also was important to Zanu's objective to continue the struggle. As a guerilla army turned political party, much of Zanu's emerging political elite were themselves veterans and, thus, were able to count on veterans to carry forward party initiatives from security to socialism. This worked because of the national moral debt to veterans and because veterans saw themselves as uniquely privileged having carried the weapons in the Liberation struggle (Kriger, 2003).

At the same time, the Zimbabwean guerilla fighters had made the ultimate sacrifice, losing family members, livelihoods and educational opportunities in the war—a point Zanu officials routinely made at political rallies and the annual Heroes Day. The demobilization period after 1980 was meant to reintegrate veterans into society but this was imperfectly accomplished, leaving many disgruntled and some angry that their white counterparts who had fought for the Rhodesian Army received greater remuneration or went on to real jobs or family farms (Kriger, 2003). What then was the point of the struggle? What had Independence brought for them? Not all veterans carried this burden on their shoulders but enough did to persist in mobilizing their status in search of privilege.

Until 1988, Zanu relied heavily on the continuing loyalty of the veterans, those who had fought in the ZANLA forces (ZIPRA, of course, in its connection with ZAPU was another story as we have discussed in chapter 3), to keep the new military under its wing and to provide access and control of other sectors of the civil services (Kriger, 2003). This was a real challenge, of course. The retention of white civil servants, many of whom had leading roles in the Rhodesian regime, was an Achilles heel in Zanu's power. Zanu was vulnerable to insurrection and, in the anti-apartheid era, manipulation and spying from South Africa. As a partial solution to these

issues, the presence of loyal veterans in strategic positions was an overt policy. Zanu privileged Zanu veterans with affirmative action policies, promoting loyal cadres in the military and police, and made accommodations for them for other civil service jobs (Kriger, 2003).

Around 1988, Zanu shifted. It argued that it needed a broader, more equitable focus that would largely address veteran needs as part of the whole society (Kriger, 2003). Not all veterans agreed with this approach. Understandably their fall from grace did not sit well, as many saw their reduction of privileged states against Zanu's broken promises—for compensation and for land redistribution. Meanwhile, some felt society in general was turning its backs to them unconcerned about their plight in competing with those whose lack of guerilla service gave them the luxury of better education and economic experience (Kriger, 2003).

As significant as veteran status was to political legitimacy, Zanu had begun to sideline veterans in 1988, two years before it would dive into ESAP. Muzondidya argues that Zanu lost interest because its political agenda was confined by the constitution and party members saw indigenization (expanding economic power for black Zimbabweans) policies as a path to their own enrichment (Muzondidya, 2009). However, taking Zanu officials at their own words suggests that Zanu was aware in the 1980s that over emphasis on veterans' issues could undermine its ability to build national unity, something it had won through its merger with Zapu. As Kriger quotes John Nkomo, Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare,

One does not have to single out a particular group for preferential treatment eight years after independence.... We should now be addressing unemployment as a national problem that faces both the veterans of the war and those who were young during the war but have not attained the age of majority" (Kriger, 2003, p 209).

Zanu understood its challenge to be about the consolidation of its power on a national level, across various sectors of society. To do so it would need some distance from veteran's issues. War credentials still had currency in Zimbabwean society, but by pushing them to the side, Zanu sought to come into its own political maturity—and greater authoritarian control. And so it needed the veteran's symbolism to reinforce its credentials as the liberator—the greatest honor of being buried at Heroes Acre, one of many ways this was tackled. But veterans could count on the government assistance...or could they?

A little bit of distance from Zanu actually may have strengthened the veterans' voice. In April 1989, The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) was formed to represent veterans. Even as a young organization, ZNLWVA succeeded in negotiating three acts on behalf of its members (the War Veterans Administration Bill, War Veterans Act and War Victims Compensation Act in 1991, 1992 and 1993) (Muzondidya, 2009). It could also count on a hearing when needed, although it was not always pleased with the results. Such a privileged position really made coalitions and support from other civil society groups irrelevant because ZNLWVA already had more power than most to get itself heard.

The original War Victims Compensation Fund (from the Victims of Terrorism Compensation Act) was actually a throwback to the Ian Smith regime in 1973 that was amended after Independence to "include almost all those who could have been negatively impacted by the war be it in education or loss of income" (Mhanda, 2011). However, the Fund was never strongly promoted among the rank and file. That was to change by 1995 as veterans flocked to put in claims after revelations that the Fund had been looted by the politically elite—only some of whom could be considered authentic veterans (Mhanda, 2011). Revelations in the press in late 1996 and early 1997 that the Fund was nearly empty and had made regular payouts to politicians, some of who were not authentic veterans between 1993 and 1996 sparked a new anger that overflowed into the streets. When the government stopped all claims to the Fund in early 1997 to investigate the alleged looting, veterans felt cheated and that they were being accused of malfeasance as a scapegoat for the actual perpetrators of fraud. The Chidyausiku Commission, established to investigate the scandal, only seemed to make things worse by dragging in the less politically connected veterans to testify.

Starting from May 1997, Veterans shocked the capital with public protests ("The worst is still to come", 1997), working up to the disruptions of Mugabe's August Heroes Day speech and a veteran's invasion of party headquarters. Thus, in August 1997, Mugabe loosened the pressure valve a little by announcing the government would make lump-sum payments to the veterans and provide life pensions (Kriger, 2003). The solution calmed the capital's bruised nerves and re-

directed attention from the investigation over government malfeasance but it also unleashed a much greater angst, not against the veterans who were largely untouchable but against the government itself, which would have to find the funds for the payments. In November of that year, 250 veterans invaded the Commission proceedings and halted them by singing revolutionary songs to support ZNLWVA leader Chenjerai Hunzvi who was meant to give evidence about allegations of misuse against him ("Heavy security as Zimbabwe war funds probe resumes", 1997).

The veteran's cause had considerable sympathy, particularly as the looting of their fund was a prime example of government corruption around which simmering resentment was growing. But this sympathy failed to translate into significant coalitions and social support for the veteran's cause—such a thing might have altered the course of events by avoiding the polarization between veterans and many other civil society groups the government would later exploit. But, while veterans as a group have not been particularly powerful (outside of those, of course in the ruling party) they have believed themselves to be the true force behind the liberation struggle and have not sought to collaborate and work with other groups in society. As Kriger explains,

To understand guerrillas' self depiction as "forgotten and neglected", it is important to appreciate their frames of reference, their belief that they deserved to be rewarded for war service, and their conviction that their war contributions were superior to those of other groups who participated in the liberation struggle—all ideas that were endorsed initially by the ruling party for its own purposes (Kriger, 2003).

While Zanu had attempted to moderate veterans' status, it never abandoned them; veterans understood its ongoing liberation struggle and, therefore, could count on hearings for their issue. This fact, documented by Kriger, undermines the idea that Zanu simply rediscovered the veterans when it needed them in the late 1990s. Zanu had no intention to transition to a post-veteran society, but really needed to expand its hegemonic influence over a broader group. It still continued to give veterans enough attention to keep them active.

Another key element of the government strategy emerged in August in Mugabe's Heroes Day Speech when he announced that 1772 commercial farms had been "earmarked for takeover



by the government” but the protesting veterans inured to promises of land that never materialized were unmoved (“Mugabe Shaken by Unprecedented Protest on “Heroes Day””, 1997). Despite steps that the government had taken to pave the legal path for land seizures (such as the 1992 Land Acquisition Act), many felt that the negation of property rights would never hold up. The government went on the offensive to fulfill promises for *fast track* land reform that had gone forward at anemic pace since 1990. By laying the path for the land grab in 1997, Mugabe sought to bring the party back inline with the popular land goals that had been its legacy. Before it was hijacked by party members angry over the tax hikes, Mugabe had intended to highlight the land issue at the Mutare conference—as he said, “in this respect, all party members here should discuss this issue frankly and in detail, focusing properly on how the land to be acquired should be distributed and managed without any decrease in production” (“Leaders should learn from mistakes”, 1997)—clearly seeing it as the important issue that would reinvigorate party power.

ZWNLVA emerged as the single most important association upon which Zanu leaned heavily to rejuvenate its hegemony in the face of widespread dissent, and this could already be seen by 1997 in its land and reparations policies. It had already buckled to a series of labor strikes, capitulated to investigate its own (largely) fraud in the War Victims Compensation Fund, and was presiding over a flailing economy. With the South African problem resolved after the 1995 elections and budgetary constrictions, it may very well be that Zanu had let down its guard. Or it may be that it already understood its social support was waning. Bringing the veterans close and doing it quickly was thus a very rational response, by so doing Zanu reinforced its hegemonic troops and, if it unleashed their interest, could count on their vociferous support. By paying them off, it was not only buying their loyalty it was driving a deep wedge between them and the rest of civil society.

In the run up to the December strikes, ZimRights Chairman Reginald Matchaba-Hove warned “that rewarding a segment of society at the expense of others would thrust a wedge between war veterans and the rest of society as many people made individual and collective sacrifices to liberate the country” (“Discontent emerging over veteran's levy”, 1997). Hove is

reported to have used the same word “wedge” in a news show when he said, “people are trying to drive a wedge between the war vets and the public” (“Muckraker column: Mugabe presides over a vanquished tribe”, 1997).

Manipulation of the veterans was indeed very strategic. The farther the veterans strayed from seeing their social objectives as one among many competing and valid objectives, the more radical and closed off they became. Finding a remedy for the veterans capable of answering their grievances (which the party itself had created, if not intentionally, then through corruption and mismanagement) required returning to nationalist roots and mobilizing the sectors of society in which Zanu’s formulation of nationalist objectives still resonated (Kriger, 2003, Bond and Manyanya, 2002).

This raw hegemonic approach to legitimacy, illustrates well before the crises of land invasions and the blatant utilization of the veterans for political ends that Zanu’s approximation to the veterans was not merely rhetorical symbolism but that this segment of civil society provided it—or certainly the inner core around Mugabe—with the most power to act. If Zanu had made a mistake before it was in being too pliable to demands of non-veteran civil society, which had allowed for the propagation of universalist values and diverse social expectations, diverging from its narrow vision. Terrence Ranger in 2002 in making a point about the promotion of a single narrow nationalist history in Zimbabwe for political ends, gives a marvelous quote from Zanu Information and Publicity Secretary from Bulawayo, Sikhumbizo Ndiweni, “The mistake the ruling party made was to allow colleges and universities to be turned into anti-Government mentality factories” (Ranger, 2004). If that were the case, in 1997 Zanu would begin reasserting hegemony by rejuvenating its natural constituency.

Veteran leadership in ZNLWVA rose to the challenge, yes. Some for personal gain, yes. Some out of dismay and disbelief that Zimbabweans had abandoned their cause but most importantly because the objective repatriation of the land and the return of their status were their exclusive social objectives. It is important to point out here that veteran’s groups were not monolithic and not all participated in the ZNLWVA approach (Kriger, 2003). But those who did

moved forward with the vociferous and potent leadership that had seen the re-awakening of fortunes and an opportunity to reclaim the goals for social transformation. This was the beginning of the social shock that was to be the catalyst to bring much of civil society together in opposition.

Still it was not anger against the veterans that erupted in the streets but a fierce demand for the government to change its ways. For most protesters, the veterans were still untouchable, as indispensable to Zimbabwe as *sadza* (a staple food made of corn/maize meal), but the veterans' leaders—most notably Hunzvi who would become as infamous for his militancy in the next years as he was for his middle name, Hitler—seized the opportunity to press further for their demands. And would soon lead the charge in the land occupations that brought Zimbabwe into the next millennium.

### **Transformations in the ZCTU**

The ZCTU may seem like a peripheral candidate for a window into civil society. Many analysts exclude unions from civil society or lump them into a gray zone because unions focus on workers in the sphere of production and they play a highly political role.<sup>30</sup> But these hybrid institutions--the church, unions, universities—in Zimbabwe supported and magnified the voice of organizations and associations that were able to access them and they emerged as foci of dissent. They were used as resources to express, direct, and magnify repressed discontent. In this way, starting from its base with the workers, ZCTU was a catalyst for the expression of people's power in Zimbabwe in December 1997 and increasingly acted as a mouthpiece for civil society until its leader Morgan Tsvangirai took the lead in a new political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, that grew from a broad-based Working People's Convention in 1999.

The genesis of the ZCTU, perhaps, made it an even more unlikely model of civil society organization. In 1980, the Zimbabwean government introduced the ZCTU as a way of addressing

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<sup>30</sup> Cohen and Arato, often discuss unions in the context of political parties. Civil society associations enable the collective bargaining of workers by pressing for the rights of collective bargaining but unions themselves are a formulation of a modern welfare state that become unnecessary as the rights are guaranteed by the transformation of the state. (Cohen and Arato, 1992)

the historic imbalance between the largely settler-run businesses in the country and the indigenous work force. Its intentions were clearly to keep the unions close to the party infrastructure (Raftopoulos, 1992). While an umbrella association of unions, the United Federation of Trade Unions, had already been formed, Zanu preferred to create its own grouping because it was reluctant to deal with an organization formed independently of the state and suspected the Federation of links with Zapu (Raftopoulos, 1992). The Lancaster House agreement had cobbled together protections for capital investors in Zimbabwe, largely leaving in place the worker/owner relations that had prevailed for the foreseeable future. Already workers were pressing for better conditions. It was, thus, not surprising that Zanu felt it needed a close proximity to the labor movement to ensure it could influence the capitalist productive sector.

The ZCTU was launched to represent and coordinate the 52 unions in the country. In the 1980s, its linkages to government weighed it down and many assumed its leadership was directly controlled and put in place by Zanu. It also had trouble gaining significant traction or concessions for its members. It was accused of corrupt practices and was severely limited in taking independent action by the 1985 Labour Relations Act that vested much power in the Ministry of Labour (Cheater, 1991). While the Act technically legalized strike action it contained several provisions that undermined labor autonomy by making it illegal for workers in “essential services” to strike, requiring government permission for strikes and giving the Labour Minister the power to amend collective bargaining agreements (Ncube, 2000).

The original intention had been to integrate ZCTU into the party structure. As a socialist party, Zanu assumed an antagonistic relationship between workers and capitalists and took a paternalistic hand in supporting the work force based on the idea that its objectives and those of the workers were the same (Ncube, 2000). This weak autonomy translated in the 1980s as a legacy of inaction and a growing irrelevance of unions to the labor movement itself. By 1985, at the ZCTU annual conference, the organization began to seek greater autonomy and by 1987 was complaining about high-levels of unemployment, inflation and wealth distribution (Alexander, 2000).

The tide turned in the 1988/1989 mass mobilization of University of Zimbabwe students. Jocelyn Alexander quotes Tendai Biti, a student leader at the time who would later become MDC Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, who says the movement "...was the first time people criticized the legitimacy of these heroes. It showed you, you could make noise and not get killed" (Alexander, 2000). Students remained a vital force in solidarity with the labor movement all the way through the period. While the improvement of their own conditions was a central motivation for their actions, they contributed both activists and thinkers who were willing to criticize government policies. Speaking at worker protests in Bulawayo on 9 December 1997, where over 30,000 protesters heard from the ZCTU and civil society activists, student council president at the National University for Science and Technology, Hopewell Gumbo said, "The government is committing an economic genocide, and if the current leadership is tired of ruling, its high time they quit, to leave room for committed people with the welfare of the majority at heart" ("Some 30,000 Workers Join Demonstrations In Bulawayo", 1997).

Many observers note Zanu's rejection of socialism, as it embraced the neoliberal economic principles of the ESAP, put pressure on the ZCTU and unions to take a more active role in the promotion of workers rights (Bond and Manyanya, 2002, Raftopoulos, 1992, Cheater, 1991). For its part, the ZCTU took steps to eliminate some of the corruption that had become the norm in its leadership and turned its attention to strengthening democratic practices in its operations (Raftopoulos, 1992). While minimum wages and access to social services, particularly education and health, had improved the position of workers, real wages for commercial and industrial workers had gone down—in 1989 purchasing power was 13 percent below 1980 levels (Raftopoulos, 1992). The situation was only to become worse as the economic policy behind the ESAP envisioned the maintenance of an inexpensive workforce as one of the drivers for development. For the labor movement, the move away from direct overlap with government objectives was the lead in to a learning decade in which numerous labor actions would help clarify that the movement needed to go beyond strikes to address the democratic accountability in government, if it sought a real commitment to both expand employment as well as secure

worker's rights. The momentous kick off to this was a strike by nurses and teachers in 1990 that was the longest in post-independence history.

Nevertheless, the ZCTU itself was still battling with a lack of trust and identification within its own society. A report produced in 1991 found that:

...half of the number of workers we interviewed did not know anything about unions at all. Of the other half, many of them were members of the union sometime in the past but resigned because they said they no longer had confidence in the union, or that the unions are powerless, or that they were useless anyway (Schiphorst, 1991).

By 1990, ZCTU's strength was largely in the urban centers of Zimbabwe where it had a base of an estimated 400,000 members, or nearly a third of the country's formal-sector workers.<sup>31</sup> But ESAP began to drive a greater wedge between the government's labor policy and the ZCTU. Bond and Manyana stress ZCTU's mounting opposition to neoliberalism and Zanu's opening door to multinational business but in their quote from Tsvangirai's 1991 interview with Africa Report, Tsvangirai was already speaking about democratic objectives just as much as he was about resistance to global neoliberalism or the creation of a working class consciousness, "What we are looking for in Zimbabwe is a democratic space. Because what is going to be sacrificed in this programme [Esap] is democracy..." (Bond and Manyana, 2002). "Democratic space" has, thus, become essential to even begin addressing the objectives of workers. Gains made through strike action were just as rapidly eroding through economic policies that were not debated or vetted democratically.

Imposition of structural adjustment and government responses were a large inducement to new action on the part of the ZCTU. In 1989, ZCTU criticized the terms of the Investment Code and used May Day celebrations in 1991 to attack structural adjustment programs (Raftopoulos, 1992). These actions signaled a note of independence from government. Nevertheless, ZCTU was beginning to feel the pressure for more effective action for workers as the government's economic policies, both in response to structural adjustment and its economic management.

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<sup>31</sup> These numbers are quoted from Raftopoulos (Raftopoulos 1992). An article from the Zimbabwe Independent in February 1998 estimates more than 600,000 members (Zimbabwe Independent, 13 Feb 1998).

Consequently, ZCTU was beginning to be more critical of government policies and take action on the part of its member unions.

Clearly Zanu was no longer the worker's party but neither was ZCTU merely the representative of workers; it began to think more broadly about the economy. In 1996, ZCTU published its influential report *Beyond ESAP: Framework for a Long-term Development Strategy for Zimbabwe* just as government was in the midst of negotiation for a second phase of the program. Tapiwa Mashakada, a ZCTU spokesman, stressed the collaborative nature of the new approach, "Instead of just criticizing the government's failure in the implementation of ESAP, we decided together with other civic groups to come up with our own ideas on how the second phase of ESAP should be implemented" (Rusere, 1996). Material conditions were worsening; unemployment hovered at 42 percent. The report called for the establishment of a consultative economic council that would represent divergent views. The government did later seek to create such a council in 1998 but the council was shunned by civil society organizations because it planned to invite participants in their individual capacity instead of as representatives of their organizations (Alexander, 2000). The scope of *Beyond ESAP* is large and speaks on behalf of many Zimbabweans with provisions, for example, to expand employment, help Zimbabwean business and abolish the reintroduction of school and medical fees (Rusere, 1996). It is the convergence of social objectives on improving governance that was beginning to capture the imagination of civil society about the existence of better alternatives to the official policy.

The churches were already working along concurrent lines with the ZCTU. The Lobbying and Advocacy Group (LAG) of the Ecumenical Support Services, established in 1992 to seek, among other things, a "civic response to economic reforms that lead to the exploitation of the already marginalized people of the South", had attended a World Bank civil society consultation with the Economic Justice Network and other NGOs in 1995. Afterwards it released a communiqué that stressed, "...[the people] are required to take an active role in defining the development paradigm through churches, civic groups and NGOs" (Dorman, 2002). The group drew up a list of over 50 individuals who wanted to be part of consultations on ZIMPREST and

wrote the Finance Ministry only to be sidelined by the Minister who finally wrote back to tell them that the draft document would only be open to stakeholders after it had been discussed by heads of ministry and cabinet (Dorman, 2002). While Dorman notes that LAG had not been successful in either dealing with government or bringing on board more NGOs to its cause, it shows that the more progressive churches had become convinced that the accomplishment of their justice and poverty alleviation goals required engagement and scrutiny of the government. Dorman and others interpret this period as the beginning of political engagement, but, to the extent that groups like the Ecumenical Support Services were responding to social justice goals in their establishment, this may be too narrow a definition of politics. At any rate, church groups should be counted among the key supporters of the 1997 people's power demonstrations, particularly the Ecumenical Support Services, The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, Silveira House (Catholic) and the Methodist Synod (Muzondidya, 2009). The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network and the Mutasa Project, concerned with the social and economic burden borne by women were two of the organizations also that supported the stayaway (Muzondidya, 2009).

The ZCTU had increased social support for labor action over time starting with a poor showing at an anti-ESAP rally in 1992 that was disrupted by police and the launch of its paper *The Worker* in 1993 (Alexander, 2000). A series of labor actions throughout the 1990s led up to one of the most successful strikes in Zimbabwean history in 1996 when doctors, teachers, nurses and other government employees, involving nearly two thirds of the civil service or 160,000 workers, won concessions for health workers and marked a renewal of union power (Muzondidya, 2009, Bond and Manyanya, 2002).

The mission of the ZCTU is to promote, advance and safeguard the economic, social and constitutional freedoms of workers by securing a legal, political, democratic and good governance framework in Zimbabwe through strengthening its capacity and independence and those of its affiliates (ZCTU, 2010). As such ZCTU served as a rallying point for general dissatisfaction in the political realm in the 1990s and moved beyond its specific objectives in supporting workers in



their struggle for fair working conditions. Using the normal union strategies to push for change—strikes, work stayaways and protests—it managed to mobilize citizen energy and gave an outlet for expression about politics.

Morgan Tsvangirai's emergence as the founding head of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 2000 is, in the story of democratization, taken to be the critical moment in the development of the national crisis from the late 1990s. After this, the story moves squarely into the competitive realm of party politics. But Tsvangirai's political role is deeply rooted in the particular links among civil society associations and the ZCTU in the 1990s. Still, the narrative that tends to prevail is one in which the leadership of Tsvangirai is the key political factor in the rise of political opposition. For example, Martin Meredith in his biography on Robert Mugabe conveniently equates ZCTU to Tsvangirai, calling it "Tsvangirai's ZCTU," (Meredith, 2002) a label which collapses the actual workings of both a number of trade unions and workers within the ZCTU but also misses the consonance with civil society associations that gave rise to the unprecedented power that the ZCTU ended up wielding.

### **Conclusion: Withholding Political Authority**

The people's power protests of 1997 went beyond the expression for worker's rights to a widespread demand for accountability and democratic governance. Because government had split with its socialist promises and capitulated to the ESAP, not only did workers suffer a fall in real income but they shared a generalized understanding that government was unresponsive to their needs, had isolated itself from public debate and their leaders were only out for themselves. The track record of political corruption (cronyism and misspending) and a lack of outlets by which people could participate in decision making suggested that there was little chance for social and economic progress as long as the Zanu government was in place.

The loss of belief in the legitimate power of Zanu went well beyond labor to church-based and human rights groups that also had begun to see the political regime as the major obstacle to progress. The ZCTU emerged as a catalyst to people's power. Workers connected with diverse

allies in the universities, student movements, legal sector and urban associations. These groups shared a common objective to demand a more accountable order based on openness, rule of law and fostering the conditions needed for economic growth.

Muzondidya concludes that the government's increasing use of coercion and its lack of tolerance for political diversity had not laid the foundations of democracy in the 1990s (Muzondidya, 2009). It is interesting, however, to see the strength of mobilization in 1997 and the leading role of a variety of activists who had joined in the new struggle as the foundations of democracy that had grown up in a context of increasing awareness of the need for rule of law and government accountability against the tide of government corruption and patronage. Clearly the foundations for democracy must have been considerably stronger than Muzondidya thinks. ZCTU had been kept in check until the 90s by Zanu's attempts to represent workers. But as it learned economic growth and expansion of economic justice that could meet the needs and demands of workers could not be left in the hands of Zanu, it provided more effective opposition as an independent organization. The real decline in wages, the stagnation of the growth in jobs and the inconsistent commitment of the government to the issues that drove them were factors, leading urban workers to defect from the party. Zimbabwe's neo-patrimonial political mechanisms of control increasingly became unstable, as they were particularly bad at meeting the diversity of objectives of its civil society. This is not a problem that Zanu could solve by throwing more resources at the population. Workers and other organizations wanted not just jobs but a commitment to expanding those jobs and to democratic rights that would lead to an increasing social capacity for political participation.

But civil society was NOT unanimous in its support of the nationwide strikes. The veterans through ZNLWVA, sought their own gains, even though their initial grievance (the mismanagement and corruption of the veterans fund) shared much of the same framing in terms of government corruption. For the veterans the payment of their reparations represents more than a purchase of their loyalty, it returned them to a position of social prominence. This reinvigoration of the social sector that most closely resonated with the plans and objectives of the government

suggests Zanu was not only aware of its problem with its own civil society but understood the necessity of supporting the base closest to its own hegemony in order to coerce a re-imposition of its own power. Of course even Zanu was not monolithic. The Mugabe faction had lost much social capital within its own structure. The political alliance with the veterans is not then just a strategy to control “external” civil society but a way of purging the party line dissidents who were jumping ship. The veterans would prove a sufficient force to divide the opposition, as we move beyond the expression of people’s power in withdrawing support for political authority in the next chapter to the positive attempts to reconstruct the social contract.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONSTRUCTING A NEW ORDER - THE NCA

*The struggle to remake the constitution of Zimbabwe emerged concurrently with the people's power demonstrations of 1997. At the behest of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and other groups and activists, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was launched in January 1998 to establish in Zimbabwe "a) a new tolerant, transparent and democratic, legal, political, social and economic order and b) a new constitutional framework upon which governance can be founded." The government countered by creating its own constitutional commission that adopted the participatory consultation process originally proposed by the founders of the NCA. The resulting draft constitution was altered at the last minute to include expanded presidential power and the ability to confiscate land without compensation running against the grain of public submissions. As an attempt to remake the constitution, and thereby the institutional basis of the social contract, the NCA did not succeed. It did, however, succeed in establishing a participatory framework for constitution making and in winning the "no" vote in the national referendum on the draft constitution. The NCA was also a significant factor in the birth of the Movement for Democratic Change, the opposition party that would challenge Zanu's rule over the next decade.*

In 1997, a small group of individuals and organizations came together to debate the problem of the constitution. Zimbabwe's constitution settled at Lancaster House had been inherited and originally allowed for temporary measures such as the requirement of parliamentary seats for the white settlers. Both Zanu, interested in consolidation of party power and the land question, and those concerned about the democratization of the political sphere saw the constitution as flawed. By 1997, Zanu had already amended the constitution 15 times.<sup>32</sup> With several of the amendments came increased party power and a stronger executive presidency.

The constitution became an area of democratic contestation for many of the same groups that backed the ZCTU in the 1997 people's power demonstrations. The problem as they saw it

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<sup>32</sup> Brian Kagoro and others cite 17 amendments to the constitution. Many amendments were relatively uncontroversial, such as lowering the age requirement for black senators from 40 to 30 or renaming Tribal Trust Lands as Communal Lands. But many also seriously altered the political terrain, such as increased power of appointment to the head of state over appointment to the Judicial Service Commission, Attorney General and Electoral Service Commission (A4 1984) or the establishment of an executive presidency with immunity from prosecution (A7 1987). Kagoro, B. (2010) *Chaos and Transition*, Forthcoming.

was not merely the power-seeking activities of the political class but the lack of political participation, the perceived empty symbols of patriotism and the shared frustration over the accomplishment of social and economic objectives that were stymied by political fiat.

The framers of the initiative that would become the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) were driven by their experiences in pursuing social objectives for labor, marginalized groups, victims of human rights abuses, students and women. They pointedly were not joined by ZWNLVA (the veterans organization) and many charity or development associations such as ORAP participated only on the periphery (ORAP's work on civic education is discussed in Chapter 4).

### **Re-making Political Authority**

One of the founders of the NCA was Tawanda Mutasah from the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Department of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). As a passionate activist, he had trained election monitors for Students for a Democratic Movement and was involved in organizing and political monitoring for ZCC. He was, by 1997, frustrated about the lack of open governance:

For me, I watched as the late minister of justice put forward Amendment 7 that created the executive presidency.... The verbal gymnastics were typical. Nobody for instance in civil society talked for anything more than 10 minutes about the amendment, which was far reaching and nobody talked about it. Within that context we had been trying to build civic capacity for engagement in governance (Mutasah, 2010a).

As he described it, the idea of launching a process that would lead to citizen participation in creating a new constitution emerged from a discussion he had one day with his friends Deprose Muchena and Brian Kagoro in which they were concerned with the lack of proactive political strategies in civil society. "...there was need for a major initiative that would be a rallying point for civil society in Zimbabwe given the exigencies in the country then" (Mutasah, 2010b). Noticing a Zimbabwean flag that decorated the office, they wondered how it might be possible to re-create the hollow symbols of nationalism, like the flag and the constitution, into vital forces for democratization.

...whatever quarrel anybody had with the way Zanu PF was running the country, Zimbabwe was a reality to which we all ought to subordinate ourselves...The country belonged to all Zimbabweans, and the people had the right to enter into a new social confidence with one another, to give birth to nationhood once again, to reclaim lost public space, and to have the platform to say "we the people..." (Mutasah, 2010b).

Enthused by the idea of engaging people in a democratic initiative around the constitution, Mutasah, Kagoro and Muchena began sharing it with others. As Mutasah says the idea "snowballed." As it grew, the initiative garnered support from others within ZCC, ZCTU (including Morgan Tsvangirai), Lovemore Madhuku who worked for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation that would later provide seed support, CCJPZ, ZimRights and many individuals (Mutasah, 2010b).

Were the initiators of the NCA also well-connected elite? Bond and Manyana argue that the drivers of the early constitutional activism were the well-educated middle class of professionals (the national bourgeoisie), making them also disconnected from the working and unemployed poor, which explains their lack of critique for misguided, neo-liberal economic policies (Bond and Manyana, 2002, p. 92). This meme associating the NCA with middle class interests seems to be widespread and runs counter to the idea that it was an authentic expression of a cross-class alliance within civil society. It prompts Peter Alexander, for example to write about the interests behind the NCA, "One might also be justified in wondering whether, perhaps, the anti-Mugabe intelligentsia concluded that, since they could not rely on the middle classes as a whole, they needed to work even more closely with the unions" (Alexander, 2000). I tend to think that these attitudes evince a post-Marxian disdain for civil society, or anything that is not one hundred percent motivated by the workers interests. But it does seem to stretch credulity a bit that the church, development, poverty and student activists that came together with lawyers and the like had somehow planned to dupe the workers to work with them. While it is true that many of the founders were well educated and better off in Zimbabwean terms, they also came from the most significant networks advocating on behalf of and working with the marginalized and the poor. Far from acting as intermediaries to the pitifully small Zimbabwean capitalist class, they had explicit aims to increase the political enfranchisement of all Zimbabweans. The moniker

“middle class” is thus both too broad—in the sense that the constitutional activists were interested in more than the protection of middle class gains—and too narrow in that it disregards the daily and professional links that these supposedly middle class activists maintained across scores of social networks.

The ZCC took the lead in convening other organizations and individuals around the idea and, thus, was born a social/political process that would shake the foundations of Zimbabwean politics. Working on the constitution gave a positive outlet for reconstructing a social contract that promised to channel peoples’ power in a positive direction. The goal was no longer simply the removal of the political regime but the creation of a political regime more conducive to the goals and aspirations of Zimbabwean civil society. But the motivations were to address the constraints on achieving social objectives (overcoming poverty, hunger and disease) around which participants were organized:

...it may be said that the vision was inspired by the community and everyday work of the various participating organizations. In this work, they variously realized that, without good and democratic governance founded on the firm foundation of a democratic Constitution in this country, the multi-pronged, well-meant, efforts to fight poverty, hunger, and disease in Zimbabwe would come to naught (Mutasah, 2010b).

The idea caught on. In a first meeting held on May 20, around 20 civil society organizations and concerned individuals met to give shape to the idea (Kagoro, 1999). Many of those present would, later in the year, take on significant roles in the demonstrations or serve as interlocutors for reporters and others to qualify citizen demands in the strikes discussed in the previous chapter, including Tsvangirai of ZCTU and Chimhini of ZimRights, who publicly warned of the growing anger before the December 1997 protests ("Date set for mass protest", 1997).

Some Activities of Civil Society Organizations, before the Launch of the National Constitutional Assembly – digested from Tawanda Mutasah’s testimony (Mutasah, 2010b)

- **ZimRights** was publicizing opinions on the Human Rights situation, and had convening seminars about electoral reform
- **Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights** had expressed an interest in drafting a working outline of good principles of Constitutional practice
- **Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace** consistent monitoring of human rights, publicizing findings, and carrying out extensive education on Democracy and the Rights of citizens.
- **Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, the Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Centre and Network, the Women’s Action group, WILDAF**, and other women’s organizations, were monitoring human rights and working on gender- disaggregated analysis and advocating for legal/judicial reform, including monitoring constitutional and legal amendments from a women’s rights perspective.
- **Foundation For Democracy in Zimbabwe** was contributing to education for democracy and working on democratic theory and grassroots political mobilization.
- **Legal Resources Foundation** was working on judiciary reform, rule of Law and the justiciability of the Human Rights Charter in the National Constitution.
- The **Church/NGO Voter Education National Committee** was holding extensive Voter Education workshops at the local level and this touched on such issues as participation, voter education and democracy-building
- **Ecumenical Support Services** was convening seminars on tolerance and constitutional comparative analysis
- The **Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions** was advocating for good governance and accountability, human rights, and grassroots education
- **Zimbabwe Council of Churches** was working on improvement of electoral systems and institutions, and economic justice. It was in the process of translating the Constitution of Zimbabwe into layman’s terms and local language
- **Legal academics**, such as Madhuku, Ncube, Makamure and Hlatswayo, and **political scientists** such as John Makumbe, Masipula Sithole and even Jonathan Moyo, had written on different facets of the Constitution, issue-specific campaign fliers, and constitutional comparative analysis.
- **Parliamentary Reform Committee** was engaged then in the much-vaunted parliamentary reform project, eliciting opinions from the Zimbabwean public on the role of Parliament

Figure 4 – Constitution-related activities of civil society organizations

In the list above is Mutasah’s analysis of the breadth of constitution-focused activities of civil society organizations and individuals before the founding of the NCA. The list is interesting for a number of reasons. For one, it illustrates that the strategy of channeling dissatisfaction in the direction of the constitution was built on the experience of human rights and justice-oriented objectives. Many involved were lawyers or law professors who had observed that many Zimbabweans did not understand the constitution’s important role in limiting political power. Another reason the list is interesting is that observers of civil society in Zimbabwe often see the late 1990s as hallmark years in which civil society suddenly threw off its excessive caution, rare



advocacy and striving for neutrality to take a more political role (Dorman, 2001, Sibanda, 1994). While it is certainly true that opposition politics and even political debate were off limits and potentially dangerous activities, political engagement was not lacking in many forms including monitoring human rights and civic education as the list above demonstrates. Each of the organizations involved in the 1997 development of the NCA brought to the work a history of trying to improve political institutions and the rule of law that provided valuable experience.

Founders came together around the constitution for a number of reasons with a shared objective to reconstitute the political sphere in an authentic constitution as a voice of the people. "In the minds of the founders of the NCA, it was only through a broad-based Constitution making process that the people's wishes could be ascertained. They were mindful also of the fact that the supremacy of any Constitution is derived from the fact that it is the word of the people" (Kagoro, 1999).

Planning for a civil society-led constitutional process was pursued in a very workman-like manner. On May 4, the group held its first technical committee meeting. At the meeting on May 20<sup>th</sup> at the Quality International Hotel in Harare it adopted an initiative to create the National Constitutional Assembly. The outcome of the meeting of twenty NGOs was a taskforce (that included CCJPZ, ZCC, ZCTU, ZimRights and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Women's Action Group (WAG), and Zimbabwe Women Lawyers (ZWLA)) and an advisory team of seven consultants (Tendai Biti, Everjoyce Win, Prof. Welshman Ncube, Priscilla Misihairambwi, Brian Kagoro, and Lupi Mushayakarara) (Kagoro, 1999). On June 11, a taskforce was elected to move forward the establishment of the organization (Mutasah, 2010b) .

Meeting participants wanted to create a constitutional process that would not challenge Zanu power directly (as they were aware that this would immediately be squashed) but they also wanted to create a structure that would not be dominated by Zanu. As a strategy, they decided to

invite Zanu to participate in meetings but agreed that while there should always be “a chair” for Zanu at the table, it was as one among many<sup>33</sup> (Mutasah, 2010b).

Given the fear of how Zanu would respond to a civil society-led constitutional initiative, a tension emerged between those who wanted to go slow by focusing on constitutional and civic education as a more indirect challenge to Zanu and those who felt that the end goal should be direct citizen participation in the drafting of a new constitution. As Mutasah explains, the constitutional goal was shared by all but the extent to which it should be tackled directly would remain a point of contention, even as the group prepared to formally launch the National Constitutional Assembly on 31 January 1998 (Mutasah, 2010b). In this way, the NCA was created with a mandate to advocate for and design a new constitution as well as to engage in civic education with an end of raising understanding among both rural and urban Zimbabweans about how the government worked and the role of the constitution in shaping this. Its founding objectives were to:

- Initiate and engage in a process of enlightening the general public on the current Constitution of Zimbabwe;
- Identify shortcomings of the current Constitution and to organise debate on possible Constitutional Reform;
- Organise the Constitutional debate in a way which allows a broad based participation;
- Subject the constitution making process in Zimbabwe to popular scrutiny with a view to entrenching the principle that constitutions are made by, and for the people; and
- Generally, encourage a culture of popular participation in decision making (Kagoro, 1999).

Participants were motivated by a shared belief that Zanu had become the law in Zimbabwe through the power wielded by the president instead of the constitution. They saw the need to create the unity and clarity of a new social contract. Addressing the source of political authority, the constitution, seemed like an ideal strategy.

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<sup>33</sup> “We would set up a process that included everybody, including every political party, including ZANU PF. We would reserve a chair for ZANU PF in the room. If they did not send anybody to sit on it, and they claimed from outside that they were being excluded from the process, we would point to their empty chair. And it would be for the people, and history, to judge” Mutasah, T. (2010b) NCA Testimony. *Chaos and Transition*. pp. 1-23.

For a country that lacks a coherent unifying national agenda, this is an opportunity to create one around the constitution-making process (Nyathi, 1999).

But it was the developing dialogues around democracy and citizen's rights that emerged as an end in the process as much as the hopes of producing an improved constitution. As the objectives above show, the NCA founders wanted to prepare Zimbabweans through education, discussion and debate to give them a taste that "constitutions are made for and by the people." In comparison to ORAP's efforts to create an alternative, more democratic space for development, within the context of national political realities, the NCA sought to transform the political realities themselves. On January 31, 1998, the NCA was launched as an open access, independent NGO to

work with other similarly minded organizations or individuals in Zimbabwe in establishing or striving to establish in Zimbabwe; a) a new tolerant, transparent and democratic, legal, political, social and economic order and b) new constitutional framework upon which governance can be founded (National Constitutional Assembly, 1997).

#### Moving to confrontation: The NCA

The NCA would not have a honeymoon period to design and create its programs. The debate over the need for a new constitution had already taken root within Zanu itself. With government protests on the immediate horizon, Masvingo MPs inserted a demand for constitutional change at the December 1997 Mutare Biannual Convention. It was not just the tardiness of addressing the Lancaster House Constitution that worried them. They were also dissatisfied at how Mugabe and his Finance Minister had attempted to manipulate Parliament to impose new taxes for the benefit of the veterans as we discussed in the previous chapter ("New culture develops in ruling party", 1997, Raftopoulos and Savage, 2004).

By February 1998, Dzikimayi Mavhaire who had been among the most vocal at the December congress introduced a bill to launch an *independent* constitutional conference. This was clearly an attempt to broaden parliamentary powers. Mavhaire said, "This review must focus on the executive presidency, especially the matter of the term of office," an unmistakable reference to Mugabe's tenure. He went on, "We parliamentarians seem to be useless. We cannot

make a decision in this government. We are just there to give the ruling party the required majority number of seats" ("Zimbabweans: Constitution Must Be Re-Written", 1998).

Protests and strikes continued in the capital throughout the period. In April, thousands of students demonstrated in Harare singing songs of solidarity for Mavhaire and calling for Mugabe and other Zanu members to step down in protest over the shooting of University of Zimbabwe student Morememories Chawira by police ("UZ students take to the streets as court spurns police application", 1998). At the end of May, Mavhaire was suspended from Zanu for his constitutional advocacy (particularly for saying Mugabe must go) but the pressure for constitutional reform would be redoubled as those associated with the NCA continued to make the case for constitutional reform (Tulani, 1998, Choto, 1998).

While the protests were unrelenting, the idea of deposing Mugabe confused some Zimbabweans who really could not imagine the country without him. Edwina Spicer nicely explores this sentiment in her 1995 documentary on Zimbabwean democracy. As a village woman she interviews asserts, "Some of them should go but the father must stay. There should be no ideas of trying to remove him. The President must stay" (Spicer, 1995). In order to address this prevailing strength of neo-patrimonial politics in which the government is perceived as an extension of the family with the "father" demanding respect and obedience, civic education and dialogue were seen as necessary to educate citizens on the purpose of government and its institutions. Towards this end holding public workshops was one of the main activities of the NCA. It created public education materials to explain how the challenge of the constitution related directly to the social and economic objectives of Zimbabweans.

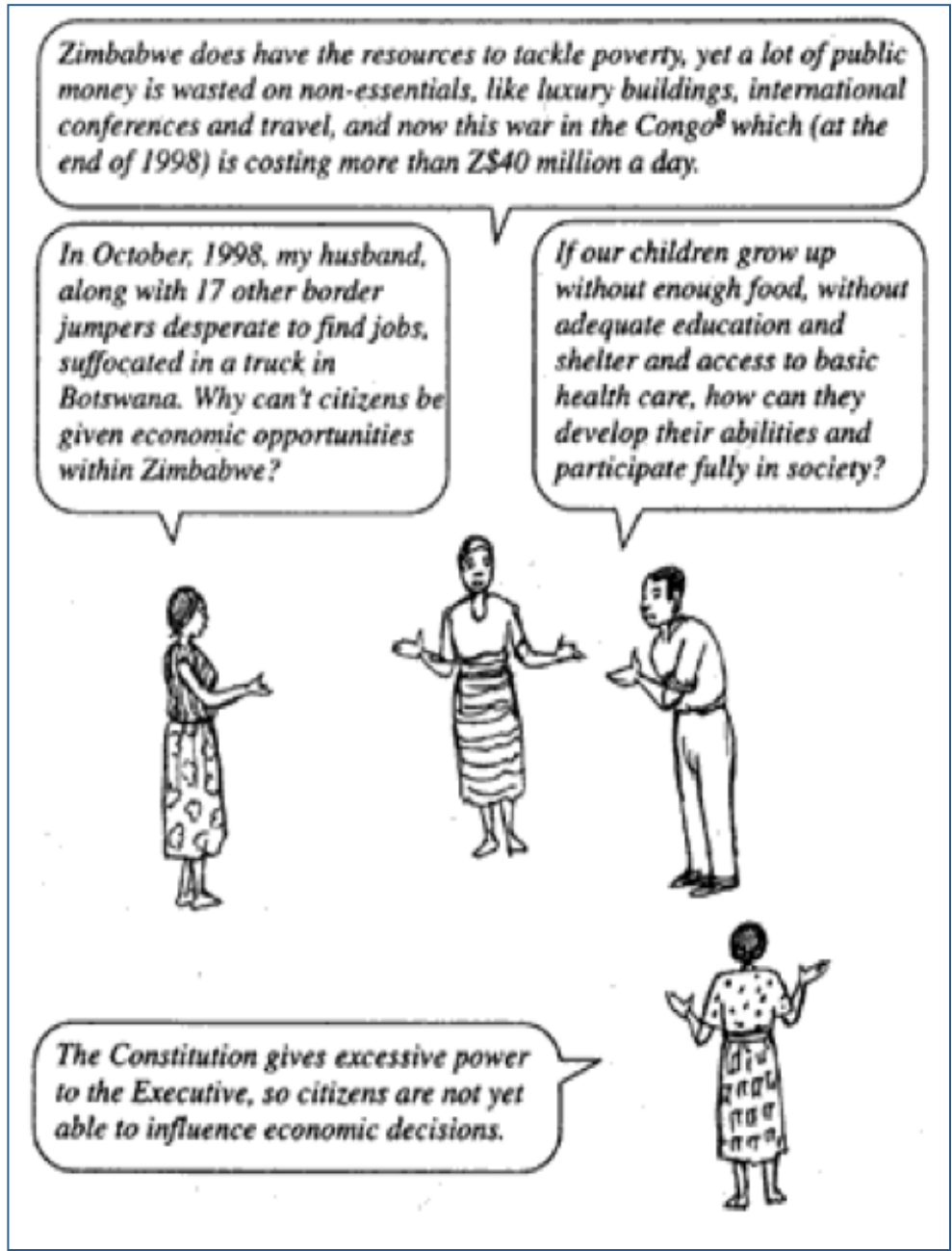


Figure 5 - NCA citizenship illustration

For example, the cartoon illustration above from a 1999 NCA brochure on citizenship shows citizens grappling with governance and corruption issues (“money is wasted on non-essentials”) in the context of social objectives (food, education, jobs and capabilities) and the need for less executive power to enhance political participation. (National Constitutional

Assembly (NCA), 1999). From 1998 to 2000 the NCA trained over 600 trainers to take these messages to the public and started conducting a national series of workshops to inform the constitutional dialogue (Dorman, 2003).

NCA's strategy of inviting Zanu to a seat at the table and expanding understanding of civics expressed a different view of governance that emphasized *participation and representation* as opposed to the Mugabe-the-father hegemony pursued through *control and opposition*.

Currently we have an authoritarian constitution with political and economic power in the hands of a few, benefiting a minority. Power is used in a negative, dominating way. People are subordinate (under the control of others) and politics is based on personalities, power struggles and empty promises, resulting in a weak society characterized by apathy, dependency and corruption (National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), 1999).

When NCA held its first meeting in the beginning of February 1998, it invited Edson Zvobgo, ruling secretary for political affairs to participate. Not only did Zvobgo not respond at first or attend the meeting, he soon after announced Zanu's intention to lead a constitutional review itself—an act that would enable Zanu to re-assert its leadership over the constitutional process and quiet its critics. Zvobgo is quoted as saying, "It is the government of the day that must lead the campaign to review the constitution" ("Zimbabweans: Constitution Must Be Re-Written", 1998). It is no surprise that Zanu would reject the NCA from the beginning since the independent constitutional process it had proposed was a direct incursion into the closed off political world Zanu had worked so hard to create.

#### Zanu's response: The Constitutional Commission

The new interest in re-constituting the nation could be used by Zanu to rebuild its authority, a necessity it had realized in the 1997/1998 atmosphere of people's power. Welshman Ncube, a Zimbabwean constitutional scholar characterized Zanu's position, "Over the years Zanu PF has insisted that the Zimbabwean constitution should not limit the exercise of public power, but should facilitate its exercise in the service of the people" (Ncube, 1999). While it had amended the constitution, Zanu had never launched a full constitutional review and it certainly was not going to allow the NCA to take the lead. As Zvobgo said, "How can a few people sit

under a tree and claim to be a National Constitutional Assembly. They are neither constitutional nor an assembly” (McCandless, 2006). This oft-quoted remark raises the problem of political representation, as a central flaw the government would exploit. NCA could not purport to represent the Zimbabwean people, but the government could.

Throughout 1998 and the first months of 1999, a formal process of constitutional review was initiated by Mugabe. Taking the steam out of the sails of the NCA meant incorporating its participatory approaches but in the context of constitutionally mandated authority to the government of the day. “If democracy is to thrive and become a national heritage, then the nation's political course to change government or its leadership can only be that of an orderly democratic process as prescribed by our constitution” (“Mugabe Calls for Constitutional Reform”, 1998).

The Zanu politburo is thought to have discussed Zvobgo’s recommendations on how Zanu could take back the constitutional issue from the Parliament just before the suspension of Mavhaire from the Party in May. Not long after in late June, the party finally became clear on its response to the constitutional calls; Mugabe announced at a party central committee meeting his support for a Zanu-led constitutional process, by urging interested parties to “certainly have the freedom...so that whatever definite and positive issues that emerge are included in a proposed document to be put to the people by referendum” (“Mugabe Calls for Constitutional Reform”, 1998).

Almost a year later, on 21 May 1999, commissioners appointed by Mugabe were sworn in to a commission established under the Commission of Inquiry Act (over the opposition of the NCA because the Act gave all powers over commissions to the President (Machipisa, 1999). Out of 396 commissioners, 150 Zanu MPs and Ministers composed the bulk, with the remaining chosen from various sectors of civil society although many had direct ties with the party (Dorman, 2003).<sup>34</sup> While the Commission was, thus, dominated by Zanu, its inclusion of commissioners

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<sup>34</sup> Dorman quotes Margaret Dongo from a Herald Article’s point that ‘three-quarters are the ruling party's politburo, central committee members, provincial chairpersons, and so-called indigenous

identified with the broader civil society provided some support for its claims of being independent of the party. With a mandate to seek the broad participation of Zimbabwean society, the commission represented a very new governmental approach, in fact the very one the NCA had been calling for with the critical exception, of course, that the commission was not truly independent.

How to relate with the new Commission, a mirror image of its own approach, was a difficult challenge for the NCA. NCA's complaints that the government could subvert the process for its own ends were derided by government officials and interestingly countered with a call on the norms of the international community, as Paul Themba Nyathi describes,

Minister Zvobgo's response is that this is a special commission whose importance would be guaranteed by the interests of the international community. The reasoning is that the president would dare not defy international opinion - ha! ha! ha! Nothing more need be said" (Nyathi, 1999).

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) is born

In at least one way, it appeared the NCA had won in the political game of pressure and compromise. Zanu, which had never produced much constitutional debate in Parliament, never mind civil society, had embraced its participatory/democratic principles. Building on the growing social consensus for these principles, around the same time, discussions were underway to launch a new political party that would champion this cause directly.

In June, Tsvangirai announced preparations for the Movement for Democratic Change that would build on the democratic fervor emerging from the people's power demonstrations and the constitutional engagement of the NCA and civil society (Sayagues, 2000a). The new party set itself the ambitious goal of contesting national elections in 2000. Tsvangirai and others from the NCA and its member organizations, particularly the ZCTU would take on leadership roles in the new party, trading in their positions in civil society organizations to compete directly for political

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business persons aligned to the party Dorman, S. R. (2003) 'NGOs and the constitutional debate in Zimbabwe: from inclusion to exclusion', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, **29(4)**, 845-63.



power. As Tsvangirai remarked at the time "You don't form a political party to remain in the opposition" ("Tsvangirai ready to take on Mugabe Alliance with Zanu 2000 possible", 2000).

The MDC would become the first viable opposition in Zimbabwe since the merger of Zanu in the unity talks in 1987.<sup>35</sup> With this event the challenge from civil society to Zanu began to crystallize and narrow, moving from the diverse realm of civil society's social objectives to the single dimension of capturing the right to set the political agenda. MDC set its sights on a rural strategy, knowing that its support was good in the urban areas. By November it launched a rural outreach program, in Tsvangirai's words,

"It was gratifying to see all that support and feedback we got from the Zimbabwean people in the towns and cities, and what we need to do now is to complete the process of taking the party to the grassroots, make it national and ensure that no-one is left out" (Viriri, 1999b).

For some of the members of the NCA, the formation of the MDC was one of the answers they sought as they could now challenge Zanu directly on the battlefield of politics.

Finally, the end of Zanu's authority, or is it?

The NCA was experiencing its own divisions. Some NCA members, such as Ben Hlatshwayo and Lupi Mushayakarara accepted invitations to join the Constitutional Commission,<sup>36</sup> believing they could accomplish more from within the government-initiated process than by continuing with the NCA. For one thing, the appointment of the credible Justice Godfrey Chidyausiku as chair, they felt, would provide some protections against political interference (Shoko, 1999). A public debate about the NCA's relevancy ensued. Hlatshwayo, a law professor and commissioner, suggested that NCA was being pigheaded to press for a perfect

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<sup>35</sup> Actually the MDC's pursuit of opening up the political space followed some of the same script its predecessor opposition parties. such as the Zimbabwe Unity Movement, particularly the battle against the one-party state and authoritarian over reach, but the ability to hear and the commitment to act on this message had been mobilized to a much greater extent by the people's power demonstrations and stayaway.

<sup>36</sup> Mushayakarara stepped down from the Commission several months later over her concerns that it would merely be another mechanism for consolidating Mugabe's power, "Zanu-PF may well produce a constitution which appears to address the concerns of the people, but its main concern is power. Unless there's a miracle, Zanu is assured of remaining in office after next year's elections "Zimbabwe Constitution: Just a piece of paper?". BBC, 19 November 1999.

constitutional process, when it had succeeded in getting government to adopt many of its principles. Singing the praises of the Commission's process and stressing his belief that the NCA should not conduct a "parallel" constitutional process but should monitor the official one, Hlatshwayo wrote,

History, accident, fortune or misfortune has given [the NCA] the specific role of "critical monitor" of the national process currently underway, and the NCA should now start playing this role consciously, deliberately and, consequently, responsibly. Our dear "friends" should start by unveiling their own constitutional blueprint that they claim to have been crafting over the last three years" (Hlatshwayo, 1999).

Rather than boycott the process, which was the NCA's official position, it should, he reasoned, monitor and follow the official process. In fact, it looked like Zanu had gained the upper hand. By adopting not just the objective of writing a new constitution but pursuing the broad, participatory process the NCA had originally outlined, it divided the independent critical positions (with many seeing this as a practical path to a new constitution) and silenced many of its opponents by co-opting them on to its Commission.

Zanu apparently had two unsurprising goals for the constitution in mind. First it wanted to secure its political control by strengthening presidential powers (Muleya, 1998) and second, it wanted to take away constitutional limits to land reform, thus freeing up its ability to nationalize farms owned by the white settlers and their predecessors.<sup>37</sup> The goal of moving forward more radical land redistribution seemed self-serving and insufficient. As Mike Auret of the CCJPZ told the Financial Times, "'Race and land are the two arrows left in the Zanu-PF quiver. They have nothing else left to offer the people.'" (Mallett, 1999) The power left in the unfulfilled revolutionary goals around the restoration of land to the original African owners was probably not taken as seriously as it deserved by many. As we saw in the last chapter, some veterans embraced it

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<sup>37</sup> Zanu had been working on its land agenda consistently since Mugabe announced 1700+ listed farms to be reallocated in 1997. The land was clearly the issue over which he believed the party would regain its legitimacy. In the run-off to the yes/no vote on the constitution Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa told voters they would be more likely to receive land if they voted yes on the draft constitution because it would remove the guarantees over compensation in the old constitution. Cauvin, H. E. "Zimbabwe Constitution Vote is a Showdown for Mugabe." New York Times, 12 February 2000.

along with a group that has largely been called “unemployed youth” and which deserves further study itself.

By articulating much of the NCA language and goals of broad citizen participation, Zanu trumped the NCA with its own constitutional process. Still, NCA maintained an independent position in the process that made it a clear voice of criticism within civil society—and it was regularly called on to interpret events by the independent media even though it was ignored by the state press. At its people’s constitutional convention held in Chitungwiza in June 1999, NCA members supported making minimal changes to the Constitution before the 2000 election but endorsed “the alternative process under the NCA and that that alternative process was the only other process on constitutional reform apart from the Chidyausiku Commission [the Constitutional Commission]” (“NCA Remains Only Hope for a People-Driven Constitution”, 1999).

In fact, it began to look like the Commission would disprove the NCA’s criticisms by actually conducting an open, consultative process. Commissioners covered the country in 1999, calling public meetings<sup>38</sup> and receiving public comments the Commission claimed to reach over one million Zimbabweans (Shoko, 1999). Responding to the worry that Mugabe could simply ignore the emerging picture of the public will which included reducing the power of the presidency and limiting its term, Jonathan Moyo said, “Because this has been such a public process, it’s difficult to imagine that once it goes to the president, suddenly things will start disappearing” (“Zimbabwe Constitution: Just a piece of paper?”, 1999). But that is exactly what happened.

In October the Commission met to review reports on consultations from across the country. The reports made it clear that Zimbabweans wanted a more limited government and one that was subject to the same laws as they were, some examples from the reports:

- People in Manicaland overwhelmingly subscribe to the idea of limiting the president’s terms to two to five years.  
Manicaland

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<sup>38</sup> Approximately 5000 meetings are held in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Britain and the United States from August 16. MMPZ, (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe), (2000) A Question of Balance: The Zimbabwean media and the constitutional reform.

- There should be no immunity from prosecution for the head of state. He or she should be arraigned for trial during his or her tenure. No one should be above the law and the head of state should be treated like any other citizen.  
Mashonaland West
- The office bearer must have a solid financial base to minimise embezzlement, greed and acquisitive tendencies, and avoid use of political office for acquiring wealth.  
Midlands Province (Shoko, 1999)

Public submissions from organizations were to follow; the NCA, which was boycotting the process, of course, made no submission. Zvobgo, who presented on behalf of Zanu started by asserting that Zanu represented five-million card-bearing members, that is, more than five times the one million who had been interviewed by the Commission. Even on its own Commission Zanu felt the need to fight its opponents for its authority to represent Zimbabweans. Furthermore Zvobgo went on for one hour, ignoring the 20-minute time limit, because he felt Zanu constituents deserved to hear the full explanation of its policies. Predictably, Zanu, far from heeding the calls for more limited government wanted to strengthen the executive presidency and set term limits at two consecutive terms of six years, which made it clear that it had ignored the comments from the draft reports. Zvobgo summed up his attitude toward the event, "It would have been silly not to allow the party that runs the country to state its vision on the constitution...other parties have a right to be heard as well but to think that they are equal to Zanu PF is completely irrational" (Shoko, 1999).

At the end of November, the original draft of the Commission's constitution apparently reflected much of the public call for a more limited government, including a provision for a ceremonial presidency and term limits that could force Mugabe to resign before the national elections planned for April 2000. Despite the dominance of Zanu members in the Commission and the boycott of the NCA, the draft reflected the general submissions made in favor of a more limited government, at least in two key areas, limits on presidential terms and no extraordinary provisions for land reform ("Catholics Denounce Mugabe Constitution", 1999). Those who had participated in the process demonstrated their optimism and felt vindicated. But this was to be short-lived.

Mugabe's aides allegedly altered the draft at the eleventh hour and returned a version that was consistent with Zanu's own submission.<sup>39</sup> Far from limiting Mugabe and Zanu's powers, the new draft expanded executive power and wrote in the absolute power of government to repatriate land without compensation, despite that this was unpopular—of the 52 percent of people surveyed by the Commission who supported land repatriation, only 30 percent favored doing so without compensation (Shaw, 2003). The outcry was immediate and went well beyond the NCA; for example, the Catholic Bishop Patrick Mutume (also the head of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe) called the draft “fundamentally flawed” and “simply dangerous” (“Catholics Denounce Mugabe Constitution”, 1999). In the month, 22 members of the Commission resigned in protest over the changes to the draft (Shaw, 2000). By January 2000, any remaining optimism over the process among the NCA and its supporters had evaporated, while the government went on the offensive to promote the draft.

In the run up to the polls in 2000 for a historic yes or no vote on the draft constitution, the stakes had grown enormous. While the level of new civic awareness is hard to measure, it began to be clearer to everyone that the new constitution did not represent the views of the majority. Musician Thomas Mapfumo, strongly supportive of the Chimurenga struggle for independence but increasingly a critic of Zanu, challenged the idea that Zanu had a privileged claim to the legacy of the struggle, "If the people say no during the referendum, then the leaders have to

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<sup>39</sup> I have not found a clear admission of responsibility on how the draft was changed. But, certainly this was the perception.... “But the day it was to have been finalised, commissioners discovered Mugabe's senior aides had secretly altered the draft to preserve his powers and the dominance of the ruling party” “Catholics Denounce Mugabe Constitution.” South African Press Association, 14 December 1999.... “Top officials of the ruling party of President Robert Mugabe have been accused of tampering with the draft constitution to favor the ruling elite. The proposals are to be put to voters for approval at a referendum next month” Shaw, A. “New Zimbabwe constitution fair, says state panel, but doubts linger.” Associated Press Worldstream, 7 January 2000. Changes published in the Government Gazette were termed Corrections and Clarifications and included the introduction of compulsory military service, prohibition on same sex marriages along with provisions for the confiscation of land without compensation Hatchford, J. (2001) 'Lessons on Constitution-Making From Zimbabwe', *Journal of African Law*, 2(45), 1-7.

accept that and take this whole thing back to the drawing board. Only then can the wishes of the people be accommodated" (Viriri, 1999a).

Whether or not Mugabe's team had altered the draft constitution turned out to be immaterial, he had the right to present whatever draft document he wanted to the people for referendum (Hatchford, 2001). This was confirmed by the high court in a challenge brought by two former Commissioners Lupi Mushayakarara and Obey Mudzingwa ("Zimbabwe's Constitution Vote", 2000, MMPZ, 2000),

[The President] is not, in my view, required to put before the voters a constitution approved by the Constitutional Commission. He is entitled to put forward any draft constitution he so wishes to ascertain the views of the voters. It may or may not be considered unwise to make changes to a document produced by a body specifically set up to produce a draft constitution, but it is certainly not unlawful (Hatchford, 2001).

Zanu had never "lost" an election and it could be relatively confident of this one. It saturated the airwaves with advertisements in favor of the constitution and even broadcast six 55-minute documentaries on the Constitutional Commission (MMPZ, 2000). The NCA had already announced its intentions to oppose the constitution on principle but the shenanigans with the last minute changes invigorated its opposition. State-owned media, of course, closed itself off to advertisements for a "No" vote defending its decision by calling the material offensive and unbalanced (Hartnack, 2000). Barred from expressing their views in all but the independent press, NCA members took to the streets. They were aided by white, commercial farmers in the rural areas who printed pamphlets and t-shirts (Raftopoulos, 2009), which would be yet another social fact to be used as proof for Zanu's charges that the white settlers had risen up against Zimbabweans. Still NCA recruited and trained monitors to go to the polls and a grassroots swell was underway. The government appeared confident during the whole period. Having never lost an election, it had put its faith in its formula of unchallengeable rural hegemony and its control of electoral systems but also launched a nation-wide publicity campaign as insurance (Hatchford, 2001).

As such, the euphoria that suffused many Zimbabweans when the "no" vote prevailed at the polls on February 12 and 13, 2000 was less over the averted disaster of the new constitution

than it was about the first taste of success in limiting Zanu power. With only a 20 percent voter turn (about a million and a half people out of a population of 6 million), the constitution had lost out by 54 percent and margins closer to 80 percent in the major urban centers (McCandless, 2006). But the most important victory was the vindication of the NCA's contention that democracy could work in Zimbabwe. As a "key informant" is reported by McCandless:

The "No" vote empowered people to know that the decision is in their hands. How much power the electorate has defines their role in terms of the political and social activities of the country. The electorate is not more important than the ruler. The "No vote changed the thinking of ordinary Zimbabweans—who they are in relation to the Constitution. People realized they can vote ZANU in and out of power. This led to success in the Parliament. It was a process of testing politics" (McCandless, 2006).

Lovemore Madhuku, a constitutional lawyer and member of the NCA wrote the meaning of the "No" vote was a repudiation of the Lancaster House constitution as amended, the partisan constitution-making process, the flawed constitutional draft that goes against the will of the people and an expression of the desire for a real constitution-making process,

The Lancaster House Constitution can only remain the constitution of the country for as long as it is necessary for Zimbabweans to author a new, genuinely democratic constitution. For us in the NCA, there is no question of the Lancaster House Constitution remaining our constitution for longer than is necessary for Zimbabweans to produce a genuinely "homegrown" constitution (Madhuku, 2000).

In the case of ORAP, a democratic culture of empowerment had been the goal, more or less by ignoring the restrictive aspects of the government agenda. The peoples' power protests of 1997 leading into 1998 demanded the end to unresponsive and corrupt government action. People withdrew from the social contract by refusing to work, but while there were calls for the President to step down, the protests did not bring down the government. Now, for the first time, in the Constitutional referendum, civil society had shown its capacity to directly deny Zanu the authority it sought through a No vote.

### **Grasping Defeat from Victory**

If the nationwide strikes and protests that began in 1997 represented civil society's broad opposition to Zanu's unlimited authority and not just against the specific proposed veterans taxes, the rejection of the draft constitution was a positive statement that the people expected

government not just to create participation in name but to respect and abide by its outcomes.

Until this point, resistance had not resulted in such a clear message.

Put differently, we all felt that, though we were “a group of people sitting under a tree”, we had all—as women, youth, churches, workers, etc—over the years, in the organizations whence we came, done sufficient work to justify the confidence that there was a clear civil society mandate to initiate this process (Mutasah, 2010b).

However, not even this victory was enough. While Mugabe had to accept the people's will in the constitutional process because he had agreed to submit to the polls, he did not view the lack of a new constitution as a real check on government power. By July, he passed Constitutional Amendment 16A that gave the government the right to expropriate land without compensation, for which Britain, as the perpetrator of the colonial theft, was required to assume responsibility. The wording returns to the struggle against others who bear the responsibility for imperfect Zimbabwean independence:

- under colonial domination the people of Zimbabwe were unjustifiably dispossessed of their land and other resources without compensation;
- the people consequently took up arms in order to regain their land and political sovereignty, and this ultimately resulted in the Independence of Zimbabwe in 1980;
- the people of Zimbabwe must be enabled to assert their rights and regain ownership of their land.... (Hellum and Derman, 2004) *underlining added*

While the legal justifications for land expropriation were prepared, the continuing revolution was being reasserted by a return to guerilla tactics and with the help of Mugabe's social army, the veterans. Finally, the party could return to its revolutionary roots. And the veterans, the original national heroes, would take the lead. Immediately after the constitutional vote, veterans started moving on to white settler owned farms, beginning with the invasion of Yotham Farm in Masvingo on February 12 and 13, to protest the outcome of the vote on the Constitution (Machipisa, 2000). The number of invasions snowballed and by March 9, over 300 farms were occupied, with one veteran, Reason Mukapira making clear the revolutionary importance of their actions, "We will not be pushed out from here. We have fought for this land before and, if it means we have to lay our lives for it again, so be it" (Mutsakani, 2000). Farm invasions and squatting activities were not an unusual form of protest in the past, given both the



desire for expedited land reform and the fragility of protections for white ownership. These invasions, however, were different from the beginning.

For one thing, veteran land activists felt strongly that the Constitutional vote closed off the path to land justice. The constitution would have empowered the Zanu government to take back the land by fiat, permanently ending the *willing seller/willing buyer* principle<sup>40</sup> that had premised land reform on the gradual buy-out of the settlers. The centrality of commercial agriculture to national income was also a problem because it added a systemic economic incentive against ever taking radical action that could damage economic infrastructure. ZWNLVA issued a press release clarifying that it saw land as the central, revolutionary issue of the constitution and, ominously, that it would take steps to regain its lost power:

The main factor we see as to the NO result is the weakness of the contributing Party's provincial structures, the reluctant mood, the failure to change with the times.... [T]his weakness of the structure has watered down **our revolutionary aspiration** and has proved beyond doubt the decay within us and that necessary and immediate steps should be taken to unify all revolutionary groupings of ZANU(PF) and consolidate the pillars upon which our support and power rests (Dorman, 2003). Emphasis added.

The land invasions in 2000 quickly became widespread and violent both against the owners and farm workers who sought to protect their jobs. In the beginning, the government appeared to take a neutral position in the invasions, as Police Spokesman Wayne Bvudzijena told reporters, "The police are just advising the veterans to move out of the farms, and for the time being some have already started leaving the farms" (Mutsakani, 2000). But it quickly became evident that the invaders were lockstep with the ruling party against the upstart MDC's challenge for political power. Unemployed youth identifying themselves as Zanu mixed with the veterans and formed gangs that were intent on persecuting and accusing farm workers and others of participation in the MDC. Around the invaded farms, discovery or even suspicion of MDC membership was tantamount to a justification for beatings, loss of property, arson and many other

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<sup>40</sup> The 1992 Land Acquisition Act sought to gain land from white farmers on a "willing seller, willing buyer basis." This principle was drawn from the Bill of Rights that was included with the Lancaster House Constitution. Moyo, S. and Skalness, T. (1990) 'Land Reform and Development Strategy in Zimbabwe: State Autonomy, Class and Agrarian Lobby', *Afrika Focus*, **6(3-4)**, 201-42.

acts, which served to reinforce allegiance to Zanu, even if they were not centrally coordinated acts. For example, Simon Dube, a communal farmer from Mbembesi reports:

So I can tell you, it was soon after the arrival of the war vets that this whole noise started. The war vets went around telling people they don't want MDC supporters in the area, In fact, at that time, I didn't know anything about MDC, until they started talking about it (Staunton, 2009).

The resulting violent chaos and anarchy served as a reinvigoration of the Zanu revolution. Party loyalists even christened it as the "third Chimurenga" in which Zanu would set out to eradicate the new opposition in the social sphere, which was a sheep in the wolf's clothing of the colonial aggressor. As Mugabe addressed a crowd of 2000 people at the party congress in Chinhoyi under the slogan, *chave chimurenga* (loosely translated "it is now war"), "Leave us alone to run our affairs. We don't interfere in the affairs of Britain, and no one should interfere in our affairs" (Norman, 2004). With the reinvigorated revolution, Zanu's propaganda resurrected revolutionary symbols and patriotic history. It authored a history manual called the Third Chimurenga and commissioned patriotic, anti-imperial music for the Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation including songs called *Chave Chimurenga*, *Hondo ye Minda* (the struggle for land) and Zimbabwe *ndeyeropa* (Zimbabwe came through bloodshed) (Chiumbu, 2004).

Land hunger and the chance for revenge against the enemies who stood in the way of the revolution (largely the white Zimbabweans and those who had strayed from loyalty to its ideals) brought Zanu party members and the veterans back in line, so that Zanu could keep an arms length as the veterans reminded the population of who was in control. Beatings, intimidation and torture all escalated in the run-up to the national elections in the context of waves of farm occupations.<sup>41</sup> Violence was part of Zanu's social message and, a consistent tactic employed in

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<sup>41</sup> There are many reported incidences. This report of Mashimba Jeremani who endured torture at a site called the Texas Ranch only to discover that his torturer was also his poll agent is illustrative of the raw, political violence that had been unleashed: "Jeremani (22) and two other opposition supporters were allegedly kidnapped on May 31 by Zanu-PF militia and taken to the notorious Texas Ranch, a farm occupied by war veterans and used as an operations centre. There they were tortured for two days. One of the three, Simbarashe Muchenwa, was later hospitalised in Harare in a critical condition. The torturers had held him over burning coals, forced him on to a raging fire and dropped melting plastic over his body" Sayagues, M. "The terror that racked Zimbabwe's poll." Mail and Guardian, 30 June 2000b.

elections and perfected during the *Gukurahundi*, the direct repression is important because it made clear that Zanu's government was in the game to win, at all costs committed to fighting off all enemies as now conveniently epitomized by the MDC. In a sense, the violence was one of the best underground recruiting tools for the MDC. As Simon Dube who had never heard of MDC, quoted above, reports his conversion to the MDC:

So, when they beat me up for the second time, then I joined this new party. First I went to hospital and I was treated and I was helped. Then I went back to settle down at home. Then I decided let me join this party. I am now an MDC supporter but it's my secret (Staunton, 2009, p 218).

The NCA coming off of its win against the constitution would continue and is still in existence today promoting an alternative constitutional process for the country, but it has lost the energy and creativity that marked its early days. A 2005 evaluation conducted on behalf of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) by Cephass Lumina cites the uncertainty over membership and the over-identification with its board chair, a haunting charge for an organization focused on promoting democracy (Lumina, 2009).

We have seen with ORAP and the ZCTU, that one of the main problems of umbrella groups was their difficulty in enumerating and counting members, which points to a chronic weakness of civil society organizations to account for their members. This can be explained by their equally important need to protect and provide refuge as we have seen that membership outside of the party creates suspicion and comes with the danger of violence against person and property.

The new NCA sought in the period leading up to the constitutional referendum to be inclusive in its processes and, thus, to be able to produce a draft constitution that would be vetted by and discussed with a broad base of Zimbabwean civil society. But it would also suffer from the same vagueness around membership that afflicted many organizations including political parties. The report bluntly criticizes the lack of membership accounting and the tight identification with and control that the chairman exerts over the organization. A picture emerges of an organization that has continued the activities of civic education for the constitutional process without the critical resonance with civil society that marked its initiation.

As many institutions, both commercial and non-profit have disappeared in the wave of economic misery that culminated in 2008 with the final abandonment of the national currency, the continued existence of the NCA is a testimony to the relevance of its stalled mission. Yet, it is also a memorial to the promise of the people power from which it sprang. It is like an institution in stasis that awaits the next opening of civil society.

### **Conclusion: Still Waiting for a Constitution**

In 2012, Zimbabwe is still without a constitution although Zanu is pressing for rapid agreement on a new constitution or for the MDC to agree on holding elections without it, as a new constitution is one of the conditions for elections to end a makeshift unity government with the MDC. The enthusiasm around the NCA was fueled by the context of anger and dissatisfaction with the political regime, even though its origins began before the December 1997 demonstrations. The founders saw it as a way to channel frustration in a constructive direction that could re-create the political regime from the ground up.

The interest in the constitution shows the awareness within civil society that the agreement between government and its citizens needed to be re-constructed. This is born out by the focus on civic education and dialogue that would connect people to a process of constitution building. The NCA was emerging as an effort to create a bridge to political ideas, purposely not contesting party politics directly while attempting to get at the constitutional causes behind political corruption and malfeasance, namely a formal constitution and informal constitutional culture that enabled the political class to be sheltered from the demands of its own civil society.

The NCA was built on lessons learned by a broad coalition organized around labor, church, human rights, and economic and political objectives. Each of these groups came to the table because they had come to believe that the Zanu government was one of the main impediments that stood in the way of realizing progress against their objectives and had begun to see the problem as the corruption of the party and its practice of squelching public participation in its policies. The balance of strategies between the promotion of civic education and dialogue

around the constitution and the work to construct a new constitution demonstrates a commitment not just to the introduction of a new and better social contract but to a process to engage as many stakeholders as possible and arrive at a better end by incorporating the diverse perspectives of the governed. The experience of the NCA shows that the ultimate success of civil society to recreate the constitutional order was weakened by:

1) The contradiction of representation

Simply put the creation and execution of a new social order required that the two legitimate parties come to the table. While the NCA, certainly counted on a broad base of support, it lacked the organizational capacity and the legitimacy to engage all stakeholders of a new constitutional order in the process. Despite the idealism of the founders, it is not clear that an NCA success in drafting and submitting a constitution could have been legitimate enough to be put to the people.

On the other hand, the government could not have carried out its own constitutional process in the manner it did without recourse to the ideas and processes pioneered by the NCA. Furthermore, the NCA's civic education efforts and watchdog role over the government-led process provided important pressure for a more democratic vision and was informed by members that were engaged in on-going civic education efforts.

2) Divided Civil Society

The revolutionary struggle against the colonial forces that enslaved Zimbabwean society had not been won and was not as anachronistic as many believed. The veterans had demonstrated that the main problem with the government was that it had become self-serving and counter-productive to the revolutionary goals that should have resulted in the retaking of Zimbabwean resources and customs. In this way, the intensification of occupations directly after the constitutional defeat was a vote for an alternative constitutional order in which the largely economic remnants of colonial structure would be eradicated along with the perceived un-African imports such as homosexuality and

universal human rights (that protected settler property). While the veterans and their supporters also saw the government as the problem, it was its abysmal track record on delivering results in this revolutionary battle that motivated them.

### 3) The Dependency Conundrum

The NCA and the government were interdependent on each other throughout the constitutional process. In order to carry out its objectives, the NCA required more than the minimal conditions of the rule of law and the enabling institutional framework—registration, oversight, funding, etc. that are necessary for associative action—it needed to be able to access a large constituency and carry out a broad social dialogue, all of which were both directly restricted by the government through limiting its access to media (concurrently persecuting private media channels and disciplining groups like ORAP that could have facilitated its access) and challenged by the creation of a parallel constitutional process that was enabled to better accomplish the NCA's objectives. Likewise the government relied on the NCA not only to elucidate the participatory conditions that would legitimate its process but also to promote the passage of the results, a condition that it ignored to its own detriment in the end.

Zanu's adoption of the same approaches, albeit with an apparently predetermined end, demonstrates not only the co-option of the NCA constitutional process by making it a redundant, non-representative (because not elected) effort but its recognition of the power it thought it would regain by harnessing the justice creating values and social objectives of civil society.

The resounding “no” vote was a shock to Zanu because it did not recognize the limits to which it could control and dominate the political dialogue. The referendum was the first time it lost in a national election and it demonstrated Zanu did not have an iron hold on Zimbabwean civil society. Bruised and battered, it would, thus, return to its hegemonic base and withdraw its support for anyone who did not clearly identify with the party base. By exploiting the veterans, it shored up its own hegemonic power by widening an inner gulf dividing groups arranged around valid social objectives within civil society. Its exertion of hegemonic power through the “passive”

employment of violence and terror in the land takeovers and persecution of MDC members threw society into an orderly chaos. Combined with the removal of support from all other elements of civil society, Zanu succeeded in weakening the capacity of civil society organizations to mobilize people's power against it. But it also interrupted the decade-long process of debate and action that had resulted in a consensus for increasing democratic accountability and participation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: PEOPLE'S POWER...PSSST, A PROCESS

*In terms of completely dismantling the political regime in Zimbabwe, civil society clearly failed. Without the cooperation of the veterans, the people's power revolution and attempts to recreate the social contract that followed left an exploitable loophole for the use of social power to keep the political regime alive. Furthermore, the launch of another political party to contend with Zanu in the one-party state it had created brought the struggle over the social contract back to the environment that Zanu controlled. This story of the struggle between civil society and the state points to three civil society strategies to counter political power: 1) constructing political alternatives within the existing regime, 2) mass withdrawal of support from the authority of the regime and 3) reconstruction of the social contract. Despite the terrible destruction of social and economic fabric of the country by the political struggle of the 2000s, the transformative process of people's power offers a glimmer of hope for the future of the country.*

In 2010 on a research visit to Zimbabwe, I was worried I might have trouble. I had heard rumors about the government turning away researchers and persecuting Zimbabweans who make contact with them. My worries turned out to have been unfounded. I soared easily through customs and found that I was welcomed with courtesy and warmth.

Amidst decayed infrastructure and traumatized people, real life continued; I attended a wedding with all the trappings--dancing, nice clothes and ceremony. I found time to go to my old favorite places, like an art workshop and the craft vendors in front of the Bulawayo City Hall who sell the beautiful breadbaskets and woodwork made throughout the region. But the absence of government services was visible everywhere I looked. The end to trash removal in the suburbs of Bulawayo where I stayed had left dark scars in the spaces where people burn their trash, conversations focused on mysterious and sometimes outrageously imaginative bills from the public utilities, and getting around was a challenge of navigating dilapidated sidewalks brimming with people or negotiating a thumbnail of space on public transit. The white population, which was once quite noticeable even if it did seem separate and aloof, was mostly but not entirely gone. A friend and I passed a nursing home that had been used by white seniors; "the only ones who are still here," she remarked, "are those who had no family or no way of getting out." But some white



Zimbabweans were certainly still there; I caught glimpses of their faces shielded behind tinted windshields or stoically shopping in the supermarkets now brimming with goods from South Africa.

On the bus from Bulawayo to Harare, we passed endless fires burning in the bush, some of which was once active farms. I thought, perhaps, the fires got out of hand from local trash disposers. “Not so,” said an officer of an environmental NGO with whom I met in Harare, “people set the fires purposely to catch animals for food.” With the loss of farm jobs, he told me, many rural families have taken to hunting. He also told me that the discovery of diamonds could help these people, if all the income did not simply disappear into the black hole of the government. Later, I met with a friend who said she was working with small groups of village women who wanted to mine these diamonds for the benefits of their communities. In the same conversation, we talked about the Zanu’s desire to hold elections as soon as possible, apparently confident that the time for the Unity Government (a temporary political marriage between Zanu and the MDC meant to calm tensions since 2008) was at an end. “We are tired of politics and elections,” she told me, “please let there be no elections.”

The stark realities of a world of diminished political authority are grim, perhaps not as definitive as the nasty, brutish and short alternative that Hobbes suggested but certainly as the conditions disintegrate, the breakdown in social and economic infrastructure becomes as much a tragedy as the political violence and turmoil. This is politics as a train wreck, nobody chooses it and rationally everyone seeks to avoid it.

The breakdown, as explored in the last chapters, was accompanied by the dissonance between the political regime and the social objectives of its citizens who in trying to build democracy, human rights and accountable government no longer believed that the regime constituted by Zanu and Mugabe and developed from the schema of an inherited constitution could serve the people. Zanu’s insistence on maintaining a monopoly on government and continuing the pursuit of its revolutionary goals by eradicating internal and external enemies for many became the repressive force to be opposed.

Zanu's revolutionary objectives, particularly repatriation of land and black empowerment, had power to the extent that people both believed Zanu was actually pursuing them and were willing to make sacrifices for this greater good. In 1997 only the veterans, unemployed youth and others for whom Independence requires return of the land to the hands of the authentic African owners were enthusiastic about this agenda. In the years after the constitutional referendum, their willingness to force others to align with Zanu made opposition dangerous. The resulting physical and social abuse coupled with the economic hardship of a rapidly retracting economy encouraged many to leave the country.

From the beginning, the conflict was not monolithic; there were diverse ends within civil society. Worker's rights, development and poverty alleviation were three we explored in the work of ORAP, ZCTU and the ZCC. In fact, Zanu was quite outspoken in criticizing the rights-based frameworks of these organizations as an importation of a false individualistic universalism from the West, serving its purpose in driving home the authenticity of its revolutionary ideas against the imposed, imperialistic values that had planted a flag on Zimbabwean consciousness. This phase of political hegemony is still going on. To mark his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday in February 2012, Mugabe exhorted Zimbabwean youth to resist Western values, most particularly homosexuality, a stable meme in his battle against the West, "You must go to the head of the imperialist and knock out his brain..." beware of "any love for money than is greater than your political conscience" ("Zimbabwe president, marking his 88th birthday, tells the young to shun Western values, gays", 2012)

Zanu's fight against so-called imperialist values has little changed over the last decade because it provides a moral basis for party power. For example, The Herald's blunt allegation of the external control of the MDC in 2003 is a raw attempt to tar the MDC with the burden of the West's imperialist intentions,

On its part, the MDC has spent virtually all of its troubled political life entrenching itself as a violent [sic], an anti-Zimbabwe political party created and funded by this country's enemies who do not want to see peace, unity and the black majority taking over ownership and control of the country's natural resources, notably land. The MDC has not wanted peace in Zimbabwe and hence if you look back to 1999 you will find endless examples of MDC parliamentarians and officials threatening peace in the hope of

politically profiting from the resultant instability. The same is true regarding national unity, mention it to the MDC and they run away preaching ethnic divisions because they do not want unity ("When will the opposition MDC become Zimbabwean", 2003).

While the hyperbolic allegations of this article should be taken with a grain of salt, the MDC certainly did emerge from a history of threatening peace (if civic protest and strikes are seen as breaking the peace) and rejecting the ruling party's vision of unity (if unity=supporting Zanu). The rejection of Zanu's objectives, or the disbelief that it really intended to accomplish anything outside of enriching the political elite through patronage and corruption, fueled the people's power moment. Zanu's response amounted to a return to the stalled revolution as if to say political corruption was meaningless as long as Zimbabwe still suffered from the fake imperialist values that keep it in a state of dependency. The moment for withholding political authority gave way to the exigencies of survival as everything broke down over the next decade. The government manipulated and controlled the country's resources most importantly overseeing the wholesale destruction of the agricultural industry as white farmers were forced out by often-violent occupations and fled the country.

Remaking the fundamental constitutional agreements of society is at times a nasty and brutish process. We can see, in the case of Zimbabwe, that the pressure for change actually accelerated Zanu and the veterans' use of violence and coercion to resolve their issues over land ownership. The emergence of a viable opposition returned the guerrillas to the trenches in a social war as a more powerful force than an army of mercenaries. The historical record of the 80s and 90s leaves much room to doubt that Zanu had used its fiery revolutionary symbols and rhetoric for more than window dressing. But these weapons were stockpiled and used effectively in the 2000s to jettison the fake baggage of democracy Zanu had lugged throughout the first two decades.

Gone was Zanu's support for the institutions of an open society (as newspapers, NGOs and the judiciary were all attacked) and gone was the pragmatism, racial tolerance and patience that had been central to the Zimbabwean alternative. Balancing its revolutionary objectives with tolerance for other objectives—protecting the economic engine of the agrarian economy by

leaving capitalist forces in tact, kowtowing to universalist rights, propping up a democracy that was really one-party rule and expanding the illusion of independence within a clientelist structure—had not worked any way if we measure success against Zanu’s efforts to consolidate and monopolize political power.

### **Did Zimbabwe have a people’s power revolution?**

For many political analysts, people’s power is significant to the extent that it results in a revolution that succeeds in unseating a regime and establishing the power of new political contenders. Samuel P. Huntington defines revolution as “rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activity and policies” (Huntington, 1994). If there is such a thing as a people’s power revolution some obvious, significant diversions from this conception of revolution, such as the commitment to non-violence and the role of values and myths, come to mind.

The commitment to non-violence in the simple terms of not challenging the government with arms is clearly prevalent throughout the three periods of people’s power in Zimbabwe we have explored. Non-violence is central to the conception of people’s power pursued by ORAP through grassroots empowerment, by ZCTU through mass, peaceful protest and by the NCA through citizen dialogue and civic education. These strategies are purposefully non-violent and would not seem to fit Huntington’s definition. But if we understand that non-violence in revolutions is itself a social objective for a better social order, we can assume Jack Goldstone’s position that non-violence may be the only path to democratic improvement, “only where revolutions are relatively non-violent, and leave no major counter-revolutionary threats or ethnic conflicts in their wake, is their hope for a democratic outcome to the revolutionary struggle” (Goldstone, 1994).

But what are we to make of revolution as the rapid change of dominant values and myths? Zimbabweans did demand a widespread change from the corruption of Zanu’s own promises for expanding the general welfare and independence of Zimbabwean society that had already become part of the political landscape. Their mass protests expressed the frustration of

civil society that government was not living up to the democratic values of participation and accountability. Civil society was motivated to address and alter the repressive conditions that limit or restrict action (the dependency of communities, the burden of taxes on workers) by attempting to restructure the formal political space. It was clear that government did not live up to its promises and systematically violated its citizens' trust. In the expression of people's power, we see a movement for re-establishing the order based on the values of democratic limits on political power and increased citizen participation. Moving into the constitutional review period, NCA attempted to channel people's power into the creation of a new constitution based on these values through civic education, consensus building and a dialogue on what government should be. In other words, civil society did seek fundamental change in the values and myths of government through a revolutionary process aimed at establishing a new constitutional order.

In Charles Tilly's framework, the important units of revolutionary action are the regime, contenders and the polity (Tilly, 1973). The revolution plays out in terms of who is able to mobilize resources for a cause most effectively. There is a certain utility in defining the contenders for political power in Zimbabwe as the union leaders and business interests backed up by middle class interests, as Bond and Manyana do in Zimbabwe's plunge. While this simplifies the analysis and makes it fit into a framework of pro and anti-neoliberal contenders, however, it obscures the larger-scale resistance to the particular regime by a *diversity* of actors who are in no way differentiated by a commitment to neo-liberal economics or the *status quo*. Grappling with leaderless diversity goes back to the very different conceptions of civil society as a site for reinforcing social control or an expanding area of social action. In terms of people's power, I fail to see how it is helpful to collapse this diversity into a class interest or specific set of interests.

Tilly does propose a resolution in centering analysis around social movements that channel claims into sustained campaigns, a variety of political action, and representations of the strength of their claims (which he calls WUNC, for worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment). From this perspective, the Zimbabwean "movement" was nascent in the grassroots empowerment work of NGOs and the protests, perhaps, finally coalescent in the creation of the

aply named Movement for Democratic Change, which was conceptualized as a political party. It is worth considering the quote from the Daily Herald News with which Tilly opens his study of Social Movements,

...various interest sectors of society will be bound together by one common grievance which in most cases will be the commonly perceived **lack of democracy in a specific political setting. This has been particularly the case within the last two decades of the South African antiapartheid struggle and more relevantly in the last four years in the Zimbabwean situation.** The only significant difference between the Zimbabwean situation and the antiapartheid social movement in South Africa is that the former tends to be less defined and less focused. In fact, in Zimbabwe people can sometimes be forgiven for thinking that the social movement has been split (Tilly, 2004) – emphasis added.

In many ways the social movement is as amorphous a structure as civil society because it still lacks a hierarchical order, however, the conceptualization has the heuristic benefit of being defined by an overarching aim such as democracy, women, rights or the environment. It also makes sense to speak of leaders within a movement as the organizations and individuals who speak on its behalf and contend directly with political power. In this way, various organizations of civil society contributed their members, staff and supporters to the *pro-democracy* movement in Zimbabwe and were adept to differing extents at mobilizing or employing people's power. A movement is not the same as people's power but is a moment when a clear direction emerges from it. Exploring the content of the Zimbabwean crisis we have seen such moments in the development of grassroots democracy, the strikes and the no-vote on the constitution.

Clearly, the MDC did emerge out of civil society as a new contender for political power only when people had learned that they could not meet their objectives through other methods. But Morgan Tsvangirai along with his business, civil society and other backers flounders with the message—since the old values and myths were clearly still a powerful moral base and the capitalist, neo-liberal framework could hardly be championed (Bond and Manyanya, 2002).

One way of explaining this is that Zanu was able to manipulate these flaws because the consolidation of social objectives behind a homegrown formulation of democracy had not fully coalesced. Instead it could mobilize social forces against the same old meme, the continuing injustice of land ownership not only because it was the most accessible but because it could

demand sufficient loyalty. Revolution continued to be Zanu's central organizing principle and in terms of power tactics it could effectively counter the people's power of civil society by igniting an equal and opposite fervor within civil society itself. Zanu was ineffective in doing this until the post constitutional period seemed to confirm that the revolutionary land goals of the veterans and others were stymied underplayed by the no vote.

So was there a people's power revolution and, if the Zimbabwean struggle against its perceived corrupt authoritarian government is an example, in what did it succeed and in what did it fail?

#### End of neo-patrimonialism?

Larry Diamond in his 2008 book, *The Spirit of Democracy*, reviewed the prospects for democratic transitions around the world. He comes back to the mainstream view that enduring neo-patrimonial realities challenge the development of democracy in Africa, as Michael Bratton has put forward. Such systems are characterized by the charismatic rule of a single individual or group who reinforce their rule through a system of clients who benefit in terms of material goods and status by providing their support. Clients in Zimbabwe became dependent on the state following Independence through political patronage and in terms of drought relief, emergency aid, educational and health assistance—a myriad of ways through which Zanu bought loyalty as the fount of resources needed for survival and basic necessities. The *social contract* under such a system is, therefore, not made between the government as an abstract entity and civil society but between actual people, as epitomized in Robert Mugabe, and those who are in a dependent position to the state. The system functions relatively effectively to the extent that the losers—those who do not receive patronage—have little redress to institutions and are kept in their subordinate position through the loyalty of those who would protect their own access and benefits.

Zimbabwean people's power emerged in direct opposition to neopatrimonial politics ("*He has exploited us for 17 years. He must go*") because the population understood the transfer of resources to a privileged few to be unfair and to this extent the patronage system was a social

injustice that stood in the way of achieving a just society through the diverse lens of development, human rights, church and community associations. As we saw, in the ORAP case, social objectives are adaptable, oriented around what is practical and desirable. It is possible to build pockets of fairness even within a neo-patrimonial regime, as ORAP did for 20 years. Even clients who benefit from the largesse of the regime measure their own benefits in terms of the accomplishment of their social objectives. In this way, for example, many human rights, democracy, university and union activists in Zimbabwe were able to pursue their goals because of the benefits they or their families had received from the Zanu-led state.

But patronage systems were recognized in Zimbabwe as the central problem in terms of corruption, self-dealing and the growing understanding that these transfers of resources were not free but had to be taken from society as a whole. They came as taxes and levies on the backs of the poor and the workers who could see their real capacities diminishing. Thus, the struggle against neo-patrimonialism had in Zimbabwe the contours of a tax rebellion.

Widespread grievance over taxes was a conduit for expressing dissent to the systems of political patronage. This bears out in the editorials, the protests and the discussions that focused on the unjust way in which the taxes were put forward to benefit the veterans and not the injustice of taxes in general. Thus, the protests were not merely a psychological expression of dissatisfaction, but a shared rational objective to make government accountable to all its citizens. Civil society does not merely have the capacity to exert people's power; it reproduces ideas of legitimate action through the educational process of pursuing social objectives. But people's power in Zimbabwe was tactically directed against the injustice of patronage politics, not taking all grievances as worthy of a revolution and a re-thinking of the social contract.

#### Civil society and political neutrality

The idea that Zimbabwean civil society was ever apolitical or neutral about politics, I think, should be seen as pure rubbish. Even where organizations such as ORAP attempted to assume an apolitical position, it was for tactical political reasons and not because they had reinterpreted their missions. While the Zimbabwean regime, in the Webberian sense had a



monopoly on violence and control over the bureaucratic infrastructure and conditions for social organization, it eventually had a responsibility for the greater good in which civil society organizations are participants. Civil society's withdrawal of support from the regime in the course of pursuing social objectives was based on a learned moral objection to the political structure in which associations found themselves. Zanu was not the engine for the values and myths that underpinned its own political institutions despite its attempts to close off and inoculate itself from social processes at work in its own civil society and, thus, had no choice—if it was committed to its survival as a revolutionary party—except to return to its base with the veterans that shared a significant portion of its core values.

If we accept that the participants in a people's power revolution share the aspiration for a change in the dominant values and myths of society but in a particular limited way that does not have the warlike features of violence and contenders for the control of the formal political institutions, then it would seem fair to say that the events of the late 1990s were in fact a peoples power revolution. But, we have one more issue. Who won?

### **Who won the Zimbabwean People's Power Revolution?**

Everyone suffered from the outcomes of the 1990s protests. Over the 2000 decade, Zimbabwe registered a painful deflation of national capacity and a hemorrhaging of economic and social health. This pain registered in the decline of support for democracy. By 2004 the Afrobarometer survey found that support for democracy as a form of government for the country had fallen from two-thirds of the population in 1999 to one half. At the same time trust in Mugabe and Zanu had risen since 1999 to just under 50 percent. The survey finds the most important factor in this rebound for Zanu was political propaganda. "Since 2000, the government has mounted a comprehensive campaign to revive the nationalist fervor of the liberation war" and "...of these two strategies of political control persuasion works better than force.... However crude, the government's nationalist appeals have apparently induced numerous Zimbabweans—especially older, less educated elements in rural areas—to accept the political status quo"

(Chikwanha et al., 2004, p 29). While it is important to understand the fear and exhaustion from the years of political infighting that followed the launch of the MDC, the ensuing rejection of democracy suggests that the people's power movement of the 1990s not only failed to dislodge an authoritarian government but also lost key support for the process of democratization.

Nevertheless, some feel that Zanu registered a decisive victory in the war of ideas. For example, in a recent interview with Lance Guma on South African radio, Blessing Miles Tendai defended the assertion in his new book, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe, 'Politics, Intellectuals and the Media*, that the reason for the failure of the MDC to take over in Zimbabwe was its inability compared with Zanu to advance ideas (Guma, 2010). Zanu, he argues, exploited society's demand for land and patriotism, while the MDC focused on the strategies of ending dictatorship and expanding democracy. The ideas must exist before Zanu and the veterans can use violence to impose them, "So the ideas have to be there, these constructions have to be there for the violence then to become operationalised so the two go together, they closely rely and that's something that's been missed" (Guma, 2010).

Tendai is right; ideas do matter. But the vision of a democratic society in which the government is accountable to its people is also a significant idea that showed its mass appeal and resonance in the events leading up to the year 2000. The failure is not, thus, only of the MDC's ability to articulate. The failure is that a genuine people's power movement despite its embrace of a diversity of opinions could be channeled into a polarizing, hegemonic war between two opposing sides; reminiscent of what Richard Day calls the "hegemony of the idea of hegemony."<sup>42</sup> The creation of the MDC as an opposition political party ready to engage on the

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<sup>42</sup> For Day, civil society is itself a dangerous forms because it is "presumes and reinforces both the state and corporate forms through the theory of autonomous spheres of action." The challenge is to break out of the authoritarian mold of set by the idea of the state itself, "Once we recognize that actually existing state non-statist societies are organized societies rather than reversions to or remnants of, a nasty and brutish 'state of nature,' we can begin to see their traditions offer alternatives to the hegemony of hegemony." Day, R. J. F. (2005) *Gramsci is dead : anarchist currents in the newest social movements*, London ; Ann Arbor, MI; Toronto, Pluto Press; Between the Lines.

very political playing field that was just rejected by civil society reduced the struggle for democracy to the faulty political rules and constitution that were central to the problem to begin with. People's power was hemmed into narrow moral space in which democracy was pitted against land justice. So people's power could not bring down the regime because a) civil society was divided internally over national objectives and b) the ruling party was capable of exploiting this split.

Thus the people's power movement in Zimbabwe was countered by an equally authentic social power of veterans that were committed to Mugabe/Zanu because they had never ceased to share its objectives. Organizations like ORAP, ZCTU and the NCA had come to a practical demand for democracy, but they did not or could not articulate a democratic vision that resonated with the veterans. The capitalist, largely white, class in Zimbabwe had shown that the status quo ownership of the means of production was not going to advance the position of the poor—especially by 1997 when even those with jobs were struggling. As Bond and Manyanya argue, unless the MDC provided a believable blueprint for economic transformation, it could not hope to unify society into a struggle against Zanu. The exceptional division of the veterans was, thus, a serious flaw in the power of civil society.

As the government collusion in the land occupations and the violence against the remaining white farmers in the country came to a head in the 2000s, the world witnessed a re-emergence of racist politics. The writing was finally on the wall for the white farmers; they were no longer welcome, at least not as owners of productive farmland. Their continuing control of agriculture and identity as outsiders gave Zanu an enemy in the white population, one that could be linked by inference to the dangerous external enemies who would stanch the revolution and exploit the country. In this way, veterans, Zanu members and unemployed youth would feel justified in dismantling the remaining economic anachronism of white power, even though it hurt the farm workers, the largely agrarian economy and everyone else caught in the turmoil.

MDC members were targeted and victimized by direct violence because they were declared stooges of the internal and external enemy that sought domination over the country.

Faced with the organized violence that Zanu knew all too well how to employ, MDC was ill-prepared to respond and ended up being accused of copying some of the same top-down strategies of Zanu (Raftopoulos, 2006, McCandless, 2006).<sup>43</sup> Mugabe knew what he was doing when he strengthened the party's link to veterans in 1997. To reassert authority, he also needed to reinvigorate Zanu's centrality in the social contract. As revolutionary fighters, the veterans reproduced and reinforced the liberation struggle for their society. Just as the interests of Gramsci's Italian aristocrats were threatened by the growing power of the capitalists, so were the promised social and economic entitlements of the veterans under threat by the new social aspirations of civil society.<sup>44</sup>

The veterans were not a part of the people's power movement for democracy; they may have constituted an alternative land justice movement although in lieu of people's power they apparently chose a form of more violent persuasion. While the unresolved claims to land were not forgotten by organizations such as ORAP and ZCTU and the NCA, they had become secondary to rewriting political power. So a broad-based people's power movement in civil society can be countered by powerful competing social objectives. When this force is highly consonant with the regime, it comprises the army of troops in the battlefield of values and violence that re-exert control over the population, even while they cannot re-create the social contract.

One can wonder if organizations like ORAP, ZCTU and the NCA had built bridges to the veterans, had, as Goma suggests, been as good about ideas as Zanu was, whether the ensuing crisis actually needed to happen. The question is hypothetical but it seems fair to say that this

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<sup>43</sup> For the most part, the MDC and its allies in civil society have been committed to non-violent strategies but faced with the overwhelming capacity of Zanu to employ both state and non-state methods of violence against them, the direct competition for political power creates an exclusionary playing field on which survival has dictated violence as a defense.

<sup>44</sup> Veterans, of course, are not the only Zimbabweans who participated in the struggle or contributed to the end of the settler state as Makumbe sums up the hegemonic liberation strategy, "The resort to the politics of the liberation struggle is, therefore, a deceptive design aimed at hoodwinking the citizenry to think that no other political grouping can run the affairs of the nation in a better or more democratic manner" Makumbe, J. M. (2009) *Zimbabwe : survival of a nation*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa.

strategy of broadening the democratic tent had already been tried by political parties and failed. The expression of the desire for an open society based on the rule of law had to be put forth as an alternative against the more than two decades in which Zanu had honed its message and, such a thing, had little to offer those who saw the land ownership structure of society as the major issue of injustice.

But this leads to another hypothetical, what if the anti-Zanu alternative had not been narrowly channeled into the creation of the MDC? Perhaps, the non-partisan power of civil society was abandoned too early, before it had succeeded in bringing down Zanu. Had Zanu ever shown it could share power in the past? Neither the constitution nor the historical record could give any inkling of a hope that Zanu would share political power—so why try again? The creation of an alternative party may have been the ultimate gift to Zanu. By so doing, leaders moved opposition onto the political field, while the Zanu regime remained in place. The historical parallels are remarkable. For example, the liberation war in which Zanu, Zapu and others took to the bush to challenge the Rhodesian government was interrupted by the Lancaster House settlement that provided for transference of power without achieving the revolutionary outcomes for the return of land and resources; now, the MDC would hold Zanu in place by opposing it on the political battlefield without winning the battle against corruption or the replacement of a faulty constitution.

Internally, the land occupiers gave Zanu an arm (just as the 5 Brigade had done during the *Gukurahundi*) that could reach into the rural base and terrorize all opposition. Those with MDC cards or suspected of having MDC cards were regularly singled out and terrorized and abused. “Whatever one’s precise characterisation, there can be little doubt that the invasions were associated with intense and widespread intimidation of MDC activists, with the party recording the deaths of 31 of its supporters in the run up to the election” (Alexander, 2000). The veterans and other land invaders functioned as both a material and ideological disciplining force that would keep opposition weak. The MDC, however hard it tried, would be trapped at a disadvantage because if it fought against the land justice issue it would show itself an enemy of

the veterans and if it fought for the land justice issue its own message of tolerance, rights and rule of law would be undermined.

Before we move forward any further on how civil society failed it is good to explore also what it accomplished. Up until the pivotal 2001 “No” vote victory against the draft constitution, Zimbabwean civil society was successful in creating spaces that substituted for a government by the people as part of a practical process of reproducing the democratic values of traditional society in concepts such as *Zenzele*. We see this first in the creation by ORAP of a practical grassroots democratic methodology, organizational structure, mobilizing philosophy and program. Its approach, used the structures of government to advance its own goals, and thereby created pressure for government to serve its citizens. ORAP is only a microcosm, one development movement among many. But we see its embrace of the democratic ideal resonate with the broad appeal of the tax protests led by the ZCTU in 1997.

In 1997 we see a change in strategy. Civil society organizations had learned that Zanu’s commitment to democracy—or to seeking the good for all people—was a hollow shell, hardly a new idea but one that galvanized into open rebellion against Zanu’s attempt to spread the burden for the theft of veteran’s funds across society. In the resulting demonstration of people’s power—Mugabe abandoned many of the planned taxes—people, including the legislators themselves, clearly demanded for the leadership to change. Civil society, thus, succeeded to strengthen and build a strong Zimbabwean conception of democracy and even to force the political leadership to act increasingly in concordance with democratic values. The uproar within the Zanu party meeting in 1997 was a clear sign that some, if not many, Zanu members themselves shared this anger over the democratic deficit. Having withheld their authority, many of the same civil society organizations and activists came together in an attempt to re-create the hollow democracy into something that better serves the interest of the people. The constitutional movement convened under the guidance of ZCC was also a positive outcome in the transformative process.

Still the movement’s accomplishments in giving meaning to a democratic Zimbabwe were insufficient to overcome the centrality of land reform (not democracy) to the next stage of

Zimbabwean Independence; as Guma points out this construction of land injustice was an idea that already had currency. In this way, we tell two equally valid stories of Zimbabwe side-by-side; one the tale of ending colonialism in which the original stripping of a people of its land and resources continues to impact on their lives and the other, the story of the quest of civil society to remake the political sphere as a more democratic space. In 1997, it looked to many Zimbabweans like the latter tale provided the ground for a shared cause against the state. But the cause, so to speak, was never shared with the veterans. Since Zimbabweans as a whole were called upon to shoulder the burden of the veterans, the 1997 tax revolt cannot be understood apart from the veteran's cause.

Even as the land has been subsequently taken over in the country, the contours and shapes of injustice are shifting again and the possibility of resuming the people's power revolution is taking on new forms. Civil society is immersed in a new struggle for rights, democracy and the rule of law that will not go away, such as in the efforts of my acquaintance who has weathered the last decade and redirected her energies to mobilizing village women to earn income from mining, one of the primary sources the government is currently doing its best to direct into official coffers. So, from one perspective, civil society did not fail. It has forced the confrontation of the contradictions inherent in the continuing struggle and, whatever emerges on the broken bones of the Zimbabwean people's power revolution, will have to contend with a new civil society that will take the events of the last fifteen years as a new social fact.

### **Possible Global Implications**

We have explored the contours of the emergence of people's power in Zimbabwe, hoping that it could tell us something about the relationship between political authority and civil society. In the course of reviewing the roles and aims of civil society groups, three moments of people's power emerged in the Zimbabwean context:

- 1) Promoting alternatives within the political regime
- 2) Withdrawing support for political authority

### 3) Attempting to reconstruct the social contract

At the risk of over-generalizing the Zimbabwean experience, it is worth noting that these moments correspond to a changing structural relationship of civil society and the political regime. In the first stage, civil society accepted the control of the State and supported its capacity but focused largely on creating alternatives for those who are marginalized by the political regime.

ORAP's alternative was the creation of an alternative democratic space in which marginalized, largely rural communities through social dialogue and local action would hold real power over their lives without challenging state power. Human rights organizations, women's organizations, unions and religious organizations in Zimbabwe also pursued alternative political strategies interacting in a diversity of ways that did not come up directly against Zanu's power. By not directly opposing government, they were able to carve out a refuge to construct grassroots, citizen power as a rational strategy to rectify oppression and serve the needs of marginalized communities. As it emerged in Zimbabwe, we can see that the idea of democracy was given shape in the safety of this refuge.

In the next stage of people's power the contradiction between people's values and the regime expressed itself in outrage over the arbitrary imposition of the will of the minority, as in the anti-tax strikes and demonstrations that rocked Zimbabwe. While protests in the street were by far the most visible moment in the expression of people's power, they were merely the tip of the iceberg in which people's real lived experiences had taught them that they share a common aspiration for a better political order. The protests were characterized by demands for change, impatience and disbelief. A yearning for real change spread like a wildfire across society and attention was focused on removing the offending political order.

Finally, in a third stage, civil society organizations sought to remake the political order to better serve the public. But with an established government in place, they face the real problem of who represents civil society. Government easily managed to convince even some advocates for change that it was the more legitimate site of a participatory constitution making process.



None of these elements of people's power are new. But seeing them emerge as part of a process of people acting together as a civil society is worth emphasizing to confirm the importance of civil society as a site for the legitimization of political authority. Such a view sees the acceptance of the social contract not taking place in some remote, possibly theoretical, and abstract moment of history. It finds order emerging from the messy and complicated processes of association and interaction. Civil society then imparts authority to its government as a process in which people and communities must learn by confronting actual injustice in their own societies. It is not any repressive constraints they fight against, it is those experienced in the path to meeting their objectives—the imposition of external agendas, unjust taxes, etc.

Civil society and the political regime are not completely separate. While each is organized around different logics they fundamentally rely on each other along the dimensions of control, support and the mutual construction of the values and meanings that flow through society. In this way, both hold power over the political objectives of society and are able to influence each other. People's power can be countered by the power of the regime in a condition of mutual dependency—the supportive conditions, in fact, proposed by most followers of Putnam and de Tocqueville including made comparative political theorists and aid agencies. While this is a messy relationship based on ongoing processes, it warrants some general observations.

**Under appropriate conditions, the expression of people's power as a concerted and effective force of civil society amounts to a withdrawal of support that can lead to the downfall of a regime**

As we see in Zimbabwe, the narrowing of the political space into a one-party state began soon after Independence. This was accepted because many Zimbabweans respected Zanu (or Mugabe) as a legitimate leader of the revolution and they saw concrete gains from the expansion of social services. Not all social objectives could be met in this context; but many could. The withdrawal of support from political authority is not the same as the absence of support for the government. It is that moment as we saw in 1997 when the reconstitution of the regime becomes

the shared goal of civil society, which continues, nevertheless, to respect the authority of government in general.

It is interesting how far some have gone to try to exclude from civil society all the unwanted elements that are squeaky and uncomfortable. A somewhat common term “uncivil society” refers to the undemocratic forces that would remake society in their own image and do not care a whit for the objectives of others who do not share their goals and identities. Uncivil society uses violence or it is not pluralistic in its values (Kopecký and Mudde, 2003).<sup>45</sup>

This might make sense if the social contract is appropriate and fixed in a widespread constitutional culture, re-created in the Habermassean way through the consent of everyone who is potentially affected, but if consent is absent or the constitution is faulty there is no shared social framework from which to judge who is in and who is out of civil society. Of course, the use of violence against others even in the pursuit of perceived justice is still indefensible because those affected by the violence find it to be wrong. The exercise of freedom in the associative sphere, that is civil society, requires a basic recognition of the other, the other’s rights and a commitment to limit one’s own actions based on the rules of society.

Writing in 1995, I think Robert Fatton gives a terrific description of the need to understand the uncivil within civil society:

...current processes of democratization are due largely to civil society's *debordement* of the state. By *debordement* I mean the capacity of civil society to defy and ultimately overwhelm the predatory state and its *projet disciplinaire* through illegal mass political defiance and protest. Civil society is thus a potentially liberating factor in any political calculus; and yet it is not always civil. Civil society can indeed be quite uncivil; it is replete with antinomies (Fatton, 2010).

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<sup>45</sup> Kopecky and Mudde quote Larry Diamond “A third distinguishing mark is that civil society encompasses *pluralism* and *diversity*. To the extent that an organization—such as a religious fundamentalist, ethnic chauvinist, revolutionary, or millenarian movement—seeks to monopolize a functional or political space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path, it contradicts the pluralist and market-oriented nature of civil society. Related to this is a fourth distinction, *partialness*, signifying that no group in civil society seeks to represent the whole of a person’s or a community interests”. Such a highly restrictive contraction of all of civil society would cut out virtually everyone who acts on behalf of deeply held moral commitments. It makes civil society less messy by denying it the power to change a whole society.

A growing understanding that the government was corrupt and its objectives hollow or dissonant with most or all groups within civil society raised the stakes and expressed itself as a denial of the regime's political authority, particularly around proposed unfair taxes, through protest and refusal to participate. Material deprivation was, of course, intimately linked to this process (as the proposed taxes were seen to cause significant hardship to workers and others). But citizens did not only suffer from a significant loss of income; they lost hope that they could improve their own conditions through political redress. People's power was, thus, the expression of moral outrage over the political sphere. However, in Zimbabwe, people's power did not succeed in the 1990s to bring down the political regime. It is, thus, not an unstoppable force. It can be retarded, countered and reduced.

**The political regime controls outcomes through the employment of hegemonic values within civil society that can disrupt and divide people's power**

A people's power protest comes together around a common agreement on the state-as-problem by a diversity of associations (as in the case of bringing together unions, human rights and church organizations in Zimbabwe). These associations are like travelers on a road who all work together to remove a roadblock even though they are strangers and headed in different directions. The obstacle is concrete and real to them; they rely on each other to define the scope of the problem and arrive at a solution.

With limited communication between the veterans and their fellow travelers, it is unsurprising that the two could not define their common problem. Was it the injustice of continuing dependency or the corruption and patronage systems of the government, remembering that both these issues had widespread resonance? And both had internally legitimated just causes. The massive consensus around the problem of the tax hikes in 1997 included everyone but the veterans and those who shared their values. And for the veterans the problem was not, at that point, Zanu: it was the people's power demonstrations that stood in their way of their special status in the continuing struggle of Zimbabweans from their resources through the attempt to take down the veterans levy.

All political regimes will seek to reward and benefit their supporters and particularly those whose resonance with their political goals is the most attuned. But it cannot be said that just any special interest group can provide the hegemonic support that a government needs to stay in power. Just as knives and spears are no longer as relevant as guns, tanks and planes on the battlefield, so the objectives of the hegemonic class must resonate out in civil society as well as with the government, we see this in Zimbabwe with sufficient numbers of youth and/or land hungry people willing to join the invasions. The struggle for liberation from colonialism has never really ended. Even though civil society gave a wide embrace to the social objectives of democratic participation, human rights and protections, the idea that all freedoms must be won and the lived experience of the failure of white-settler capitalism to redistribute land and resources were shared even among the broad dissenters in civil society. The means of the violent occupiers could be denounced but the ends, distilled as the re-establishment of black control of the land, were largely shared even by many of the white farmers (whose public complaints were not the solving of injustice but the imposition of new injustice). As Moyo remarks, "...both ZANU (PF) and the state have followed behind the social movement and tried to co-opt and contain it within the framework of the evolving land acquisition programme" (Moyo, 2001).

As Gramsci suggested, hegemonic civil society is a powerful force. Leadership is exerted through the resonance of values—in the case of Zimbabwe—the resolution of land injustice. And therein is an explanation of Zanu's success in reasserting and reconstructing itself; its own objectives were not exhausted. As Tendai points out Zanu was very strategic in the war of ideas. By using the anger over land, a contradiction that it was careful to keep alive but also contain during its first two decades, and one that resonated beyond Zimbabwe's borders (Raftopoulos, 2004),<sup>46</sup> mobilizing the veterans meant reinvigorating the basis of its authority over the continuing

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<sup>46</sup> "The Mugabe Government has worked hard to generalize its model of resolving the national question, based largely on the model of land reform through violent land occupations, articulated through a Pan Africanist and anti-imperialist discourse. Moreover, in this model, the human rights question and the democratic demands of civic groups are dismissed as an extension of Western intervention, with little relevance to the 'real issues' of economic empowerment" Raftopoulos, B. (2004) Nation, race and history in Zimbabwean Politics. in B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage (eds)

struggle. The landless and the land hungry derived their power from having nothing to lose and everything to gain as well as their claim to a moral ground.

What if civil society had built better bridges within itself to the veterans and those with continuing grievances over land distribution? What if ORAP had not ignored the land issue and the ZCTU had been better at bringing in the veterans who also had a beef with the government over its corruption with the veterans fund? What if the NCA had found a way to involve the veterans in the constitutional debate from the beginning? If a people's power revolution requires unity around a shared cause, there is value in acting with a view to the make up of the whole of civil society. This is a question of strategy and tactics but it is also a key to the construction of shared social values. So it was not inevitable that democratic-seeking civil society had to come head-to-head with land justice seeking Zimbabwe and it is not inevitable that either democracy or land justice will be realized without the other, it is, probably not even very likely. But the generations of tomorrow who will have to rebuild on the ashes of these destructive years will deal with new possibilities for democracy and distribution that bring their own need for resolution.

**The construction of social meaning and values within civil society is an ongoing process that can be interrupted but not halted by the exertion of hegemony or the removal of support.**

If we see it this way, the construction of political authority is a painful struggle—it could be the educational process to which Hegel referred when he said “the disfavor showered on education is due in part to its being this hard struggle...” (Hegel, 1967). This goes beyond the pain of learning what is already known; if we think of education as a constructive process in which people face and work through the intransigent and contradictory values of their society, in which there are no easy answers but only those that come through the painful process of succeeding and failing on what we set out to do, we can see the lifeworld of civil society always pushing at

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*Zimbabwe: injustice and political reconciliation.* Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

the repressive margins, falling down but getting back up as a different civil society with new capacities ready to fail and succeed again.

As the saying goes, people can always vote with their feet. More than three million Zimbabweans (out of a total population of 12 million<sup>47</sup>) fled the country in the decade after the people's power demonstrations.<sup>48</sup> There are now Zimbabwean diasporic communities in South Africa, England, Australia, Canada, the United States and neighboring countries. Of course, much of the white settler population would leave as well ("30,000 Whites in Zimbabwe", 2005). Many in the diaspora continue to be the voice of a democratic movement and they, along with the courageous activists that have stayed in the countries at organizations like the NCA, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, the CCJPZ, Kubatana, the Foundation for the Western Region of Zimbabwe and others as well as the MDC that has learned from its political battles and persecution. The debate about the future more democratic Zimbabwean regime continues and will prove a more powerful force than international sanctions in charting a path through the endless crisis.

**Political regimes through civil society's dependence on supportive resources and institutions can further inoculate themselves against people's power**

Clearly, Zanu did not only have the hegemonic power of the veterans and the unemployed youth to deploy against the growing opposition. Because state and civil society are interdependent both for material resources such as land, taxes and patronage and the state provides the conditions, laws and institutions for associative action, the state can diminish people's power merely removing by removing the support and protections needed by civil society.

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<sup>47</sup> The CIA Fact Book reports the population of Zimbabwe as 11,342,000 in 2000. The population would fall by 4 percent and 7 percent in 2006 and 2008 respectively, reflecting internal crisis. Current population is reported as 12 million. The Fact Book also estimates that Zimbabwe currently has the world's greatest rate of migration of nearly 25 migrants per 1000 people—presumably as Zimbabweans are trying to return home. CIA, (2011) CIA Fact Book - Zimbabwe.

<sup>48</sup> The size of the diaspora is difficult to estimate and many of the returning Zimbabweans may have returned after the periodic crises such as the economic collapse and elections of 2008. In 2007 there were at least three million displaced Zimbabweans in South Africa. Howard-Hassmann, R. E. (2010) 'Mugabe's Zimbabwe, 2000-2009: Massive Human Rights Violations and the Failure to Protect', *Human Rights Quarterly*, **32(4)**, 898-920.

Zanu methodically dismantled the supportive environment. It eviscerated the judiciary of sympathetic judges, proposed draconian new rules for NGO registration, removed legal protections for an independent media, persecuted those few newspapers that remained and limited food distribution by independent actors. By permitting violent land occupations and the persecution of MDC card carriers, it created an environment of fear for independent thinking and action and removed the security civil society needed.

We can come to the issue of dependency in two distinct ways. First, Zanu controlled the aid and assistance for communities affected by drought as well as the national social services infrastructure. While it had opened up in the 1990s to allow for private actors in its clientelist networks, for example, the budding of independent media and the action of local and international NGO in the rural areas, it kept sufficient power to squeeze them if they rebelled. By coming down hard on civil society, e.g. the draconian NGO legislation and media ownership laws passed in the 2000s, it succeeded in disciplining civil society. Unless MDC were to have taken to the bush, its own powers to mobilize resources behind its cause were severally limited.

But it is hard to say that removing the supportive pillars for civil society is a strategy worthy of replication by other governments that would stay in power. The resulting loss of population and industry, not to mention the eventual international sanctions that Zimbabwe suffered, are a very high price to pay and make it clear that civil society and the state are significantly dependent on each other.

**While civil society associations are conscious of repressed aspirations in diverse ways, they will work with regimes to solve them until the regime becomes the most significant obstacle to these aspirations.**

To the extent that ORAP's approach is generalizable, it says a lot about the immanent capacity of civil society to make its own freedoms in a repressive situation. By creating the conditions and logic in which autonomy over development makes sense, ORAP was actively resisting the government/party centric view of development. It did this through an emancipatory

approach to citizen's democracy that avoided squaring off against its government—which ultimately would have weakened its ability to pursue a more democratic localized alternative.

Once again, seeing education as something that emerges from both daring to set one's own objectives and acting on them, ORAP communities had the opportunity to experience freedom in conditions that were far from free. The violence of the *Gukurahundi* was a concrete experience. Coupled with a pulling in, a return to culture and initiative taught people that they did not need to wait for the government in order to accomplish the things they desired. The participation of local government officials in ORAP programs coupled with its efforts to work collaboratively with government can be seen as a constructive engagement to make the government into something it needed to be. Attempting to re-purpose the government's objectives to those more resonant with the objectives of local association was, thus, a viable way of resisting authoritarianism.

Such collaboration is, however, very difficult to separate out when the government itself becomes the problem. While ORAP participated in the Working Peoples Convention and pursued its own program of civic education, it had to bear the burden of needing government approval in order to pursue its drought relief and other programs in the rural areas, it failed to put its full support behind the people's power coalitions that emerged from the 1997 demonstrations.

**The creation of a rival political party before support for political authority has been fully withdrawn may undermine the force of civil society**

In a society with little viable opposition the creation of the Movement for Democratic Change as a broad-based, inclusive political party was easily justified by the necessity to re-insert debate in the political process. Perhaps, however, it came too soon. The NCA had succeeded in highlighting the need to create a new constitution and the people's power demonstrations had withdrawn significant political support from Zanu but the political regime remained in place.

Paradoxically, the government-led constitutional consultations did produce something of a blueprint around the desire for a more limited government and the 'No' vote on the constitution was actually a 'Yes' vote for this dispensation. The elections that year in which the MDC garnered



50 percent of the Parliamentary vote were a further expression that the country was ready for a change.

It was not enough, however, to simply be the party of not-Zanu, as many of the parties in the country had already demonstrated. And as long as the rules of politics remained the same, the MDC, like the parties that came before it was going to need to fight over their bones. As Raftopoulos elegantly shows, it had neither the structure, the vision nor the capacity for this fight even though it was the best subscribed opposition party since Zanu and sucked all of the strength and power it could from civil society (Raftopoulos, 2006). As Bond and Manyanya argue, MDC's economic vision abandoned the workers and the poor for a version of the prevailing neo-liberalism, prying it wide-open to the charges of new imperial control (Bond and Manyanya, 2002) at the center of the Zanu's political vision.

This does not mean civil society should never move its dissent into a political party—it does so all the time. But the speed of the events and the lack of preparation can leave no alternative except for a new party to play the same hegemony of hegemony game, by the same rules and with the same outcomes as the past. The creation of the stopgap Unity government in 2008 is an eerie reflection of the Unity Accords of 1987 that ended the life of Zanu or the negotiated settlement of Lancaster House that changed the faces but not the structure of government. The difference is, of course, that Zimbabwe is in a much different place today and the debate over what it is and what it should be has directly affected much more of its population.

### **Conclusion: When will Zimbabwe be Free?**

I must admit that I have entitled my conclusion "When will Zimbabwe be Free" somewhat ironically and feel compelled to start with the disclaimer that I believe the preceding analysis has no predictive power to answer this question. What I mean to say by the question is a little less dramatic and more limited in its scope. Something more like can we expect to see a resolution to this particular tragedy and what might a resolution look like from the perspective of civil society?

In 2008, the economic collapse in Zimbabwe became so complete that the Zimbabwe dollar disappeared. Having survived rates of inflation that make it a global legend—dollar dominations rose from the thousands, to the millions and billions and even came with expiration dates in the form of bearer's checks—the Zimbabwe dollar was finally supplanted by the US dollar (and a cobbled together mess of coins from neighboring countries). My acquaintances all have horror stories to tell about 2008, mostly concerning their frantic search for food and the basics of survival that consumed virtually everyone in the country. Those close to the borders fled to neighboring countries where they endured long lines and discrimination as they struggled to bring home enough to keep themselves and their families alive. In a way, the loss of the currency is an interesting metaphor for the Zimbabwean identity, which, although it has not ceased to exist as the currency has suffers from a highly contested present that seems like it will only progress in a future without Mugabe and, perhaps, Zanu.

After the 2008 election in which Zanu declared victory amid allegations of rigging and intimidation, South Africa helped to negotiate the “unity” government between Zanu and the MDC, from which Zanu/Mugabe has shown it will do whatever it takes to extricate itself. Industry, media, tourism, infrastructure, schools, health care and people's lives have been ruined or remade. And, yet, I think the story of civil society is a reason for optimism; ‘hope,’ a word I have not yet heard die on the lips of my Zimbabweans friends. Why?

While there is no guarantee, civil society is tirelessly working to both define the space of free action and enhance the capacity of citizens to act within it. As a historical process, new repressions and freedoms are created that will only be stable to the extent that people understand themselves to be better off with them, that is, able to rationally anticipate the accomplishment of their objectives. Zimbabweans are not playing with democracy; for many the future of the country has become literally a matter of survival. The struggle for Independence must be won over and over again, at each stage seeking for a chink of freedom as diversity overcomes one hegemonic group only to see another rise in its place. On the other hand, the struggle for survival is now taking up most the time of many Zimbabweans transforming many

social objectives into unaffordable luxuries that must await a new political dispensation. In falling half way down a well, the danger of falling the rest of the way is still there. It is interesting that so many discussions with my friends in Zimbabwe throughout the years have begun with an acknowledgement that “we have already hit the bottom.” The idea that there is nowhere to go and that one can only begin to climb from the bottom.

If we think of the social contract as a process and not a moment, the centrality of the dream of a participatory constitution is a beautiful metaphor for the advancing of new conditions through learning, struggle and aspirations within evolving social contracts. But for me, it is the clarity of the old woman in Filabusi that the aspiration of civil society—of people sharing common cause—is the common good of all including those who have not yet contributed and who are not yet born. And in this the political, moral and ethical goals of society, civil society provides the possibility of the idea of expanding freedom even while the concrete reality remains out of grasp.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Historical Timeline

Year	Event
1961	Zapu Formed
1962	Southern Rhodesia Council of Social Services founded
1963	Zanu Formed
1979	Lancaster House Agreement
1980	<p>Independence, beginning of national reconciliation                      Voluntary Organisations in Community Enterprise (VOICE) established from Southern Rhodesia Council of Social Services</p> <p>Apr Independence Day Celebration at Rufaro Stadium, Salisbury</p> <p>Jul State of Emergency renewed (and every 6 months to 1990)</p> <p>Nov Battle between ZIPRA and ZINLA guerillas</p>
1981	<p>Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) begins organizing                      Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) established</p> <p>Feb Outbreak of Violence at Entumbane (300 killed)                      Dumbutshena Report commissioned</p> <p>Aug South African forces sabotage Inkomo Army barracks (\$50m in equipment destroyed)                      Growth with Equity development plan</p>
1982	<p>Transitional National Development Plan</p> <p>Feb Discovery of arms caches in Matabeleland</p> <p>Jul Indemnity and Compensation bill reinstated (granting government officials immunity from prosecution)                      5 Brigade passing out parade and ready for deployment                      Gukurahundi initiated – Zapu political rallies banned</p>
1983	<p>Jan 5 Brigade deployed to Matabeleland</p> <p>Sep Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate atrocities in Matabeleland.</p>
1984	Leadership Code Promulgated
1985	<p>CIO detentions/disappearances</p> <p>Jul Elections (Zapu retains its 15 Matabeleland seats)</p>

Year	Event	
1986	First 5-year Development Plan	
1987	Replacement of Westminster form of Government	
	Jun	Zapu rallies banned
	Dec	Unity Accord – End Gukurahundi Replacement of Westminster form of government
1988	Apr	Amnesty for dissidents (122 surrender)
	Jun	Amnesty includes all members of the army Willowvale Scandal breaks
1989	Zimbabwe joins Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (WB)	
	Apr	Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) party formed by Tekere
	Oct	Student demonstrations at University of Zimbabwe lead to first closure Mugabe dissolves senate, creates House of Assembly
1990	Economic policy change-ESAP Elections – ZUM loses Constitution change: ZAPU leader as Head of State/Land Reform Zimbabwe accord with Overseas Private Investment Corporation Nurses and teachers strike	
	Jul:	State of Emergency is not renewed
1991	Drought to 1992	
1992	Land Reform and Repayment II published	
	Mar	Lines for drought relief
	May	Forum for Democratic Reform Trust established
1994	Jul	Racism protests in Harare
1995	Apr	Elections IMF Suspends Balance of Payments support
1996	Second 5-year ESAP set to begin Land negotiations with Britain	
1997	Veterans demonstrations & protests	
	Mar	CCJPZ releases Matabeleland Report
	Sep	Commercial farm workers Strike
	Dec	Nation-wide “people’s power” stayaway and strikes Zanu party Conference in Mutare
1998	Launch of the National Constitutional Assembly Continued strikes and stayaways	
	Sep	Donor’s conference - <i>International Donors' Conference on Land Reform and Resettlement Programme in Zimbabwe</i>
2000	Feb	Nationwide Referendum Rejects Draft Constitution
	March	Land occupation intensifies
	July	Constitutional Amendment 16A
2008	Collapse of Zimbabwe Dollar	
2009	Unity government formed with MDC and Zanu	

## Appendix 2: Acronyms

Acronym	Name
ANC	Africa National Congress
BLPC	Bulawayo Legal Project Centre
CCJPZ	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
CFU	Commercial Farmers Union
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CZI	Confederation of Zimbabwean Industries
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
LCFHR	Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights
LRF	Legal Resources Foundation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MMPZ	Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe
NANGO	National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NCPDZ	National Council of Disabled People of Zimbabwe
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NUST	National University of Science and Technology
ORAP	Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
VOICE	Voluntary Organisations in Community Enterprise
Zanu or ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (armed wing of ZANU-PF)
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (armed wing of ZAPU)
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republican Police