In Defence of National Sovereignty? Urban Governance and Democracy in Zimbabwe

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Amin Kamete

Elections are usually regarded as an important measure of democracy as they constitute a "general indicator of the relationship between state power and different groups in society" (Laakso 1999:9). Democracy – however it is defined (Joseph 1999) – is in turn an indicator of urban governance. Using this framework of liberal democracy, pre-independence Zimbabwe can be judged as having been very undemocratic (Swilling 1997) and therefore badly governed (Global Development Research Centre (GDRC) 2000). The black majority did not have the vote in either national or local government elections. They were excluded through the adoption and application of several restrictive qualification criteria that included race, land tenure, income and property ownership. During the 1960s and 1970s, liberation movements waged a long struggle of independence, one of whose major aims was the extension of the vote to the black majority. Following independence and the triumph of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), one of the two liberation movements, the urbanites who had been given the national vote through the promulgation of universal adult suffrage were not immediately granted the local vote. Understandably, the former liberation movement sought first to address pressing national issues before turning attention to local issues such as municipal council elections.

This chapter reviews in detail how and why the local vote was eventually granted and democracy was ushered in to urban Zimbabwe after the restrictive qualification criteria were dropped or relaxed. It then examines how the relationship between the ruling former liberation movement – perhaps buoyed by regional and tribal politics as well as the euphoria of independence – and the urban masses was initially cosy before widespread disenchantment produced apathy and then total and open hostility from the angry urbanites as they sought to dispose of the former liberation movement. The discourse peers into

the souring relations and the continuously widening fault lines. It discusses how these developments have generated "unfriendly" responses among the ranks of the ruling party. The chapter suggests that it is these unfriendly reactions that might be regarded as the recanting of the major aims of the liberation struggle by ZANU-PF, in particular those relating to human rights and electoral democracy.

Factored into the analysis are issues relating to urban governance. Here, it is explained that the deterioration of the national macro-economic situation under the management of the former liberation movement, coupled with a persistently atrocious record of urban governance under a local administration that was almost entirely made up of representatives from the ruling party, resulted in the "informed" urban masses dumping the ruling party *en masse* and opting for change, a move that – perhaps curiously – was in accord with sections of the urban population that could be labelled as reactionary by the former liberation movement. The chapter then examines the reaction of the ruling party as it sought to win back the urban masses, and how, after failing dismally as reflected by the pattern of national and local government elections, the government presided over by the former liberation movement embarked on a strategy of systematically disenfranchising the urban electorate through legal, physical and administrative instruments.

It is at this point that the discussion critically examines the question as to whether the former liberation movement is adopting reactionary tactics that could be viewed as a blatant reversal of the gains of the liberation struggle or whether the movement is simply guarding those gains and consolidating its post-independence achievements.

The discussion seeks to develop a balanced view of matters while leading to a conclusion that is backed by events and processes on the ground. The conclusion revisits the emerging view that the concept of democracy is being abused or twisted to suit selfish and corrupt agendas by politicians from the liberation struggle era. It also looks critically at a variant of this view that insists that the former liberation movement is inexplicably going where everybody else is coming from, and how it is reverting to the history of the liberation war to justify its every (untenable?) move that is causing untold suffering and frustrations among the embattled urban populace.

Urban Governance and Electoral Democracy

Electoral democracy cannot be separated from issues of governance, which in this case is more than the "act of ruling" (Onibokuni and Faniran 1995:3). To lay the framework for the ensuing discourse on elections and democracy, it is important that governance as a concept be examined in greater detail.

Many discussions dealing with governance rightly focus on the relationship between "the governors" and "the governed" (see Olowu and Akinola 1995). Governance relates to the whole spectrum of civil and political institutions, relationships and processes. This brings to the fore the central role governance plays in democracies. However, the concept of governance is neither simple nor free of controversy (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) 2000:1). The definition of governance by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997:2–3) is one of the most comprehensive attempts so far. The agency defines governance as:

> The exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In a commentary on this definition another UN agency [UNCHS 2000:8] emphasises the distinction between *governance* and *government* and points out that in the concept of governance power is viewed as existing within government as well as outside it. Besides government other institutions that are seen to have power include civil society and the private sector. Informal institutions are also factored into the decision-making and power-brokering formulae. The argument is that relationships and processes between the stakeholders are (or should be) the basis of decision-making. In the light of this, one source maintains that governance: "is about roles, rules and relationships" (GDRC 2000). One of the key roles stakeholders play is the organisation and control of, as well as participation in, the events and processes involving the selection of those who will govern. This is accomplished through the electoral process.

Governance has been appropriated into the urban arena, where it is regarded as reflecting "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and

private plan and manage the common affairs of the city" (UNCHS 2000:9). Involved as it is with diversity, urban governance inevitably incorporates the resolution of conflicts and accommodation of diverse interests in order to promote "co-operative action". The mediation of differences is increasingly becoming a common trait in the discussions of urban governance. It is as important as the articulation of interests and the exercise of legal rights and obligations (GDRC 2000).

The debate on urban governance has assumed normative overtones through the search for "good" urban governance. Among the numerous prescriptions for good urban governance are attributes such as transparency, popular accountability, efficiency, participation, trust, reciprocity, legitimacy and representativeness in the conduct of public affairs, as well as respect for human rights and rule of law (Olowu and Akinola 1995:20; Harpham and Boateng 1997; Wekwete 1997; GDRC 2000). The UNCHS has gone beyond this to search for what it considers should be the norms of good urban governance. From the agency's viewpoint: "good urban governance is characterised by sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability, civic engagement and citizenship, and security, and ... these norms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing" (2000:11).

Diversity in urban areas necessitates the incorporation of the mediation, management and resolution of conflict as an integral component of urban governance. It also makes it imperative that all different groups, interests and viewpoints are taken on board in the planning and management of the common affairs of the city. It is not surprising therefore that the Global Campaign for Good Urban Governance amplifies the concepts of the "inclusive city" and "inclusive decision-making" to deal with the "messy reality of competing interests and priorities" in order to "balance, reconcile and trade off the competing interests" (UNCHS 2000:9). The Sustainable Cities Programme describes the outcome of this strategy as "broad-based local governance" (UNCHS and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) 2000:2).
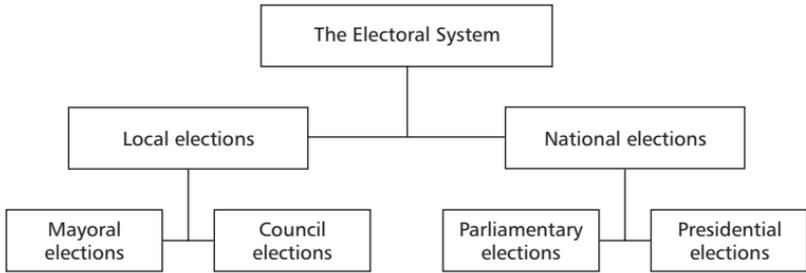
Among the key attributes of good urban governance are indicators that have to do with the involvement of the general population in the running of cities and towns. Attributes such as civic engagement, governability, accountability, participation and legitimacy (GDRC 2000; UNCHS 2000) imply, among other things, the existence of democratic processes. These are sustained by a system of electoral democracy (see Young 1999:40). This enables residents to have a

strong say in deciding who rules them and how they are governed. This they do through voting. It is here that the issue of citizenship comes in. As will be demonstrated, citizenship can be used or abused by those in power to enhance or erode the principle of democratic governance, especially in the electoral processes.

Electoral Democracy and Urban Governance in Zimbabwe

The electoral system in Zimbabwe is depicted in Figure 1. As the diagram shows, there are two levels of election in Zimbabwe: national and local. Each of these levels has two types of election. The principal decisions for both levels are made by the nation state, especially in the national legislature. For this reason, national elections are perceived as having more at stake than local ones. They are thus more popular and more bitterly fought. Not surprisingly, they get a greater proportion of attention and are subject to more rigorous and detailed analyses than local government elections (see Darnolf 1997; Laakso 1999). National elections have wider socio-spatial and temporal implications. They afford the opportunity for more significant decision-making on more fundamental issues. They also have greater impact on shaping national identity; they are decisive in the crafting of national legislation; and they are critical in defining access to national resources, power and influence across space, society and time. In view of this, it is understandable that since the dawn of Zimbabwe's politically exciting times in the year 2000, parliamentary and presidential elections have aroused more interest than mayoral and council elections.

However, this should neither downplay nor diminish the importance of local elections. It is at the local level that issues of governance and democracy are more acutely felt. Local government is heavily involved in the day-to-day life of the population, as it grapples with critical issues of service delivery and management. It is also at the local level – though within the parameters set by the centre – that the wellbeing of the population is moulded. Perhaps more significantly, local government elections, which often take place more frequently than national ones, are more important as quick indicators and gauges of public opinion and political allegiances than parliamentary and presidential elections.

Figure 3.1 Levels and types of elections in urban Zimbabwe

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                    │  The Electoral System │
                    └─────────────────────┘
            ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
    ┌───────────────┐               ┌───────────────┐
    │ Local elections │             │ National elections │
    └───────────────┘               └───────────────┘
     ┌──────┴──────┐                 ┌──────┴──────┐
┌─────────┐  ┌─────────┐      ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ Mayoral │  │ Council │      │ Parliamentary │ │ Presidential │
│ elections │ │ elections │    │ elections     │ │ elections    │
└─────────┘  └─────────┘      └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
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Under Colonial Rule: No Vote for the Majority Blacks

During the various colonial regimes, urban electoral democracy was a preserve of whites. Race was the single most important qualifying criterion. In the very first elections in 1899 the vote was open only to literate male British subjects who were over 21 and were economically independent in terms of property or income (Laakso 1999:30). Little wonder then, that out of a population of more than 500 000 people, fewer than 5000 qualified to vote.

Buttressing the race card was a host of legislative and administrative instruments, chief among which was the constitution. For example, the Land Tenure Act designated urban areas as "white only" areas, blacks being allowed only to provide labour there with the understanding that they would retire "home" once their usefulness ran out. Being aliens in urban areas, blacks could not own property there. Consequently, they could not vote in urban local government elections. This was effectively ensured by the infamous Land Apportionment Act that legalised the expropriation of land from the blacks and its re-allocation in such a way that urban areas ended up in white areas. To emphasise the point that blacks did not "belong" to the towns and cities, the townships set aside for housing blacks in urban areas were run not by the respective urban local authorities but directly by the Department of Native Affairs situated in central government.

Independent, but still no Local Vote

It thus came as no surprise that part of the agenda of the national liberation struggle was "one man one vote", which in essence meant expanding the vote to millions of disenfranchised blacks (Sellström 1999). Although the most pressing electoral priority of the liberation movements was the national vote, in particular general elections, it would not be inaccurate to state that local government was also on the agenda. A significant proportion of the nationalists and their leadership had been residents of urban areas and victims of the politics of racial exclusion and marginalisation at the local level (see Meredith 2002).

Zimbabwe's first post-colonial constitution, the Lancaster House Constitution, introduced universal adult suffrage. It was this provision that allowed the majority blacks to vote in the 1980 general elections. The historic elections brought ZANU-PF to power – the larger of the two liberation movements. More than two decades later, it was this former liberation movement that still held the reins of power. In the course of time, the party's cosy relationship with the more enlightened urban electorate was to turn gradually into a lukewarm one before it quickly deteriorated into mutual hatred and distaste at the close of the twentieth century. The evolution of this relationship and its impact on the electoral system are the subject of the rest of this discussion.

As noted above, immediately prior to independence, the right to vote in general elections was extended to the indigenous black population. Residency, age and citizenship rather than race and property ownership became the new qualifying criteria. In addition to indigenous Zimbabweans, this democratisation saw many people of foreign origin, but with residency, coming to cast their vote. Notable among these were immigrant workers from neighbouring countries – mainly Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique. In addition to dominating the farming and mining sector, these foreigners constituted a significant proportion of the working class in the urban areas, including Harare.

The introduction of universal adult suffrage was not automatically extended to urban local government elections. The right to vote in urban local government elections in Harare, as in other cities, was for a time still based not only on residency but also on property ownership, which in the clauses of the operative legislation was an indication of the existence of a material stake. It is this stake that gave one the right to participate in the management of the common affairs of the city, which in essence meant the right to select representatives in local

government elections. That a large number of blacks could not vote in local elections was a foregone conclusion. Most were tenants and lodgers. According to the law, they did not have a material stake in the urban system. This situation continued well into the late 1980s.

Finally, the Vote

ZANU-PF has always been a populist party. To underline this fact the party's long-standing slogan boldly proclaims "The People's Party". The leaders, most of whom are nationalists who directed the liberation struggle, love to show off the power of the party through its support base and dominance in decision-making structures. It was only a matter of time before the party decided to turn its attention to ensure its dominance in institutions of local governance in urban areas. There were good reasons for this. The party had most of its support from the low-income workers who, by virtue of not owning property, did not have the right to elect representatives to urban councils. The fact that most of the colonial period was characterised by racial discrimination under which blacks could not own property in "white-only" areas, meant that low-income groups would for some time continue to be in the minority with respect to property ownership in the urban areas.

To address this anomaly, the government tried to empower – economically and politically – urban low-income groups. First it promulgated the policy of homeownership under which all sitting tenants in council housing were to be afforded the chance to own the houses on a rent-to-buy basis (Zimbabwe Government 1995; National Housing Task Force 2000). The policy did help increase the number of home-owners among the low-income groups. However, in terms of electoral democracy there was an inherent limit to this policy. There could be only as many new voters as there were houses to be owned. The fact that by the end of the 1990s Harare's official housing waiting list had over 100 000 applicants emphasised the shortage of houses to own. Not surprisingly then, Harare continues to be dominated by lodgers who, according to a recent study, constitute more than two in three of all urban households (Mubvami and Hall 2000).

Consequently, the "right" to vote was limited to a few ratepayers whose allegiance to the party was not as fervent and obvious as that of the non-home-owning low-income majority. In any case, most of the ratepayers were whites in

the middle- and low-density areas. And they did dominate local politics. Those blacks who had managed to climb up the socio-economic ladder were too few to make a difference. In any event, most of them were lukewarm in their support. Some displayed outright apathy to electoral issues. They saw no reason to go through the rigorous and tedious voter registration and voting process. It should be remembered that the Zimbabwean economy was still robust, and the predominantly urban manufacturing sector was still on an upward swing.

Table 3.1 Voter composition in Harare in 1990 and 2000

Area	1990		2000	
	Number	**Per cent**	**Number**	**Per cent**
High density	383 832	76	536 645	82
Medium & low density	121 054	24	118 375	18
Total	504 886	100	655 020	100

Source Kamete 2000a

What made the local vote undemocratic was the fact that the affluent groups who could vote in council elections were decidedly in the minority. Figures for the general elections, which, as noted above, had been democratised, reveal just how exclusionary the local electoral system was. In 1990, compared to the high-density-area voter population of about 400 000, the total number of eligible voters in affluent medium- and low-density areas was less than 122 000 (Table 3.1). In fact, the non-voting low-income groups made up more than 75 per cent of the registered voters in Harare. Ten years later this proportion had increased to over 80 per cent. A comparison of the composition of the Harare city council with the national legislature shows just how illogical the local electoral system was. The local council did not reflect the national situation.

In the national parliament there were overwhelmingly more urban members of parliament representing the disenfranchised groups than those that represented the privileged, affluent electorate. Members of parliament representing high-density (low-income) areas constituted 77 and 81 per cent of Harare's urban parliamentarians in 1990 and 2000 respectively (Table 3.2). Thus, while parliament was in step with the demographic and socio-economic composition of the city, council was not. The situation where representatives chosen by a minority ran the affairs of the city was clearly reminiscent of the colonial era.

Table 3.2 Constituency representation for Harare in parliament in 1990 and 2000

Year	Total in Harare urban	In high-density low-income areas		In other parts of Harare urban area*	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
1990	13	10	76.9	3	23.1
2000	16	13	81.3	3	18.8

*Includes medium-density (middle-income) and low-density (high-income) areas as well as commercial and industrial districts and institutions.
Source Kamete 2002a

Table 3.2 shows the electoral situation in Harare. The point here is that the high-density (low-income) areas are home to the majority of urban voters in Harare. As reflected in the table, out of the 13 constituencies (or geographical electoral districts) demarcated in 1990, 10 were in the high-density low-income areas. This translates to 77 per cent of the total voter distribution in geographical terms. In contrast, non-poor areas, which were privileged with the local vote, made up only 23 per cent of the constituencies. What this means is that 10 years after independence, the majority still did not have the vote.

Things had to change, but not entirely for altruistic reasons of good governance and democracy. In addition to democratising the urban electoral system, the "People's Party" needed to express its political dominance in numerical terms in the urban local authorities. The ZANU-PF government eventually gave the local vote to the urban masses at the close of the 1980s. This it did by relaxing property ownership as a qualifying criterion for voting. Legislation was passed that stipulated age and residency as the only requirements for participating in the urban local government electoral process. As envisaged, by the mid-1990s the party was dominating all urban local authorities. Only a sprinkling of independent councillors in cities such as Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare prevented ZANU-PF from having 100 per cent control over municipal councils.

Why Were Urban Local Elections "Democratised"?

While the idea that ZANU-PF gave the local vote to the "masses" because it wanted to "complete" the democratisation process cannot be dismissed out of

hand, later developments in urban politics were to cast doubt on this observation. In using the wisdom of hindsight, it can be concluded that ZANU-PF gave the vote to the people because it wanted to stamp its authority on local authorities. Subsequent developments would reveal that the ruling party was determined to get its way in urban local government not only in terms of decision-making, but also to enjoy such benefits as free urban services, and access to land and employment.

By the beginning of the year 2002, for example, the ruling party and its leadership were in arrears in their rates and services accounts in virtually all urban centres. In Harare alone, ZANU-PF officials owed the city council about Z$300 million (about US$7.3) in unsettled bills (Zvauya 2002). This was about 40 per cent of all uncollected revenue in the city (Kamete 2002a:38). In addition, it later emerged that a large number of ruling party supporters got their jobs in Harare city council in circumstances that strongly reek of "cronyism" (Zvauya 2002). Just before the ruling-party-aligned commission running the city was replaced by an elected opposition-dominated council, it employed over 2000 labourers and a senior executive. When the new council resolved to fire the workers, the local government minister, himself a top-ranking member of the ruling party, issued directives reversing the decisions (Kamete 2002a).

Thus the party had more than a political motive in gaining control of urban councils. It also wanted to ensure that it could extract as much material capital as it desired without anybody standing in the way. Affluent, independent and business-minded voters had been bringing in independent and business-minded councils. Developments following the democratisation of local government elections suggest that politicians viewed the control of local resources by "the wrong people" as hindering their access to the coveted resources and opportunities. That had to change. There was no better way to do this than to overwhelm the system with the popular vote.

The party proceeded to democratise the urban electoral system because it was confident that the majority would vote for it. The good relations between the party and the majority of the urban residents assured the party that it would defeat most of its opponents in urban local elections. The results of the enfranchisement of the rest of the urban population vindicated the party's calculations. Before long, the party had under its control the majority of councillors, this in addition to its monopoly over urban parliamentary

constituencies, virtually all of which were, by 1995, represented by ZANU-PF members of parliament. The urban populace was firmly behind the party that had selflessly liberated them from colonial rule.

Souring Relations

The cosy relationship between the party and the urbanites did not last long. Even in the heyday of good comradeship, there were signs that the populace was slipping in its support. First there was apathy. As the years wore on, the percentage of registered voters turning up to vote in urban constituencies progressively declined. From a massive 106 per cent turnout for cities and 113 per cent for other urban centres in 1985,[1] the turnout had by 1995 declined to 51 per cent for cities and 53 per cent for other urban centres (Laakso 1999:117,176). The rapid deterioration of the economy orchestrated by the 1997 slump of the Zimbabwe dollar was a major factor in the souring relations between the nationalist party and the urbanites. The economic plague saw the proportion of the urban poor rise from 41 per cent in 1995 to 63 per cent in mid-2001 (Kamete 2002b:14; see also Ministry of the Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare 1997; Consumer Council of Zimbabwe 2001). Amidst an unrelentingly skyrocketing cost of living, urban poverty began to be politicised (Nyakazeya 2001).

In February 2000 the urban electorate finally dumped ZANU-PF in a fiercely contested referendum over a new constitution. About two in three of the urbanites who voted rejected the constitution, this despite a massive campaign by ZANU-PF, which to all intents and purposes viewed the constitution as party business (Kamete 2002a:33; Meredith 2002:163). The newly formed labour-based MDC and the National Constitutional Assembly – a civic body advocating a new constitution – had successfully delivered the first dosage of defeat to the former liberation movement, which, prior to this historic event, had known nothing but victory in all elections.

For the ruling party worse was to come. The country's fifth parliamentary elections were held in June 2000. They were, arguably, by far the most fiercely contested general elections in Zimbabwe's history. When the results were announced the party had been booted out of almost every major urban centre. It lost everything in all the cities and only managed to scrounge something in the smaller urban centres. These "smaller" victories were obtained through

gerrymandering, which resulted in urban constituencies being diluted by large swathes of rural territories. Notably, the turnout in these two historic voting processes was very high. The urbanites had turned up in large numbers and angrily passed a vote of no confidence in the party. No wonder then that the party detected a huge conspiracy to unseat it.

What amounted to a betrayal in the eyes of the party was to continue in urban local elections. Within two years the party lost mayoral elections in Masvingo, Bulawayo and Chegutu. It also lost all by-elections in Bulawayo, the second largest city. The minister responsible for the local government portfolio refused to officiate at the installation ceremonies for all but one of the renegade mayors.

Assault on Democracy in Harare?

The 2000 election outcome was a nightmare for the party. However, there was no time to wallow in self-pity, as there was to be a presidential poll in 2002. It was then that the party got to work. Three controversial developments took place which are variously interpreted. On one hand the party's opponents see them as a shameless descent into despotism. On the other, these same developments are viewed by the party as reflecting the former liberation movement's staunch and patriotic defence of the gains of independence and, indeed, national sovereignty. Table 3.3 summarises the three illustrative cases in Harare.

Table 3.3 The assault on democracy

Case	Events	Effect
The Harare Commission saga	Blocking of council and mayoral elections despite the obvious illegality and court orders	Denying people the right to choose their own representatives
Disenfranchisement	Stripping of citizenship from "foreigners' Reduction of polling stations by 40 per cent Disregard of court order	Denying people the right to vote
Ministerial directives	Vetoing of council decisions on finance and recruitment Barring mayors from attending Cabinet Action Committee meetings	Denying democratically elected representatives the right to decide and observe processes that affect their constituency

Denying People the Right to Choose: The Harare City Commission Saga

In February 1999, the then Minister of Local Government and National Housing dissolved the entire Harare city council. The sitting councillors were victims of a public outcry that followed erratic water supplies to some high-density areas. The affected residents were incensed. Eventually they succeeded in having the executive mayor resign and forcing the minister to suspend the entire council (Kahiya 1999). Though the Combined Greater Harare Residents' Association finally engineered the downfall of the council, this historic event began in the high-density residential areas, where the low-income residents' disgruntlement was carried on to the streets and into town houses. In suspending the councillors the government was acting in sympathy with public sentiments. The minister appointed a commission to run the city and restore it to its former glory. The Harare City Commission was to hand over the "restored" city to an elected council. Considering the fact that the mayor and some of the councillors were high-ranking party officials, it can be concluded that the government was unusually sensitive to the needs of the people.

The law stipulates that an appointed commission has a limited lifetime, and its tenure cannot be extended indefinitely. This stipulation was to become a source of controversy and animosity in the city. Developments on the electoral front made it very unwise for the minister to call for early elections in the capital. The urban rebellion had happened during the tenure of the commission (Kamete 2002). The minister was supposed to call for elections within a year. The rejection of the constitution and the urban losses of ZANU-PF in the June parliamentary election, coupled with massive opposition victories in mayoral elections in Masvingo, Bulawayo and Chegutu, sent clear signals that the party stood no chance in mayoral and council elections in the capital. It came as no surprise that the minister resisted any calls to terminate the tenure of the commission and pave way for an elected council. That would be disastrous and embarrassing, especially in view of the fact that the 2002 presidential elections were imminent. Despite calls from residents, the opposition and civil society, the government refused to allow the residents of Harare to choose who would preside over their interests in council. The tenure of the commission was repeatedly and illegally extended.

Faced with what they perceived as an assault on democracy, various

stakeholders, among them individuals, civil society and the opposition MDC, sought legal recourse. The High Court declared the commission illegal and ordered the holding of elections within specified dates. Government appealed the decision. Eventually the case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which again ordered that elections be held before the presidential poll. Government ignored the order and stood by its decision to hold council and mayoral elections simultaneously with the presidential election. Needless to say, this would be long after the expiry of the deadline set by the courts.

Denying People the Right to Choose: The 2002 Election Saga

The run-up to the 2002 presidential poll witnessed the most intensive efforts at disenfranchising the urban electorate. The government put in place legal, physical and administrative obstacles that were strategically meant to frustrate the urban electorate. First came the legal impediments. A change in citizenship laws disenfranchised large sections of the electorate. These were residents who were not Zimbabweans by descent and/or had dual citizenship. The law required such people to renounce foreign citizenship within a specified period. This was obviously targeted at white voters and some black immigrants whom the president had disparagingly described as "totemless".

The initial demands on citizenship constituted a straightforward and logical requirement. However, someone was bent on throwing a spanner in the works. The registrar-general's interpretation was that anyone *entitled* to any foreign citizenship had to renounce that entitlement. The timing of this pronouncement was such that it would be administratively impossible to complete the process before the end of the voter registration period. Foreign embassies made it clear that they could not complete the paperwork within the stipulated time. Consequently, tens of thousands of urbanites were disenfranchised.[2]

Then came the residential criteria, where all desiring to register to vote had to own property or have proof of residence. Commentators saw this as targeting the so-called "born frees" (young people born after 1980) most of whom were in the opposition camp and were non-property owners. These had to have collaborating evidence that they were indeed residents of urban areas.

The physical impediments came in the form of the reduction of polling stations. In Harare alone there was a 40 per cent decrease in the number of

polling stations (*Daily News* March 29, 2002). To buttress what may be perceived to be a monumental electoral inconvenience, the Harare elections became administratively complex. The president had decreed that the election would be a tripartite poll where residents had to cast votes for the mayor, councillor and president.

Due to the complexity of the voting process, by the time the voting period officially came to an end, there were still long queues of voters in all polling stations in Harare. This was not surprising considering the fact that it reportedly took as long as 10 minutes to process one voter. In response to an urgent appeal from the opposition the High Court ordered that the voting days in Harare be extended by a further day. In a flagrant defiance of the order, the next day government opened polling stations late and closed them early.

The end result of the legal, physical and administrative impediments was a systematic disenfranchisement of more than a quarter of a million registered voters in Harare alone. Though it is difficult to estimate the combined numerical effect of the legal, physical and administrative strategies to deny the vote to the urban voter, it can be argued that in terms of electoral democracy the net effect was significant enough to constitute an assault on democracy.

Denying Council the Right to Govern: The Flood of Ministerial Directives

The former liberation movement won the presidential poll but suffered heavy defeats in the mayoral and council elections. The opposition snatched the coveted mayoral seat and all but one of the contested council wards. But the ruling party was not done yet. It was still determined to flex its muscles. Before the first democratically elected council in three years could settle down, the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing issued three directives in quick succession (Kamete 2002a). The first directive reversed a council resolution to cancel all recruitments and promotions effected by the commissions in the previous six months. The second one instructed council to refer to the minister all council resolutions dealing with human resources and financial matters. The third one banned all mayors from attending Cabinet Action Committee meetings. Mayors could attend only by invitation.

Commentators see the directives as an attempt to clip the wings of the new city administration, which – as events on the ground show – is out to undo what the

previous administrations under the tutelage of the ruling party have done. The council may view its radical actions as heralding the introduction of efficiency into urban governance and management systems that had hitherto known nothing but misplaced patronage, corruption, incompetence and inefficiency. However, that is certainly not the way government sees the rapidly unfolding events. Victimisation and plain politicking is what the ruling party reads into the behaviour and actions of the new city administration.

Explaining the Party's "Undemocratic" Behaviour

The former liberation movement's behaviour since the year 2000 has led to critics the world over criticising it for behaving undemocratically, impoverishing the once-stable economy, and resorting to authoritarian tactics of governance. The imposition of "smart" sanctions (arms embargoes, financial sanctions and travel restrictions targeting the ruling party leadership and their interests) by, among others, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, the European Union and Switzerland, is a result of these accusations (Tostensen and Bull 2002). So is the suspension of the country from the Commonwealth. The accusations are based mainly on the conduct of the government immediately before, during and after the 2002 presidential poll.

The government and ruling party have not been taking this lying down. The whole country is now awash with what opponents of government consider to be blatantly shameless propaganda, but what the former liberation movement views as setting the record straight by telling it as it should be. The party claims that it is the champion not only of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle but also of defence against an attack on national sovereignty and the country's continued existence as an independent state. The following sections will examine these two perspectives.

Consolidating Gains and Defending National Sovereignty

ZANU-PF's explanation of its behaviour is based on what it perceives to be the nature of the opposition, its supporters and its sponsors. Ever since white farmers appeared on CNN happily making cash donations to the MDC, the opposition has been labelled a puppet of imperialists, while the farmers have been labelled enemies of the state. As early as 1999, President Mugabe spoke of

> some persons of British extraction who have been placed in our
> midst to undertake sabotage aimed at affecting the loyalty not just
> of the people but also that of the vital arms of government like the
> army, so that these can turn against the legitimate government of
> the country. (Cited in Meredith 2002:154)

Opposition party supporters, most of whom are young urbanites born after 1980, did not, according to the ruling party, experience – let alone participate in – the liberation struggle. Because of this they have been labelled as misdirected sell-outs bent on compromising the country's hard-won independence.

The puppet and sell-out tags have been used *ad nauseam* to discredit the opposition and its support base. Factored into the foreign sponsorship of the party have been British organisations such as the Westminster Foundation. "White Rhodesians" – as they are derogatorily labelled – from all over the world, but particularly those from Britain and South Africa, are seen as the real power behind the MDC. That the opposition party has substantial support from the white community and the international community is an undeniable fact. ZANU-PF loves to remind everyone who cares to listen about its not-so-adulatory interpretation of this kind of foreign support.[3]

The former liberation movement's trepidation, though paranoid, is not totally unfounded. The MDC's rags-to-riches story is sensational. As the ruling party regularly points out, this phenomenal rise is partly a result of foreign sponsorship or "foreign masters", as the party's propaganda machinery puts it. To underline this thesis, President Mugabe once described the MDC as being "as old and as strong as the forces and interests that bore and nurtured it; that converge on and control it; that drive and direct it; indeed that support, sponsor and spur it" (quoted in Meredith 2002:192).

The party that waged a liberation struggle that was entirely bankrolled by the same "force" now roundly condemns anyone who gets help from the same sources. In fact, so incensed was the party about the rechannelling of foreign support to the opposition that it banned the foreign funding of all political parties. This it did by rushing through parliament the Political Parties Finance Act in 2000. The fact that the ruling party openly continues to receive funding from foreigners despite the legal ban suggests that the piece of legislation was crafted with the opposition in mind.

In addition to the financial support from "enemy" quarters, what perhaps

convinces ZANU-PF that its opponent is an imperialist puppet is the perceived support from the independent and international press. The ruling party's stalwarts insist that local independent newspapers – *The Daily News*, *The Financial Gazette, The Zimbabwe Standard* and *The Zimbabwe Independent* – which neither toe the party line nor applaud what the government is doing, are owned and operated by the enemies of the state. Descriptions such as "oppositional press", "Rhodesian-funded", "Rhodesian-owned", "white-owned", "white-funded", "British-funded", and "British-owned" newspapers or news media houses are common in the state media and in the speeches of party leaders. ZANU-PF's open hatred of independent media houses is based on this perspective. The birth of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act in 2002 is in part an expression of this conviction.

Table 3.4 In defence of national sovereignty

Reason	Official refrain	Perceived threat
The nature of the opposition	"They did not fight the war"	No credentials and right to run the country
The nature of the opposition support	"Puppets of the British" "White sponsored"	Agents of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism
The nature of the critics of the regime	"Oppositional press" "Rhodesian-owned newspapers" "Rhodesians" "British-sponsored newspapers" "The apartheid press" "White-owned newspapers"	Propagators of neo-colonialist and imperialist propagnda

It is not surprising, therefore, that the urbanites' rejection of the ruling party is viewed as a rebellion that is dangerous not only for the ruling party but also for national independence and sovereignty. Further, the support of a perceived puppet by the urban electorate is also regarded as a betrayal of the country and a lack of patriotism. The incessant calls for political re-education and national conscientisation of the urban masses are based on this view.

It is in light of the above that the government's actions and the behaviour of the former liberation movement become understandable. The assault on the democratic rights of the urban electorate is nothing more than a drastic action to protect the country's sovereignty, jealously guard its independence and self-determination as well as consolidate the gains of independence. Left alone the urbanites will sell the country to the highest bidders, who in this case, are the British from whose kith and kin the government of Zimbabwe is taking, or rather "repossessing", commercial farms. Thus, to its proponents, the party's desperate bid to neutralise the treacherous urban areas by stifling and paralysing them in electoral terms is a means to a noble end.

No Patriotic Agenda

Opponents of the party and critics of its seemingly desperate behaviour have little sympathy for this defensive view. To them, the ruling party is going back to the days of oppressive despotism experienced under the brutal colonial regimes. In this contrasting view, there is nothing patriotic about the former liberators' bid to stifle the urban population. The undemocratic behaviour is a result of fear and paranoia.

Above all, the leadership is afraid of losing a lucrative source of income. On numerous occasions the party's stalwarts have been labelled as thieves, described as corrupt and unscrupulous. Even the land redistribution programme is branded as a ploy by the party leaders to grab land for themselves rather than for the masses (*The Zimbabwe Standard* June 9, 2002). The fact that most well-known beneficiaries of properties seized from white farmers are party stalwarts lends credibility to this claim. The plundering and milking of state enterprises, the defective administration and awarding of tenders, the looting of the War Victims Compensation Fund, as well as the history of non-payment for services rendered by public sector institutions, including local government, are seen as evidence of the party's mercenary and kleptocratic tendencies.

To critics, the sad developments in the country are thus symptomatic of a desperate bid to hang on to power even at the expense of the wellbeing of the country. Here the urbanites are the prime target because they can see through the plot and have refused to be fooled, unlike the uninformed illiterate or semiliterate rural electorate. What is happening to the urbanites can thus not be

separated from the systematic persecution of other enlightened opponents of the nationalist party such as reporters, leaders of civil society and opposition politicians.

Table 3.5 No patriotic agenda

Reason	Explanation
Fear of losing income	Desire to continue control of public coffers
Fear of retribution	On plunder and human rights abuses
Implausible evidence of threats to national sovereignty	Poorly scripted plots to incriminate opposition in anti-government activities
Paranoid tendencies	Unwarranted persecution of independent thinkers, reporters, the opposition

That Tony Blair, the British prime minister, who is among the fiercest critics of the regime, has come up for attack and accusation for practically all the maladies plaguing the country thus comes as no surprise to those who believe they can see through ZANU-PF's badly scripted act. Letters in the independent press and discussions at public forums ridicule some of the accusations against the British. Among these is one that insists that the economic mess in which the country finds itself is a result of British-sponsored economic sabotage. The abundance of what critics regard as unintelligently contrived plots (see box) to convince the world that the enemies of the state are at work around the clock, lends further weight to the dismissal of the perceived threats to national sovereignty and the gains of independence.

It is on the basis of these fictitious plots that the conclusion is reached that there is no threat to national sovereignty. Instead, the nationalist party is afraid of its people, especially the urbanites. Some imaginative observers even claim that the fear is born from prospects of retribution once the party is booted from power. The numerous and unrelenting calls and threats of justice (see *The Zimbabwe Standard* June 9, 2002) have, in the opinion of the party's critics, spurred the former liberators of the country to cling onto the reins of power by any means. If democracy and good governance fall victim to this spirited bid to resist an ouster, then too bad.

In the final analysis, this view argues that it is the fear and greed of paranoid nationalists that has orchestrated the country's tumble into what the proponents of this explanation regard as despotism (see Good 2002). It is fear

Neo-Imperialist Plots?

Among the most celebrated of these poorly constructed plots was a sensational revelation in the year 2000 in the principal daily newspaper of a document detailing a plot to destablise the country. The country did not believe it. The Minister of Information, during whose tenure the revelation was published, was never re-appointed to cabinet. Another state daily published an alleged plot to bomb buildings in the major cities. It appears the public was never convinced. No one was arrested. Some of the plots, including some that involve treason have gone to the courts (Kahiya 2002). As yet there has been no conviction. Large dosages of such plots regularly appear under what critics regard as the guise of investigative reporting.

of retribution and the desire to preside over the country's resources so as to ensure that the plundering of its wealth by a few continues, that underlie the behaviour of the former liberation movement. Anything that threatens the political and economic status of the party leadership is the enemy, not of the country but of the former liberation movement, especially the top brass. In this view, selfishness and personal ambition, rather than patriotism and the defence of national sovereignty, are the driving forces behind the persecution of urban residents and the atrocious record on urban governance and democracy.

Conclusion

It is a fact that the urban populations have rejected the former liberation movement. It is also a fact that the former liberation movement has been staging a spirited bid to remain in power. In the process, the party that brought independence and democracy to the country has become in every way as undemocratic as its colonial predecessors were. Falling victim to all this have been the institutions of democracy and democratic processes including the urban electoral system. These adversities have been to the detriment of the urban populace, especially the urban electorate and civil society, whose rights have been trampled on or snatched away.

What remains controversial, however, is whether ZANU-PF is engaged in a process that is seeing the reversal of all the good it brought at independence. Among the good things are the right to choose who governs, the right to participate in the running of the affairs of the urban areas and the country, as well as the right to associate and the right to speak (see Young 1999).

The party argues that it is protecting the country from a revival of neo-colonialism and the new imperialism. On the other hand, critics will continue to maintain that the party has no patriotic agenda. It is the fear of the people and the paranoia emanating from the desire to save the leadership's hide that is the driving force of the onslaught on the urban population.

The evidence at hand seems to agree with this contention. The ridiculous nature of the supporting evidence about the threats to national sovereignty is a strong indication that there may be absolutely no threat at all to nationhood and national sovereignty. The regular bizarre accusations that it is the enemies of the country, working through a puppet opposition, who are responsible for landing the country in its current socio-economic and political plight are less than convincing. This is especially so when the "enlightened" urbanites can point to the ruling party's own responsibility for plunging the country into its current state of economic disaster and political conflict and instability.[4]

Notes

1   The 113 per cent is explained by the fact that there was a larger voter turnout than anticipated according to the officially registered voters.

2   Among those who lost the vote was Sir Garfield Todd, a former prime minister of Southern Rhodesia who had supported the liberation struggle.

3   Following the 2000 parliamentary election, the president who is also the first secretary of ZANU-PF warned the party's central committee of the "forces ranged against us" which to him was a "resurgence of white power". He described the MDC as "a counter-revolutionary Trojan Horse contrived and nurtured by the very inimical forces that enslaved and oppressed our people yesterday" (quoted in Meredith 2002:191).

4   Among the sources of the current problems are (i) the fall of the Zimbabwean currency, which was precipitated by hefty payments to veterans of the country's war of liberation in November 1997; (ii) the country's entry into and involvement in the DRC war; and (iii) the invasion of commercial farms in February 2000. Some include in the list the victory of the ruling party's candidate in the March 2002 presidential elections.

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