



ROBERT MUGABE IN ZIMBABWE: THE ENDGAME?

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Introduction

The descent into the morass of failure seems relentless for a country that used to be, at the aftermath of its independence in 1980, the “jewel in Africa” to be carefully preserved, as former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere advised an acclaimed Mugabe ascending into power.¹ With a prosperous agricultural sector and a manufacturing industry contributing for 25% to national GDP, in the 1980s Zimbabwe inherited a relatively modern economy which, despite being rooted in the supremacy of the white settlers, was among the most advanced in the region. Thirty years later, the only jewels left are those made out of the country’s rich diamonds fields and traded in advanced economies through undisclosed deals at the expenses of the Zimbabweans.² With the overwhelming majority of the population involved in informal activities such as petty trade and artisanal mining, shrinking incomes, an acute cash crisis shaking the banking sector and over 4 million facing food and nutrition insecurity, the country appears today a pale shadow of itself three decades ago.³

The precipitous economy has sparked growing dissent and anti-government protests in Harare since June 2016, which have flared up all over the country, calling for Mugabe’s ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), to step down.⁴ Yet, despite his rapidly deteriorating health conditions and his advanced age, the 92-years-old President seems not having any intention to leave the helm of his sinking ship. He unlashes the heavy-handed Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) against demonstrators and openly threatens judges ruling over the exercise of constitutional rights such as freedom of assembly. The future ahead is filled with uncertainties for Zimbabwe, with a new wave of protests staged by opposition groups calling for electoral reforms, the announced plans to introduce bond notes in October sparking apprehensions from investors and citizens and growing factionalism within ZANU PF. Overall, consensus coalesces around the idea that Zimbabwe is finally entering a new phase of its history; yet, the direction of this transition remains unclear. Much will depend on the power struggle within the ruling party, the cohesion of the opposition and the ability of the

1. G. Kanyenze, *Beyond the enclave: Towards a pro-poor and inclusive development strategy for Zimbabwe*, African Books Collective, 2011.

2. Global Witness Report, *Financing a Parallel Government?*, June 2012.

3. *Ibid.*

4. “Tajamuka Calls for Mass Stay Away to Press Mugabe to Step Down”, *Voice of America*, 29 August 2016, available at: www.voazimbabwe.com.

international community to seize the moment and re-engage the country in a process of real and meaningful change.

This note provides the historical background of the present crisis; analyses the political dynamics in the ruling party and opposition circles and describes various potential developments from now to the 2018 elections.

The Onset of the Crisis. Unravelling Zimbabwe's Underlying Contradictions

The status of paralysis in which Zimbabwe has slipped throughout the past years might be traced back to the early 1990s, with the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) prescribed under the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as part of the wider structural adjustment agenda adopted in the '80s by the Bretton Woods Institutions. Indeed, the free market economy model promoted by ESAP failed to relaunch a stunted economic growth, whilst growing annual inflation and rising unemployment soon gave rise to large civil unrests.⁵ Moreover, the ESAP did not address the land inequality inherited by the colonial system, and only benefitted large-scale, predominantly white farmers through a policy of agricultural export promotion, leaving behind the majority of black people trapped in the survival economy.

Following the economic hardships caused by ESAP, in the years 1997-8 the government resorted to populism in the attempt to maintain the support of traditional allies. First the decisions to concede to 50,000 liberation war veterans a gratuity of Z\$ 50,000 (USD 4,300)⁶, then the entry into the DRC war to support President Kabila represented two massive unbudgeted expenditures which precipitated the crash of the Zimbabwean dollar and the stock market.⁷ Soaring inflation and spiralling food prices were heavily felt by workers, who started coalescing around the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Led by former secretary general of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, Morgan Tsvangirai, and regrouping trade unionists, intellectuals, urban middle class, commercial farmers and small rural producers, MDC represented the first opposition party in the history of post-independence Zimbabwe, which gained nationwide support calling for leadership renewal and promising an equitable redistribution of land.⁸ The threat of a growing MDC ahead of

5. See supra 1.

6. "Zimbabwe: Government Offer Compensation to War Veterans", *AP Archives*, 19 October 1997, Retrieved 3 November 2016, available at: www.aparchive.com.

7. *Ibid.*

8. B. Raftopoulos & P. Quantin, "De l'émancipation du mouvement syndical à l'affirmation du MDC", *Politique africaine*, (1), 26-50, 2001.

the forthcoming elections, spurred the government to revive the land reform issue, considering it as powerful instrument to secure the support of the 66% of the population living in rural areas.⁹ In April 2000, it passed a law introducing land dispossession of white farmers without compensation and openly resorted to intimidation against them and their workers, unleashing the military and war vet brutality in one of the saddest pages of the post-independence period.¹⁰ After years of violence, by 2009, 12 million hectares of land had been taken away from white farmers and only 200 white farmers were left in the country.¹¹ As many argue, the land reforms can be seen in this sense as a land grabbing and primitive accumulation process by part of ZANU PF cadres and used as a patronage dispensation instrument in a desperate attempt to side-line the nascent MDC and shift the attention from a deteriorating economy.¹² Despite being flagged as an instrument to redress past injustices and benefit all indigenous Zimbabweans, the policy was captured by political elites in ZANU PF and used as a patronage tool to retain power: Mugabe's officials and supporters occupied the majority of commercial farms, whilst the majority of black people remained excluded by the redistribution, losing jobs and livelihoods.¹³

The eviction of white skilled landowners had disastrous consequences; a country once considered the "breadbasket of southern Africa" witnessed a tremendous drop in agricultural production, deriving from the inability of the new land owners, Mugabe's family and affiliates, to run farms productively.¹⁴ The fertile Zimbabwean land was now mostly directed to unproductive use, cash-crops production fell dramatically and the contraction of agricultural productivity dragged the country into a spiral of de-industrialisation and structural regression. Shrinking cereal production led to widespread food insecurity; the destruction of the agricultural base of the country resulted in the decay of the manufacture sector, due to the depression of internal demand, and forced the government to resort to natural resource extraction as backbone of a dwindling national economy. A severe draught in the mid-2000 and a massive HIV/AIDS pandemic further exacerbated the controversial land reform's effects. Over the period 1999-2008, the economy declined by 51% the banking sector collapsed and

9. Index Mundi, Zimbabwe, "Density & Urbanisation section", available at: www.indexmundi.com.

10. *Human Rights Watch Report*, "Land Reform in the 20 Years After Independence", 2002. www.hrw.org.

11. *Ibid.*

12. L. Maunganidze, "Zimbabwe: Institutionalized Corruption and State Fragility", in *State Fragility and State Building in Africa* (p. 39-60), Springer International Publishing, 2016.

13. See supra 1.

14. R. Pilosof, "Possibilities and Constraints of Market Led Land Reforms in Southern Africa: An Analysis of Transfers of Commercial Farmland in Postcolonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2000", *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 16(1), 32-49, 2016.

farmers were unable to obtain loan to finance their production, leading to severe shortages of food in the shelves of supermarkets.¹⁵ Due to policy inconsistencies, overwhelming State interventions and infrastructure decay, foreign investors left in droves. Fiscal mismanagement and an unsustainable public expenditure, almost entirely devoted to the payment of civil servants, made the government unable to repay the debt contracted with IFIs, leading IMF to suspend Zimbabwe's voting rights in 2003.¹⁶ The contraction of the economy and the rapid depreciation of the Z\$ trapped the country in a skyrocketing inflation spiral which culminated in 2009, when the Zimbabwean dollar was officially abandoned and replaced with the US\$. As a side effect of the crisis, the informal sector emerged as the predominant segment of the economy, capturing four out of five jobs in the active population, whilst the rate of unemployment peaked up to 95% in 2009.¹⁷

The economic breakdown, coupled by a violent electoral crisis in 2008 following unofficial polls indicating Tsvangirai ahead in the first round, forced the government to sign a power-sharing deal under the aegis of a South African-led SADC negotiation team. The Global Political Agreement was concluded between ZANU PF and the two factions of MDC, now split under the leadership of Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and Welshman Ncube (MDC-N).¹⁸ The government of national unity (GNU) provided a halt to the precipitous economic decline, with the stabilisation of the economy and the introduction of a multi-currency system, which reduced inflation and brought back basic commodities to Zimbabwean citizens.¹⁹ However, this "marriage of convenience" was a short-lived one, and the economic recovery came at the expenses of significant political gains: the deal maintained the balance of power drastically in favour of ZANU PF, which kept control of the security sector and the electoral commission. Mugabe had no real intentions to share power with MDC and the government made no meaningful progress in the implementation of political reforms, whilst ethnic factionalism, corruption scandals and fragmentation around individual personalities weakened the opposition parties.²⁰ With the discovery in 2008 of rich diamonds fields in Chiadzwa, Eastern Zimbabwe, which were brutally seized by the army, Mugabe eventually ensured his

15. See supra 1.

16. International Monetary Fund Press Release 23/80, Press Release: IMF Suspends Zimbabwe's Voting and Related Rights, available at: www.imf.org.

17. CIA, The World Factbook, Zimbabwe accessed 30/08/2016 in www.cia.gov.

18. "Zimbabwe 2008 elections and aftermath", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, available at: www.britannica.com.

19. Mukhlani, "T. Zimbabwe's Government of National Unity: Successes and Challenges in Restoring Peace and Order", in *Journal of Power, Politics & Governance*, June 2014, vol. 2, No. 2, p. 169-180.

20. B. Raftopolos (ed.), *The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement*, African Books Collective, 2013.

absolute grip on power, using their immense revenues to provide a parallel source of funding for ZANU PF and its security apparatus to prevent any return of MDC in the following elections.²¹

During the electoral run of 2013, indeed, allegations of vote rigging irregularities and voters intimidation by military were advanced by several observers, including the national Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN).²² In a public speech addressed to the war vets association last April 2016, Mugabe himself confirmed the role played by the military to ensure ZANU PF victory in 2013.²³ However, the SADC recognised the ballots as free and fair and announced Mugabe as the winner in August of the same year.²⁴ With the re-election of the ZANU PF leader as Head of State and the dismantling of the GNU, the economy re-entered the downward slide already experienced between 1997 and 2008, characterised by the crash of Zimbabwe's stock, loss of investor confidence and drainage of banks' funds; hundreds of companies were forced to close, several thousands jobs were lost and the capacity utilisation of the manufacturing sector declined from 44,9% in 2012 to 39,6% in 2013.²⁵ The country accrued a cumulative deficit of \$25 billion between 2013 and 2015, a domestic debt of nearly \$6 billion and \$11 billion of liabilities towards IFIs.²⁶ Persistent economic mismanagement and knee-jerk policies, with the exception of the brief period of the government of national unity, trapped Zimbabwe in a spiral of de-industrialisation, financial vulnerability and informal economy. This situation keeps on sparking growing frustration and resentment among the population until the present day.

21. T. Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Corporations, Smugglers, and the Theft of Africa's Wealth*, PublicAffairs, 2016.

22. Election Day Media Report, Wednesday 31 July 2013, The Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, available at: archive.kubatana.net.

23. "Mugabe Remarks Exposes Military", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 15 April 2016, Retrieved 1 September 2016, available at: www.theindependent.co.zw.

24. See supra 18.

25. "Zimbabwe's Economic Collapse Alarms Business", *Zimbabwe Situation*, 20 March 2014, Retrieved 3 November 2015, available at: www.zimbabwesiuation.com.

26. E. Cross, "The Economic and Political Crisis in Zimbabwe", *The Zimbabwean*, 17 July 2016, Retrieved 3 November 2016, available at: www.thezimbabwean.co.

Mugabe in Tight Corner: Causes of Instability and Fragility of ZANU PF

Overview

Over the past years, economic decline and growing infighting within ZANU PF over the succession to an ageing Mugabe have floundered the country in a situation of unprecedented political and financial uncertainty. The economic hardship, characterised by recurrent shortages of hard currency, has been exacerbated by the declining performance of the mining sector, echoing the fall of international commodity prices and the slowdown of the Chinese economy.²⁷ Indeed, Zimbabwe mining industry has become the default sector of the economy, after agriculture and industry have come to a halt due to the fast-track land reform and its disruptive consequences. The country's enormous mineral wealth has traditionally benefitted national elites which, thanks to lack of transparency, intimidation and centralisation of power have captured the economic rents generated by natural resources and arbitrarily dispensed them to their supporters in order to retain power. For this reason, the modest gains from mineral commodities exports since the beginning of the year²⁸ have reduced the patronage power in the hands of the elites, increasing the costs of maintaining the *status quo* and forcing the government to implement short-term and contradictory policies.²⁹ In June 2016 the Ministry of Commerce introduced the Statutory Instrument 64 (SI 64), a tight regulation to restrict imports of goods from neighbouring countries with the aim to boost local industry.³⁰ According to SI 64, a long series of goods such as builders ware products, cereals, coffee creamers, peanut butter, bottled waters and cotton clothes could not be imported anymore.³¹ The promulgation of the import ban sparked immediate reactions at the

27. "Zimbabwe's liquidity crisis: the curse of China's slowdown and a strong dollar", 21 April 2016, Retrieved 25 August 16, available at: source.co.zw.

28. Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa's Mid Term Fiscal Review, presented 8 September 2016, available at: www.techzim.co.zw.

29. Interview with Human Rights Activist and Centre for Natural Resource Governance Executive Director Farai Maguwu, Harare, 19 October 2016.

30. "New Import Regulations Gazetted", *The Herald*, 18 June 2016, Retrieved 25 August 2016 www.herald.co.zw.

31. Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016, Control of Goods, Zimbabwe Revenues Authority.

Zimbabwean-South African border of Beitbridge, where several thousand people, mostly unemployed citizens who depend on informal trade, enter the country every day to sell South African goods.³² Since July 1st, protests erupted in road blockages, and recurrent shutdowns³³ whose consequences can still be felt today. Furthermore, the introduction of bond notes at the beginning of November, meant to ease the liquidity constraints through a non-convertible but US\$ pegged currency, valid as legal tender for all transaction within the country³⁴, has been received with negative sentiments by Zimbabwean citizens and businessmen. Fear and anxieties from general public risk further accelerating the collapse of the economy, especially after Mugabe's shocking overturn of Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa's plan to axe 250,000 civil service jobs to reduce public spending announced after the release of the Mid Year Fiscal Policy Review.³⁵

All these erratic decisions are symptomatic of a defiant and panicking government, clueless on how to reverse the quagmire it has thrown the country in. The looting machinery of the Zimbabwean state needs to be oiled with resources and, as the economy dives deeper and popular discontent rises again, maintaining the *status quo* is revealing increasingly burdensome for Mugabe's entourage: the acute shortage of US dollars, the main currency circulating in the country, has jammed the usual play of ZANU PF leader to buy loyalties by arbitrarily controlling and distributing the resources available.³⁶ Periods of hardships and dire straits are not new to Zimbabweans, but this is not so much the case for the ruling party which, deprived of the material resources to keep it glued together, seems to have finally started cartwheeling.

The Economic Meltdown – Zimbabwe: a Sinking Ship in Mighty Storm

Marked by decades of populist and misguided policies and constrained by the loss of monetary sovereignty, Zimbabwe is no stranger to economic crisis and vulnerability to external shocks. The dollarization of the economy after 2009 allowed the shops to bring back goods in their shelves,

32. "All Borders Face Shutdown on Monday", Zimbabwe Exiles Forum, Nehanda Radio, 05 August 2016, Retrieved 25 August 2016, available at: nehandaradio.com.

33. "ISS: Can Zimbabwe's #ThisFlag movement lead to real political change?", Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Africa, Defence Web, 19 July 2016, Retrieved 03 September 2016 www.defenceweb.co.za.

34. Statutory Instrument 133 of 2016, Zimbabwean Government Gazette Extraordinary, Vol. XCIV, No. 66 31st October, 2016.

35. "Zimbabweans Agonise Over Bond Notes", *DailyNews*, 18 September 2016, Retrieved 18 September 2016, available at: www.dailynews.co.zw.

36. "Analysis: In Zimbabwe, Spring Is in the Air", *Daily Maverick*, 28 August 2016, Retrieved 29 August 2016, available at: www.dailymaverick.co.za.

but it did not come without significant costs. Lacking its own currency, Zimbabwe's Central Bank does not have tools to control the quantity of money in circulation; therefore, it can only increase the amount of foreign reserves in its banking system through exports, FDIs or remittances.³⁷ However, the resources of liquidity have continued to shrink over the past years: the country has suffered a systemic trade deficit reaching -323 USD million in 2016, being a net importer of fuel and capital goods, with 490 USD million imports hugely exceeding the 167 USD million produced by exports.³⁸ FDIs have remained steadily low due to unfavourable investment climate³⁹, whilst diaspora remittances have dropped by 15% during the first half of 2016 and are expected to continue declining, as Zimbabweans residing abroad prefer to send money back home through informal channels and mobile money wallets.⁴⁰ The unfavourable business climate has led to the closure of more than 300 companies only in the first half of 2016.⁴¹ In addition, the slowdown of the main foreign commercial partners of the country – China – and the depreciation of neighbouring currencies against a strong US\$ have further depressed national exports and magnified an already heavy liquidity crisis.

A unique combination of elements renders the current crisis of an unprecedented magnitude. After the violent 2013 elections, and the resulting loss of confidence of investors in the Zimbabwean banking sector, fiscal revenues have steadily declined. This is also due to massive illicit financial outflows linked to the extractive sector, which have severely drained the national Treasury. The loss of 15\$ billion of diamond revenues which should have been generated since the begin of mining activities in Chiadzwa in 2008, but which have resulted in just over a 1\$ billion for the state coffers, allegedly due to opaque practices of the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDZ) and misappropriation by top government officials, well epitomises this worrisome trend.⁴² The global economic crisis and the decline in global commodity prices, and raw materials which have been the main source of inflows after the land reform, has worsened the balance of payment, leading to a debt soaring to nearly \$6 billion and \$11 billion of liabilities towards IFIs. During the

37. See supra 23.

38. Trading Economics, Zimbabwe Balance of Trade, Retrived 05 October 2016, available at: www.tradingeconomics.com.

39. See supra 23.

40. V. Chipunza, "Remittances to Zimbabwe Decline by 15% to \$387.9 million as use of informal channels", *The Financial Gazette*, 8 September 2016, Retrieved 12 September 2016, www.financialgazette.co.zw.

41. Prosper Chitambara, PhD, Senior Economist for Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LEIDRIZ), speaking at Zimbabwe Reality Check Seminar, workshop organised by Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, Harare, Tuesday 18th October, 2016.

42. "Diamond Looting in Zimbabwe Costs the Country \$15 Billion Loss", *The African Exponent*, 20 March 2016, Retrieved 30 August 2016, available at: www.africanexponent.com.

annual IMF/WB meeting held in Lima, Peru, last September 2015, the Zimbabwean delegation committed to an ambitious strategy to clear its external debt arrears to its multilateral and bilateral donors.⁴³ However, the inability of the government to honour the Lima Agreement and the failure to pay, by June 2016, the US\$1,8 billion in arrears it owes to the IMF are refraining IFIs from unlocking further assistance to the country. Zimbabwe has been put on hold in the IMF agenda, after the austerity plan proposed by Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa has been suddenly overturned by President Mugabe.⁴⁴ This plan was meant to rationalise public expenditure and reduce employment costs which, up to now, have grown to absorb almost the 90% of government revenues. Facing the dilemma between the economic and the political rationale, Mugabe has again sacrificed the former in order not to lose his support base ahead of the 2018 elections. Doing so, he jeopardised the uncertain re-engagement process with the West and openly humiliated Chinamasa, in a move which speaks volumes about the turbulences within the ZANU PF.

In such a situation of economic distress, deprivation and food insecurity have become commonplace in rural and urban areas across the country. The UNICEF country report for August 2016 indicates 4 million people currently facing food and nutrition insecurity in the country from January.⁴⁵ As Minister Chinamasa acknowledged at the launch of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (I-PRSP) on 26th September, over 70% of Zimbabweans are currently living in poverty; the government has secured so far only \$800 million out of the \$2,7 billion required to implement the I-PRSP, which should serve to relaunch agricultural productivity and restore a social sector severely affected by the crisis.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the persistent El Niño induced draught has escalated food insecurity across several regions, namely Matabeleland North and South, Masvingo, some parts of Manicaland and the Midlands.⁴⁷

In urban areas, the high reliance on imports from regional neighbours due to insufficient domestic production, degraded infrastructures and recurrent power cuts have rendered goods in supermarkets inaccessible for ordinary Zimbabweans, due to prohibitive prices.⁴⁸ For this reason, it has become commonplace to buy food and primary commodities in the streets: the high density areas of Harare are full of wooden stalls and pavement

43. Lima Strategy Document, www.newsday.co.zw.

44. E. Mambo, B. Mpofu, "Zim Squabbles Rock IMF", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 September 2016, Retrieved 17 September 2016, available at: www.theindependent.co.zw.

45. UNICEF Situation Report, August 2016, reliefweb.int.

46. "70% of Zimbabweans live in poverty", *IOL News*, 26 September 2016, Retrieved 02 October 2016, available at: www.iol.co.za.

47. "FEWSNET: 4 Zimbabwe Regions Facing Acute Food Shortages", *Voice of America*, 3 October 2016, Retrieved 04 October 2016, available at: www.voazimbabwe.com.

48. E. Cross, "The Deepening Crisis in Zimbabwe", *The Zimbabwean*, 21 August 2015, Retrieved 03 September 2016, available at: www.thezimbabwean.co.

markets where petty traders sell vegetables, electronic devices and clothes, often counterfeit or stolen, at far lower prices than the traditional shops. Mirrors, electric buckets, home furniture can be easily bought whilst waiting at traffic lights or stuck in the traffic jam. In the eastern city of Mutare, fashionable shoes are smuggled from the bordering Mozambique and sold in streets at competitive deals. Furthermore, as banks and ATMs are running out of cash, queues have become interminable everywhere, and people are forced to stand in line for hours, eventually not being able to access their money. Pictures recently shared on Twitter show Zimbabweans sleeping outside banks in order to be able to access their cash before the entry into circulation of the surrogate currency, as the maximum withdrawal amount has been slashed to \$50 daily.⁴⁹ The rush of panicking citizens and investors to withdraw savings from their accounts is the inescapable outcome of an extremely low, if non-existent, public confidence in the fiscal management capacity of the government, exacerbated by the anxieties linked to the imminent introduction of bond notes.⁵⁰ In rural areas, where there is little access access to banks or cell-phone coverage, people are increasingly returning to barter, exchanging crops and animals for basic commodities⁵¹. In this situation of economic turbulence, social safety nets are waning, as pensions funds have become insufficient to secure the assistance to those in need, and pensioners are often reduced to live with something as little as \$40 per month.⁵² The inability of parents to pay the school fees for their children has increased school dropout of 40% since 2012, accompanied by an upsurge in child marriage and early pregnancy.⁵³ School fees continue to increase, whilst the monthly budget allocated for schools by the executive is a miserable \$20.⁵⁴ At tertiary level, economic difficulties often expose female students to risky sexual behaviour in order to pay the fees for university and accommodation; as a result, the HIV rates at University of Zimbabwe has reached an unprecedented peak of 47%.⁵⁵

49. D. Zane, "Zimbabweans Sleeping Outside Banks", *BBC News Africa*, Live Reporting, 4 November 2011, available at: www.bbc.com.

50. "Zimbabwe Economy Dives on Bond Notes Jitters and Investors Fears", *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 06 September 2016, Retrieved 04 October 2016, available at: thezimbabwemail.com.

51. "A Cashless Economy in Zimbabwe? With Little Cash, There's Little Choice", *The New York Times*, 03 November 2016, Retrieved 04 November 2016, available at: www.nytimes.com.

52. "Pensioners Live in Abject Poverty", *NewsDay*, 20 September 2016, Retrieved 03 October 2016, available at: www.newsday.co.zw.

53. "Over 13,000 Pupils Drop out of School", *The Financial Gazette*, 12 March 2015, Retrieved 04 October 2016, available at: www.financialgazette.co.zw.

54. See supra 34.

55. "47% Of UZ Students with HIV", *Chronicle*, 20 May 2016, accessed 05 October 2016, available at: www.chronicle.co.zw.



Citizens queuing at CABS bank in central Harare, August 2016, Harare

The health sector as a whole has been tragically affected by the deepening crisis; several referral hospitals in Harare have been forced to suspend surgical operations, due to the lack of essential drugs such as painkillers, anaesthetics or antibiotics in health facilities and pharmacies.⁵⁶ Patients often need to supply soap or even water buckets and to pay in advance – rigorously cash – to obtain the necessary treatment. “It has become an inescapable dilemma: if we spend our salary in drugs we can’t afford to bring food to our table, if we buy food we can’t save enough money for medicines” explains a patient who had to borrow \$150 for a scan.⁵⁷ Finally, the rampant extortions of money and widespread bribery acts committed by police officers at illegal roadblocks, and the government recurrent failure to pay pensions and civil servants salaries on time

56. “Drug Shortages Spell Doom”, *NewsDay*, 19 September 2016, available at: www.newsday.co.zw.

57. Conversation with a patient held by the author visiting one of Harare government hospital on 5th August 2016.

(including the security forces) are the eventual testament of the Zimbabwean economy.

The Growing ZANU PF Infighting

Cornered by a disintegrating economy and weakened by his advanced age and poor health conditions, President Mugabe is losing his tight grip on power and seems no longer able to act as uniting force within a wrangling ZANU PF devoured by infighting and personal bids. Factional politics is not a new phenomenon within the incumbent party but dates back to the late 1970s and is linked to its very nature based upon clientelism and patronage practices.⁵⁸ Since the independence ZANU PF – complicit the war vets and the security apparatus – managed to deeply entrenched itself on the ground with a capillary presence in every district of the country. The state became gradually an extension of the party itself and its cadres were appointed to key positions in public, private and parastatal sectors, whilst legislative and judicial powers were diverted to protect the interests of ZANU PF itself.⁵⁹ This allowed top officials to accumulate enormous personal wealth and privileges which, however, require political power and influence to be maintained and expanded. As the resources of this neopatrimonial regime are shrinking, obtaining control over the party has become a life-and-death struggle between various ZANU PF factions. The succession issue is crucial for any future development of the country, as economy deteriorates and re-engagement with external partners is anchored to requests for a leadership renewal. However, the lack of clear institutional provisions and Mugabe's refusal to facilitate a transition is exacerbating internal divisions and drifting the competitors further apart.

Indeed, his frail and deteriorating conditions have recently led to a flurry of speculations about his health and, ultimately, his eventual death.⁶⁰ However, the President keeps scoffing at such rumours. Asked about his health state when he returned from Dubai after having mysteriously left the SADC Summit in Swaziland, last August, he ironically answered, "Yes it's true I was dead and I resurrected as I always do".⁶¹ However, his old age is pushing the President towards the end of his political carrier and renders the situation extremely volatile with regards to his succession. At a first glance, the solution might derive from the 2013 Constitution which, at Section 101, reads: "if the President dies, resigns or is removed from office,

58. S. Moyo, & P. Yeros, (2007). "The radicalised state: Zimbabwe's interrupted revolution", *Review of African Political Economy*, 34(111), 103-121.

59. T. Scarnecchia, "The 'fascist cycle' in Zimbabwe, 2000–2005", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32(2), 221-237, 2006.

60. "Robert Mugabe 'death': What We Know so Far", *The Southern Daily*, 1 September 2016, Retrieved 03 September 2016, available at: thesoutherndaily.co.zw.

61. "President Mugabe Returns Home", *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation*, 03 September 2016, Retrieved 03 September 2016, available at: www.zbc.co.zw.

the first Vice-President assumes office as President until the expiry of the former President's term of office".⁶² However, this clause is suspended until 2023, because of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which disciplines the first 10-years long transitional periods. The Sixth Schedule states that, should such circumstances occur, the Vice-President becomes acting President for 90 days, period after which the ruling party nominate a person to assume office as a new President.⁶³ This provision, however, is extremely problematic: indeed, there is no clear definition of whom, inside the ruling party should nominate a successor. The internal procedures of ZANU PF on presidential selection, if existent, are unknown; meanwhile, the Constitution itself does not clarify whether it should be the Congress, the Executive Committee or the party leader to supply a presidential nominee.⁶⁴ Such loophole is particularly dangerous in a context of highly dysfunctional factional politics like the one wrangling ZANU PF. The drafters of the Constitution did not envisage a situation of strong internal divisions between equally powerful groups each pushing for its own candidate.⁶⁵ The party constitution is silent on how to choose a new leader in case Mugabe becomes incapacitated or dies whilst still in office; meanwhile, his uninterrupted 36-years long hegemony have prevented ZANU PF to gain experience on how to conduct internal elections. Hence, the ambiguities in the transitional provisions of the national supreme legislation, the silence of party constitution and the sharpening factional divisions might lead to a chaotic situation where several nominees are concurring for the position of President. Furthermore, the personalisation of the ruling party, rooted in the award of goodies and fortunes to single elements of ZANU PF leadership, is backfiring against him, as party members find hard to submit to any other leader and are pouncing against each other on the remaining crumbs of power. Within the Youth ZANU PF League, for instance, national commissar Saviour Kasukwere has recently attempted to shut down the Midlands Provincial Co-ordinating Committee (PCC) alleging that other young elements within the Midlands PCC had been working to destabilise the province and to support the Vice President ascendancy, to whom Kasukwere is fiercely opposed. This episodes illustrates how the internecine factional war for the control of pivotal party structures has eventually spilled out at all governmental levels.⁶⁶

However, the *do-ut-des* logic maintaining affiliations in exchange for personal benefits has rendered the ethnic connotation less evident in the

62. Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, Section 101, Para 1,a www.constituteproject.org.

63. *Ibid.*

64. "Experts Say Zimbabwe Constitution Can't Address Mugabe Succession", *Voice of America*, 25 March 2016, Retrieved 04 October 2016, available at: www.voazimbabwe.com.

65. *Ibid.*

66. E. Mambo, "Zanu PF Youth League Fractures Widen", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 22 January 2016, www.theindependent.co.zw

current factionalism. Divisions are generally based on competing personal interests, irrespectively of ethnic belonging. Even though mass violence against the Ndebele minority had taken place in the past, political grievances within the ruling party do not overlap with a Shona/Ndebele divide.⁶⁷ At institutional level, despite no Constitutional provision directly address the issue, balance has been ensured through the appointment of two equal Vice Presidents each representing an ethnic group, with the purpose of pursuing a “regional balance”.⁶⁸ Undoubtedly, tensions are palpable in Ndebele-dominated districts such as Bulawayo and Hwange, where criticism is fierce against the centralisation of decisional power in Harare and nourish ethnic grievances exacerbated by the current economic hardship. However, the political factions are not mostly shaped by inter-ethnic rivalries; instead, it would be more appropriate to talk about a generational divide between the liberation fighters reunited in the Team Lacoste under the leadership of Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the Generation 40 (G40) faction regrouping younger ZANU PF officials.

The struggle erupted in the end of 2014, when former Vice President Joyce Mujuru was expelled from ZANU PF under allegations of plotting against Mugabe.⁶⁹ Mujuru’s unbridled rise to power, culminated in 2013 with the post of Vice President, was making her the papal candidate to ascend to Mugabe’s throne. This nomination, however, disappointed Mnangagwa, who had secured ZANU PF victory in 2013 thanks to the control of the security apparatus. Her removal, arguably planned with the compliance of other top officials such as Education Minister Jonathan Moyo, finally led Mnangagwa to obtain the Vice Presidency and allowed him to consolidate his preeminent position. His diplomatic and business-oriented mind, furthermore, granted him the favour of the international community, which subordinate their financial assistance to Zimbabwe to his takeover of the presidency, as he is considered the only figure able to navigate the structural reforms the country desperately needs. However, the emergence of the G40 faction, regrouped around young politicians such as Jonathan Moyo, Local Government Minister, Saviour Kasukwere and the increasingly influential First Lady Grace Mugabe, has prompted the final race to control the party and – consequently - the government.⁷⁰ The

67. The Gakurahundi massacre which took place between 1983 and 1987, was an operation carried out by the national army’s Fifth Brigade against alleged anti-government elements among the Ndebele minority in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces, resulting in the killing of a number between 8,000 and 30,000 individuals. Reference: T. M. (2010), “Zimbabwe’s illusive national healing and reconciliation processes: From independence to the inclusive government: 1980-2009”, *conflict trends*, 1, 19-27.

68. “Why Does Zimbabwe Have a Dual Presidency”, *The Herald*, 22 December 2014, Retrieved 03 September 2016, available at: www.herald.co.zw.

69. International Crisis Group Report, “Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis”, February 2015 www.crisisgroup.org.

70. See supra 46.

G40, whose name derives by a constitutional provision allowing anyone above the age of 40 to run as presidential candidate, is an amorphous group opposing Mnangagwa ambitions and apparently supporting the ascension of Mrs Mugabe.⁷¹ Motivated by the fear of her husband's death and the loss of the family's enormous wealth, the First Lady is conquering her own political space after having been elected chair of the Women League of ZANU PF in 2014. However, her limited popularity makes Mrs Mugabe more a pawn in the chessboard between the two competing factions, subtly used by the real mastermind of G40, Minister Moyo. The rivalry has now reached unprecedented bitterness, to the point that is openly fought even through the media, used by the competing groups to smear each other and disclosing murky appropriation of the country's wealth. Responding to allegations which saw him involved in shady land deals, for instance, Minister Moyo recently accused on Twitter party officials linked to Mnangagwa for the looting of the USD 15 billion diamond revenues.⁷²

In such ever-shifting political battlefield, an unexpected turn comes with the defection of the war veterans. Traditionally, the relationship between Mugabe and the liberation veterans has been one of mutual benefit, with the liberation fighters aiding ZANU PF's leader in maintaining his rule in exchange for material benefits of any sort.⁷³ However, in July 2016 they publicly withdrew their support for Mugabe as Presidential candidate in the 2018 elections. Despite rhetoric claims against Mugabe's authoritarian drift, this choice should not be considered the outcome of any real democratic shift, but mainly a strategy to preserve their interests. In defining its transition strategy for the post-Mugabe era, the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) has positioned itself with Mnangagwa, identified as the most likely heir of ZANU PF. For this reason, war vets are at odds with Mrs Mugabe's G40 group and, indirectly, with their old leader. Feeling betrayed by his cronies and by the same Mnangagwa, hence, the ZANU PF leader has reacted by expelling eight ZNLWVA leaders from the party, among them the Secretary-General Victor Matemadanda, the Deputy Chairperson Headman Moyo, the Spokesperson Douglas Mahiya, and National Commissar Francis Nhando.⁷⁴

Likewise the axe of the guerrilla fighters, the public humiliation of Finance Minister Chinamasa, another of Mnangagwa key ally, with Mugabe abruptly reversing his long awaited austerity measures, embodies the

71. P. Pigou, "Southern Africa Report", Institute for Security Studies, Issue 6, September 2016,

72. See supra 30.

73. "War Vets: Mugabe vs. Mnangagwa", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 29 July 2016, Retrieved 30 August, 2016, www.theindependent.co.zw.

74. "Mugabe's ZANU-PF Expels Unruly War Vets' Leaders", *News24Zimbabwe*, 04 August 2016, Retrieved 30 August 2016, available at: zimbabwe.news24.com.

centrifugal dynamics shattering ZANU PF, where power balances and fortunes change overnight. The “pendulum politics” of the ruling party, however, seems this time having exhausted its motion.

A Tightening Opposition Front

Since the start of the political crisis, the fragmentation and polarisation of opposition parties has benefitted the ruling ZANU PF and cushioned its precipitous implosion. ZANU PF’s main rival MDC split in two main factions, MDC-T and MDC-N, at the time of the government of national unity. After the electoral loss of 2013, MDC-T split again, with the former secretary general and Finance Minister Tendai Biti accusing Tsvangirai of increasing undemocratic and violent practices. Biti then joined other disaffected MDC-T members and formed the independent People’s Democratic Party (PDP).⁷⁵ However, MDC-T remains still today the largest and most popular force opposing the ruling ZANU PF and many believe that this time its leader might be given the chance to finish the work he started in 1999.⁷⁶

At the same time, newly formed constituencies are waving the momentum of ZANU PF trembling foundations. Since her purge in 2014, former VP Joyce Mujuru has launched her own formation, the Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF), which is increasingly tapping into the resurgent political space. Together with her, other former ZANU PF bigwigs such as cabinet members Dzikamai Mavhaire, Rugare Gumbo and Kudakwashe Bhasikiti, have joined ZimPF, taking leadership positions. Nonetheless, several of ancient Mujuru’s allies are hesitant to be publicly associated with her, arguably because of the abundant benefits they received from the complex patronage machinery operated by the ruling party.⁷⁷ However, her inaugural rally for Mashonaland Central province held in Bindura, a traditional ZANU PF stronghold, attracted thousands of people and was attended even by leaders of other opposition parties such as Biti.⁷⁸ So far, a fragmented, weak and poorly funded opposition has failed to propose itself as a viable alternative, lacking the necessary unity and cohesion to unseat the incumbent party. However, the unprecedented internal and external pressures on ZANU PF might provide a major push for an inclusive opposition coalition to come together in an attempt to defeat Mugabe in 2018. In June, five parties, namely Mavambo Kusile Dawn (MKD), the

75. See supra 46.

76. See supra 4.

77. “Where Are Joyce Mujuru’s Allies?”, *Zimbabwe Situation*, 30 June 2016, Retrieved 25 August 2016, available at: www.zimbabwesituation.com.

78. E. Mambo, “Mujuru Shakes Zanu PF Stronghold”, *The Standard*, 4 September 2016, Retrieved 02 October 2016, available at: www.thestandard.co.zw.

Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (RDZ), the MDC-N, Zimbabweans United for Democracy (ZUNDE) and the Democratic Assembly for Restoration and Empowerment (DARE) have reunited under the Coalition of Democrats (CODE).⁷⁹ Biti's PDP and the former liberation movement Zimbabwe African People Union (ZAPU) have been also invited to join, but despite common acknowledgment from their representatives over the need to work together, their participation is still uncertain.

Furthermore, the establishment of the National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA) gathering several opposition parties, among which the same MDC-T and ZimPF, to push for electoral reforms ahead of the 2018 elections might finally open a window of opportunities to challenge Mugabe's undisputed power, by creating synergies and a convergence of interests and resources unseen so far. The NERA group has woven the repeated nationwide shutdown organised by grassroots movements such as #ThisFlag and *Tajamuka/Sesijikile* ("We Refuse" in Shona and Ndebele languages) in demanding the resignation of President Mugabe. It has also released several statements condemning the brutal repression of peaceful protesters.⁸⁰ NERA leaders have acknowledged the need for opposition parties to come together under a grand coalition to oppose ZANU PF, if they really want to have a chance in the next electoral run. At the present time, the CODE and NERA groups are informal clusters of parties consulting and exchanging information to create a cohesive opposition front for 2018. However, so far, concrete steps actualise such alliance have not been taken; "We are not there yet, we aspire to get there, we strive to get there at the appropriate opportunity" PDP's leader Biti said in a press conference held in Harare on 12th of August.⁸¹

The recent meeting in Gweru between Tsvangirai and Mujuru, furthermore, has nourished expectations among experts and the general public about a possible alliance between the two main opposition constituencies; MDC-T vast popular base and Mujuru's liberation credentials might open an unprecedented window of opportunity to finally defeat Mugabe.⁸² Yet, acrimonious divisions within the MDC-T over a possible agreement with a long-life enemy render such marriage difficult to actualise. Issues of leadership need to be addressed to decide who should be the Presidential nominee, and a common vision and agenda presenting concrete alternatives is still lacking. Furthermore, many analysts and commentators fear that a grand coalition might not be enough if the

79. "Zimbabwe: Five opposition parties form coalition to challenge President Mugabe in 2018 poll", *International Business Time*, 1 June 2016, www.ibtimes.co.uk.

80. "Massive Boost for Opposition Coalition", *NewsDay*, www.newsday.co.zw.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Tsvangirai, Mujuru present formidable coalition, *DailyNews*, 19 August 2016 Retrieved 02 September 2016, available at: www.dailynews.co.zw.

electoral bodies will remain under the control of the regime.⁸³ “My concern is that if opposition parties do not push for genuine electoral reforms there will be a crushing of the opposition, even if they run unite around a single candidate. The only hope is the creation of an even electoral environment. What we really need is a coalition of the willing”, human rights activists Farai Maguwu explained.⁸⁴

An Arab Spring, Zimbabwean Style?

As the government is broke and the economy continues to sink deeper, popular discontent and anger in the country has reached unprecedented intensity, galvanizing pro-democracy activists and fed up citizens to demand for change and accountability from the ruling elites. The protests erupted first in June in Beitbridge as a result of the abrupt ban on imports. Since then, a wide range of grassroots movements has gained momentum, attracting thousands of Zimbabweans to join “stay-away” and national shutdowns in Harare and the other main cities of the country. On July 6th, with shops and departments stores closed all over the town, Harare resembled a ghost city.⁸⁵ Citizens and businessmen responded to the appeal launched on Facebook and YouTube by an unknown pastor, Evan Mawarire who, wrapped in the Zimbabwean national flag, called for a nationwide strike and told the government “enough is enough”.⁸⁶ Pastor Mawarire complained about the daily hardships faced by Zimbabweans and asked the executive to urgently address the economic situation and to listen to its “*tanieta*” citizens (“tired” in Shona). Mawarire’s message echoed widely among his countrymen, mostly because he presented himself as a simple father concerned of no longer being able to pay the school fees for his children. “I am not a politician, nor an activist, just a citizen” he said in one of his videos.⁸⁷ The choice of the flag was of paramount importance, as it symbolised the hope for Zimbabweans to finally re-appropriate of their future and protesting against the monopolisation of the emblem – hence the country itself – by ZANU PF. The hashtag #ThisFlag rapidly circulated across the country and mobilised thousands of citizens around Mawarire, to the point that, when he was arrested and charged with treason, hundreds of lawyers offered to represent him in court, whilst a crowd of Zimbabweans wrapped in the flag gathered outside to express support to the pastor.⁸⁸ Mawarire was soon

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*

85. “Strikes and Protests Bring Zimbabwe’s Capital to a Halt”, *New York Times*, 6 July 2016.

86. “Can Zimbabwe’s #ThisFlag movement lead to real political change?”, Defence Web, Institute for Security Studies, 19 July 2016, Retrieved 02 October 2016, available at: www.defenceweb.co.za

87. Pastor Evan Mawarire, #ThisFlag, YouTube Video, available at: www.youtube.com.

88. See supra 68.

released and induced to flee to the US, but the struggle continued under the banner of other protests movements such as the Tajamuka/Sesijikile campaign, which staged several demonstrations all over the country. In central Harare, in August, thousands of people took the streets in peaceful demos, brutally repressed by a heavy handed police, which resulted in violent clashes where protestors, even unarmed and elderly citizens, were beaten and arbitrarily arrested. Riots swept also in the second largest city of Bulawayo, Gweru, Kwekwe and Masvingo where citizens joined the shutdown demanding the dismissal of the bank notes and the resignation of President Mugabe.⁸⁹ These protests undoubtedly managed to create solidarity networks and document the violence of police repression even to audiences outside Zimbabwe.

Marches calling for Mugabe to resign have been staged even overseas, in cities such as London and New York, where the Zimbabwean diaspora has widely mobilised in solidarity with the campaigns in the country.⁹⁰ On 17th September 2016, ahead of the 71th United Nations General Assembly session, a group of Zimbabweans residing in the US and including members of #ThisFlag movement has gathered together outside the UN Headquarters, appealing the international community to embrace their call for political change in the country.⁹¹ However, despite having played for decades an instrumental role in alleviating poverty and sustaining relatives and friends back home through remittances, Zimbabweans overseas remain largely voiceless, as the country's electoral law does not allow them to cast their vote, unless for those in diplomatic service.⁹² Even though the government has been facing mounting pressures from civil society, gathered around the NERA coalition, asking to concede the right to vote to Zimbabweans living abroad, ZANU PF continues to deny its citizens in the diaspora the right to vote, arguably in the attempt to curtail their "game changer" potential in the forthcoming elections.⁹³

89. "Latest Zim News Updates. Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Masvingo, Kwekwe Mutare in ShutDown", *ZimNews.net*, 06 July 2016, Retrieved 25 August 2016, available at: zimnews.net.

90. "Zimbabwe's Diaspora Protests in London and Calls on President Mugabe to Go", *Nehanda Radio*, 4 November 2016, Retrieved 15 November 2016.

91. "Zimbabweans Protests Outside UN ahead of Robert Mugabe's Address", *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 18 September 16, retrieved 14 November 2016, thezimbabwemail.com.

92. "Pressure Mounts on Diaspora Vote", *The Financial Gazette*, 18 August 2016, retrieved 15 November 2016, www.financialgazette.co.zw.

93. "Zimbabwe Diaspora: The Vote, the Cash", *Zimbabwe Situation*, 21 September 2016, retrieved 15 November 2016, www.zimbabwesituation.com.



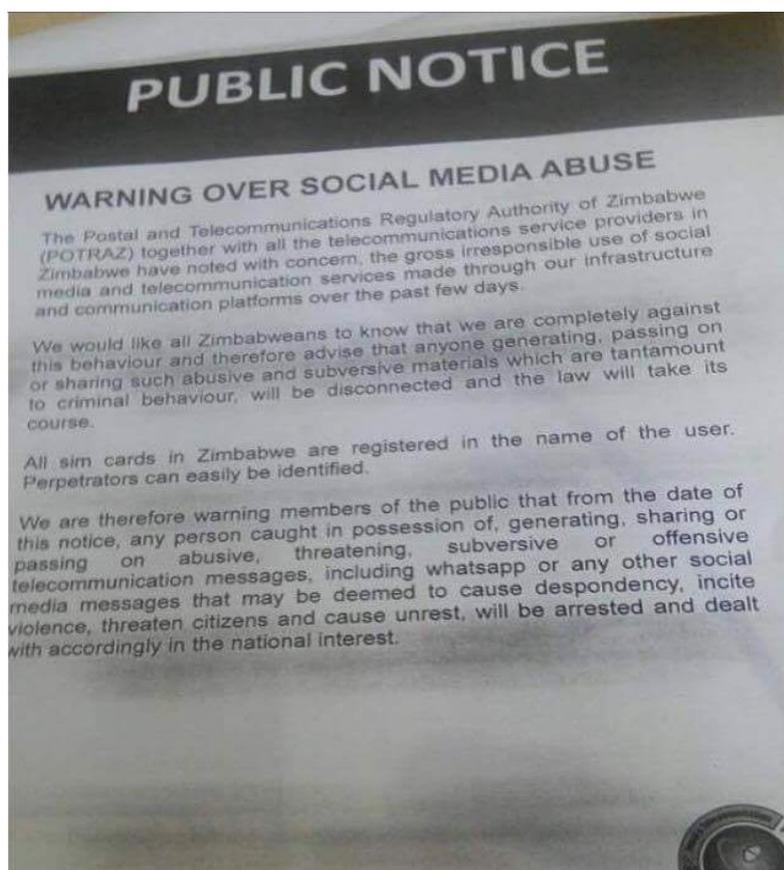
View of central Harare on national ShutDown day, 6th July 2016, Harare



Protesters gathering in front of Harare Magistrate Court in support of Pastor Evan Mawarire, 13th July 2016, Harare

At the same time, Social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook and YouTube have revealed crucial in opening alternative spaces of civic

engagement and participation even for a Zimbabwean polity traditionally left outside any real political process.⁹⁴ As the revolution of social media uprisings, fought through hashtags, is immune to traditional repression instruments, the government has nonetheless attempted to crackdown access to virtual platforms, fearing their massive potential as game changers in the democratisation process, disseminating cheap and free information in a context where the only TV channel, ZBC, is state-owned and its content carefully censored.⁹⁵ During the shutdown days, indeed, it curtailed access to Internet rendering impossible for anyone without wideband Wi-Fi to use Whatsapp or Facebook. It also issued a public notice warning over social media abuse and the passing of “subversive messages” which could be equated to criminal behaviour and hence subjected to prosecution.⁹⁶



Public Notice Warning on use of social media, circulated by the Zimbabwean government, July 2016

94. “Social media becomes Mugabe’s nightmare”, *Inter Press Service*, 25 October 2016.

95. “Robert Mugabe Seizes on the Latest Political Threat to His Zimbabwe: WhatsApp”, *The New York Times*, 2 October 2016, Retrieved 03 October 2016, available at: www.nytimes.com.

96. Public notice warning against social media abuse distributed in hard copy and circulated in radio channels in July 2016.

The recent introduction of a ban on the selling of the same national flag, an emblem of patriotism now condemned as a symbol of unity (against the government) and the *de facto* upheld of the rule of law, epitomises the fears of an increasingly contested government running out of resources.

However, despite the growing significance of civil society unrests in opposing ZANU PF regime, grassroots movements lack the necessary coordination and organisation to effectively threaten the survival of the ruling party and they are not likely to create a revolution similar to those witnessed during the Arab Spring. During a recent meeting in Bulawayo, gathering representatives from Tajamuka, #ThisFlag, NAVUZ (National Association of Vendors Union of Zimbabwe) and other movements, these groups appeared to be fragmented and lacking a common strategy. Many analysts, indeed, refer to them as “popcorn” movements precisely for their spontaneity and the lack of an organisational structure, a factor which severely jeopardise their potential.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, their appearance in the social and political landscape is of paramount importance as it shows that country is finally ripe for a direct confrontation with the government. Unlike their next-door neighbours (South Africans) harassment and repression have rendered Zimbabweans “very risk averse” and predominantly incline to passivity vis-à-vis the violent dominance of the state.⁹⁸ With the emergence of the above-mentioned movements, the situation seems to be slowly changing. However, these have been received by the population with mixed feelings, often considered to be too violent and not really able to engage ordinary citizens, which are overall more concerned with livelihoods than governance issues.⁹⁹ Indeed, in a country where 94% of people are working in the informal sector, people are more concerned of making their day in the streets, rather than joining shutdowns which have often resulted in “business as usual” for the majority of the population. In such scenario, however, windows of opportunities for civic engagement and activism might arise precisely from the new ‘survivalist’ labor structure of the country.¹⁰⁰ Formations such as small-scale miners unions or the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Association (ZCIEA) are flourishing, as these are the sectors which currently employ the greater part of the active population: such organizations are increasingly coming together to capitalize on the growing constituency composed by informal and unregistered workers, in order to play a bigger role in civil society mobilization and to exert a greater

97. Meeting in Bulawayo with civil society the author has attended.

98. Zimbabwe conflict or collapse, in 2016? Research and Advocacy Unit Report, May 2016.

99. Semistructured interviews with several members of Zimbabwean civil society organisations and NGOs attending the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa Reflection Meeting, 09 September 2016, Harare.

100. A. Bieler, *Challenging Corporate Capital: Creating an Alternative to Neo-liberalism*, Rosa Luxembourg Foundation, 2016

influence in domestic politics.¹⁰¹ How to reconnect social struggles and legitimate demands of socio-economic justice by Zimbabwean people to a broader political agenda remains, arguably, the main challenge ahead. How to reconnect social struggles and legitimate demands of socio-economic justice by Zimbabwean people to a broader political agenda remains arguably the main challenge ahead.



Informal vendors in Harare central, September 2016, Harare

Looking East... or Not Anymore? China and the West Political Agendas in Zimbabwe's Quagmire

Since the standoff with the West after the fast-track land reform and the imposition of targeted sanctions on high-ranking ZANU PF officials, China has long remained the only valuable ally of Zimbabwe, due to Beijing insatiable appetite for the country's enormous natural wealth and its traditional non-interference approach. The Look East Policy embraced by Mugabe in 2003 as flagship of his anti-Western rhetorical narrative was designed to replace the West with the East as the pinnacle of Zimbabwe's

101. Semi-structured interviews conducted during the Dialogue Forum For Civil Society Organisations In The Extractive Sector, meeting organised by Solidarity Centre, held on 4 November 2016, Harare.

foreign policy.¹⁰² Indeed Sino-Zimbabwe trade is today far greater than the cumulative trade between the African state and US and EU. In 2015, the total trade between China and Zimbabwe totalled 1,170 million Euros, against 606 million Euros with European countries.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Chinese FDI's represent the greater source of foreign inflows to the country, representing the 72% of total investments towards the African country.¹⁰⁴ China has increasingly put its hands in the lucrative Zimbabwean natural endowment, with consistent investments in the mining sector and the creation of profitable joint ventures, such as the Anjin Investment. Anjin Investments Private Limited is a 50-50 joint venture between Chinese investors and the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation and the Ministry of Defence, which pounced on the Chiadzwa diamond fields immediately after the brutal seizure of the land by the government army in 2008.¹⁰⁵ Owning seven mines, Anjin has been by far the biggest mining firm operating in the gem-rich Manicaland province. For long, Chinese firms have been largely exempted by the nationalisation imperative implemented with the Indigenisation Act, requiring all foreign companies to cede the 51% of shares to indigenous Zimbabweans.¹⁰⁶ However, after the scandal of the USD 15 billion loss in diamond revenues, Mugabe arbitrarily closed Anjin and other diamond companies claiming that the companies operating in Chiadzwa had been responsible for massive looting depriving the nation of its wealth.¹⁰⁷ A deeper investigation, however, links the shutdown of the Chinese firm to the succession fight between Team Lacoste and the G40. Being a joint venture with the Zimbabwean National Army, Anjin is reported to have secured substantial funding to Mnangagwa faction in its presidential bid.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the conflation of the military within mining industry to fund ZANU PF in election times is not new. What is different is that this time the resource curse is happening within the party itself; hence, closing Anjin might seal off Mnangagwa's road to Presidency in favour of his rivals.

Following its domestic slowdown and mounting tensions with Mugabe's administration after the forced closure of the diamond firm,

102. See supra 4.

103. European Union Trade in Goods with Zimbabwe, European Commission, Directorate Generale for Trade, available at: trade.ec.europa.eu.

104. "Zim to benefit from China's \$40 billions investment", *The Standard*, 16 August 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: www.thestandard.co.zw.

105. See supra 2.

106. "Chinese Firms Exempt from Indigenisation Law", *New Zimbabwe*, 2 March 2011, retrieved 05 October 2016, available at: www.newzimbabwe.com.

107. "Robert Mugabe to nationalise Zimbabwe's diamond industry", *The Guardian*, 3 March 2016, Retrieved 05 October 2016, available at: www.theguardian.com.

108. "Succession Rocks Diamond Mining", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 18 March 2016, Retrieved 05 October 2016, available at: www.theindependent.co.zw.

Beijing is now gradually re-adjusting its diplomatic engagement but in a very ambiguous manner. After having refused to extend any further assistance without the settlement of the succession dispute, the Chinese government seems to have finally come out with a bailout plan of US\$5 billion to rescue the utterly distressed agricultural sector. This might be read as an attempt to counter West's proposed US\$2 billion package under the stalled Lima Agreement.¹⁰⁹ Both the western countries and China want to have their say in the ZANU PF succession broil. Western leaders openly favour the Vice President, whilst less clear is the standing of Beijing. Traditionally Hu administration has backed Mnangagwa and the reported shift under President Xi to a position closer to the G40 might be a just response to Western plans. Following China's pragmatic logic, Mugabe succession is mostly a *conditio sine qua non* to bail out the economy of Zimbabwe and – consequently – save the conspicuous investments made in the country.¹¹⁰ What seems uncontroversial, however, is that the two rescue plans backed by the two foreign rivals mirrors and amplifies the domestic struggle for power within ZANU PF.

109. "China Shells out US\$5bn for Zim", *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 September 2016, Retrieved 29 September 2016, available at: www.theindependent.co.zw.

110. *Ibid.*

Possible Scenarios Ahead of 2018 Elections

Given Mugabe's increasing frailty and the unprecedented volatility within ZANU PF, it is paramount to question which are the plausible scenarios ahead of the 2018 elections, and to enquire whether an extra-constitutional regime change will occur before the ballots are casted. Caught between a rock and a hard place, ZANU PF might stick to power until 2018 and try to extend its rule beyond the next election, unleashing violence against the mounting opposition. As of today, it is rather unlikely that a military putsch or a civil society-led revolution will lead to a transition of power ousting ZANU PF regime.¹¹¹ A more realistic scenario would see Mugabe handover the power to Mnangagwa, even though increasing attacks from the G40 group are thwarting Vice President bids. Arguably, the regime will survive until the next elections even though the relentless implosion of ZANU PF might eventually lead to an electoral turnover in 2018. However, fragmentation among the opposition parties, uncertainties around the creation of a robust coalition front – especially in the event of a contestation between Tsvangirai and Mujuru – and the tight control of electoral and security institutions by ZANU PF render the ousting of the incumbent party far from obvious.

Over the short-term, however, the possible trajectories until the elections take place in 2018 appear to be the following:

Scenario 1: Opposition and popular pressure lead Mugabe to step down and bring an accelerate regime change before 2018

Under this first scenario, mounting protests and demonstrations in Zimbabwe would violently escalate to the extent of forcing Mugabe to step down, dissolving the incumbent government and leading to an extra-constitutional transfer of power outside ZANU PF before 2018. This situation might be precipitated by the economic collapse provoked with the introduction of bond notes.

111. "Change Will Come from ZANU PF", *DailyNews*, 10 August 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: www.dailynews.co.zw.

A popular uprising would sign the ultimate implosion of ZANU PF, with Mugabe arguably forced to flee the country, as it happened in other protest-led transitions such as Burkina Faso. The dire economic and social situation of the country and the absence of an opposition ready to takeover in the immediate aftermath of a popular revolution would require a collective and inclusive effort involving all domestic stakeholders to lead the country out of the current mayhem and prepare the terrain for the next elections. In this case, a National Transitional Authority (TNA) might be put in place to ensure the necessarily electoral reforms and resume dialogue with donors. Such provisional body could navigate the transitional period through an emergency rescue strategy, putting in place urgent measures to halt the current economic meltdown, restore the broken social contract and prepare credible elections as provided for by international and regional guidelines such as the African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa.¹¹² The TNA would be an independent, nonpartisan and technical body composed of commissioners gathering stakeholders from civil society, traditional leaders, businessmen, judiciary and representatives from the entire political spectrum¹¹³. As soon as electoral reforms are implemented, the transitional government shall ensure free and fair elections to take place, which would be internationally and regionally supervised through the deployment of electoral observers. A new government would be finally formed to fully engage in a gradual normalisation of the economic and political situation of the country.

As of today, however, a protest-led transition is highly unlikely. The tight control of the security apparatus by the regime, opposition fragmentation and lack of high profile leaders and coordination among grassroots movements renders the overthrow of Mugabe through a popular uprising rather unrealistic to achieve.¹¹⁴

Scenario 2: Mugabe voluntarily steps down before 2018

In a more likely outcome, his advancing age and increasing external and party pressures might force Mugabe to handover the power to a successor within ZANU PF before the end of tenure in 2018. From a political and constitutional perspective, Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa is

112. "The Case of a Transitional Authority", *The Zimbabwean*, 16 August 2016, Retrieved 30 August 2016 thezimbabwean.co

113. SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, www.ohchr.org

114. A. Le Bas, "Briefing on Current Zimbabwe Socio-Political Relations", Research Report, March 2016, Centre for Strategic Intelligence Research.

perhaps the best option for a regime change within the ruling party.¹¹⁵ On the one hand, his past as a liberation war hero allowed him to entrench strong connections with the military establishment; on the other hand, his pragmatism and business-oriented mentality have granted him the endorsement of the international community.¹¹⁶ Mnangagwa will embrace the gradual economic reforms needed to appease donors and regain the confidence of foreign investors, ensuring a softer landing for the country after Mugabe is gone. In the meantime, the capacity of the opposition to coalesce in a solid front might lay the ground for a viable political alternative to finally unseat the ZANU PF in the next elections, given the eroding popular base of the ruling party. The President refuses to facilitate the succession issue has made clear his intentions to remain in power for life. Nevertheless, increasing pressure from external actors, especially China, might wrestle Mugabe's arm and force him to surrender the Presidency to the Vice President before the elections.¹¹⁷ The Asian giant, Zimbabwe's main lender, is reported to have strongly recommended Mugabe to hand over power to Mnangagwa before 2017, in order to save Zimbabwe from a complete meltdown before it is too late.¹¹⁸ Beijing is now running out of patience and wants to be sure that Mugabe's disastrous legacy does not ruin completely the conspicuous investments it has made over the past decade. A succession in this direction would perhaps ensure gradual economic reforms, as Mnangagwa key ally, Finance Minister Chinamasa, might finally be able to implement the necessary measures to clear debt arrears and unlock future assistance to bail out the collapsing economy.

Undoubtedly Mnangagwa leads the field in the succession competition and the growing attacks against him might indeed be interpreted precisely as a sign of fear towards his seemingly unstoppable rise. Yet, the latest moves of the President – the closure of Anjin and the public humiliation of Chinamasa – seemed to vehicle the message that the Vice President was not the favourite candidate anymore. In this perspective, another short-term development, even though less likely, might see the handover of power to the G40 faction. By deciding to neglect the succession issue, Mugabe has *de facto* aligned himself with the G40 group, turning his back on Mnangagwa. The G40 group is seen to be ideologically closer to Mugabe, pushing for a more radical application of the indigenisation law and being strongly vocal against re-engagement with the West. An eventual victory of the Young Turks, as they are called within the party, might ensure greater ideological continuity with Mugabe; on the other hand, it

115. See supra 89.

116. *Ibid.*

117. "Latest: China Orders Mugabe to let Mnangagwa Takeover in 3 Months", *ZimNews.Net*, 9 September 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: zimnews.net.

118. *Ibid.*

would undoubtedly lead to a setback in the re-engagement process with donors, plundering the country deeper in the economic doldrums. Furthermore, the lack of military support and war liberation credentials might represent stumbling blocks for G40 leader's aspirations.¹¹⁹ Undoubtedly, for long, the President has deliberately used the tactic of balancing the two factions to prevent one of the two becoming too powerful, eventually throwing ZANU PF into an open war when the balance of power kept shifting overnight. However, in an unexpected turn of events, on the 2nd of November the Zimbabwe Anti Corruption Commission (ZACC) arrested Minister Moyo accusing him of serious fraud, money laundering and abuse of office after a month-long defiance during which he refused to appear before what he called a "captured" Commission serving the ambitions of the Vice President¹²⁰. This time Mugabe has not intervened to rescue the young politburo member, giving green light for the investigations to continue. The silent complicity of the President might suggest the last U-turn in the succession struggle: as the factional war is eventually coming to an end, Mugabe, increasingly aware that the Lacoste faction is likely to prevail, is getting ready to throw the losers into the mud to save himself and his interests in the event of Mnangagwa's final ascent to power¹²¹.

Scenario 3: Mugabe dies before 2018

Should a presidential vacancy arise due to the abrupt death of Mugabe whilst still in office, the situation would reveal extremely unpredictable and might trigger a constitutional crisis if not properly addressed beforehand. This outcome might be due, on one hand, to the President's reluctance to designate a successor and, on the other, to the complex patronage system cementing ZANU PF and the major state structures around his figure. As explained above, according to the Sixth Schedule of the 2013 Constitution, which carries transitional provisions, succession in the occurrence of President' death would be disciplined by Section 14(4), foreseeing the takeover of the Vice President for a period of three months whilst ZANU PF would select a successor. This situation, however, carries within itself critical issues, mostly due to the lack of clear ZANU PF internal procedures and succession provisions. According to ZANU PF Constitution the nomination should be addressed through convening an Extraordinary Congress but challenges in the composition of the latter arise, as no clear provisions spell out who should constitute this body. Furthermore, the

119. "G40 out to Destroy Mugabe: Msipa", *NewsDay*, 15 February 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: www.newsday.co.zw.

120. "Zim Minister Hands Self over to Anti-graft Agency", *News24*, 2 November 2016.

121. "G40 Faction Has Lost and Mugabe is Throwing Moyo and Kasukuwere to the Croc", *Bulawayo24News*, 4 November 2011, Retrieved 05 November 2016, available at: bulawayo24.com.

current lack of a National Chairperson to preside of the Congress and opaqueness in the structure of the Electoral College would exacerbate confusion and uncertainties in any selection process.¹²² In a context of mounting tensions between the team Lacoste and G40, the normative void might escalate the risk of intra-party conflict and precipitate ZANU PF in a violent struggle, with the competing factions pushing to install their favoured nominee. Perhaps, a growing inference into Zimbabwe's king making game by the military would eventually take place, as the security sector stands firmly behind Vice President Mnangagwa and might intervene to ensure his takeover if Mugabe dies in office. Even though Zimbabwe has never experienced a military putsch so far, the threat arising by the eventual victory of a G40 exponent might spur the military apparatus to assume a more prominent role, in order to ensure continuity with the previous regime and the safeguard of their political interests, paving the way for the ascendancy of the Vice President.

Scenario 4: Mugabe runs as candidate in 2018

The president reiterated his intentions to remain in office until “God will remove him”. Even though his capacity to manoeuvre government's decisions is fading, Mugabe still retains the final say over country's vital issues, as the sudden reversal of Chinamasa austerity package shows.¹²³ Furthermore, whilst ZANU PF is dragged into the bitter fight for succession, the security sector and in particular the Joint Operation Command (JOC), composed by the cadres of army and intelligence service, sticks loyally behind Mugabe. As previously stated, their support for Mnangagwa could reveal decisive in tipping the balance of power in the ZANU PF infighting in favour of the Vice President¹²⁴, as Grace Mugabe and the G40 exponents lack the liberation credentials, in case Mugabe dies or becomes incapacitated whilst in office. However, until Mugabe is actively in power, the security sector is likely to remain soundly behind him, not least because the military has accrued substantial privileges and economic benefits which granted him their loyalty. This means that, unless he dies or become incapacitated to exercise power, it is unlikely that he will resign voluntarily before the end of his mandate.

122. “The Big Saturday Read 2: What Happens if President Mugabe Vacates Office?”, *Alex Magaisa*, 3 September 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: alexmagaisa.com.

123. “After Mugabe's Gone: Three Paths for Zim”, *The Zimbabwean*, 12 June 2016, Retrieved 26 September 2016, available at: www.thezimbabwean.co.

124. “ZANU PF Succession Battle: Chiwenga Warns Robert Mugabe Faction”, *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 8 August 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: thezimbabwemail.com.

With Mugabe running again in 2018 and without credible and solid electoral reforms, the country would face a situation similar to that of 2008, with ZANU PF forcing the electoral commission to rig elections and recurring to widespread intimidation, violence and restriction of voting rights to unlawfully secure its victory in a situation where he and his party have not legitimacy anymore. Demonstrations and civil unrests would arguably escalate again, led by grassroots movements and online activism but, again, a popular revolution would not take place, as the military would not side with the protesters and activists and civil society leaders lack an overarching political strategy.

However, given the current situation with the country in a comatose status, the political costs of allowing ZANU PF leader another round in power are way too high: it is likely that no donor will bail out the country if Mugabe remains in office for another term, given the absence of any commitment for an inclusive and serious dialogue towards a sustainable economic recovery and institutional reforms. The broke economy, the president's growing infirmity and inexorable health deterioration will make this new mandate very uncertain and volatile.

Conclusion

As the country sinks deeper into the abyss of economic and political mayhem, the Zimbabwean government is under growing pressure, cashless Zimbabweans struggling to make their days are raising their voice to say “enough is enough” and traditional backdoors seem to be finally closing for Mugabe’s stampede. The open resort to harassment and intimidation, which has become the sad refrain of government’s reaction to the recurrent popular contestations, shed light on the panic pervading ZANU PF cadres, as they run out of money and strategies to hold onto power.

The forthcoming months will be tough for the country, especially with the injection of the feared bond notes in the agonising economy of the country. Donors and investors will arguably maintain a “wait-and-see” approach until the leadership renewal within ZANU PF is addressed, the persistent draught will continue to drag rural inhabitants into hunger and food insecurity, the growing anti-migration sentiments in the neighbouring South Africa will continue to affect the life of millions of Zimbabweans.

As the country approaches elections, with a ZANU PF shattered by divisions and a growing, albeit still fragmented opposition, the political landscape is extremely uncertain. Over the short-term, a succession within ZANU PF with Mnangagwa taking over power remains the more credible scenario. However, if the opposition forces will manage to overcome divisions and adopt a common agenda, being able to ride mounting popular dissatisfaction, the possibility of an electoral turnover in 2018 might eventually materialise. Online voting advice campaigns are already spreading throughout social media, raising awareness among citizens and pushing for the adoption of transparent, accurate and accessible voter registration systems.¹²⁵ The polls however, will need to be carefully monitored and supervised by regional and international observers, if the international community wants to avoid the repetition of the mistakes committed in the past and seize the moment to finally engage the country in a meaningful reform process.

125. “Biometric Voter Registration: A Case for Zim Towards 2018”, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 21 February 2016, Retrieved 25 September 2016, available at: www.theindependent.co.zw.

Appendix 1

List of Acronyms

CODE - Coalition of Democrats

DARE -Democratic Assembly for Restoration and Empowerment

ESAP -Economic Structural Adjustment Program

GNU -Government of National Unity

I-PRSP- Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

MDC -Movement for Democratic Change (split in MDC-T under the leadership of Tsvangirai and MDC-N under the leadership of Ncube)

MKD- Mavambo Kusile Dawn

NAVUZ - National Association of Vendors Union of Zimbabwe

NERA - National Electoral Reform Agenda

PDP - People Democratic Party

RDZ - Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe

SADC - Southern Africa Development Community

ZANU PF- Zimbabwe Africa National Union – Patriotic Front

ZAPU - Zimbabwe African People Union

ZCDC - Zimabwe Consolidated Diamond Company

ZESN - Zimbabwe Electoral

ZNLWVA – Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association

ZUNDE - Zimbabweans United for Democracy

Appendix 2

Chronology of Zimbabwe Crisis (2000-present)

2000 - Fast-track land reform

2002 - Commonwealth suspends Zimbabwe membership, EU and US imposes travel sanctions and freezes assets of ZANU PF top officials

2003 - IMF suspends Zimbabwe's voting rights

2006 - Zimbabwe's annual inflation rises above 1,000% in April

2008 - Electoral crisis following Tsvangirai reported victory and military seizure of Chiadzwa diamonds fields

2008-9 - Power sharing agreement and government of national unity

2009 - Dismissal of national currency and dollarisation of economy

2013 - Electoral crisis and allegations of manipulation, intimidation and vote rigging

2014 - Expulsion of Vice President Joyce Mujuru and appointment of Grace Mugabe as leader of Women League

2016 – Growing civil unrests and national shutdowns