

The Democratisation of Revolutionary Movements and the Revolutionisation of Democratic Movements. An Aerial View of Zimbabwe's New Dispensation as at November 2017

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the democratisation of revolutionary movements and the revolutionisation of democrats; discuss the major highlights of the New Dispensation in Zimbabwe; and suggest the way forward for a better Zimbabwe. The paper is largely qualitative based on documental analysis and random interviews in the district of Marondera. The findings of this study are that the revolutionary ZANU PF party is reforming, although there are some reservations over such overtures. This is a result of pressure exerted by the opposition since the turn of the new millennium. The opposition itself is also gradually earning the recognition of revolutionaries. Genuinely, credible, free, fair, peaceful, transparent elections and sustainable dialogue were identified as other remaining keys required to unlock Zimbabwe's bright future.

DOI: 10.7176/PPAR/9-3-03

Publication date: March 31st 2019

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is currently undergoing a fresh page in what has come to be known as "the New Dispensation". This followed the surprise, unprecedented unseating of the career long serving former President of Zimbabwe Robert Gabriel Mugabe as from the 14th of November 2017 in what some critics have described as a "smart coup" whilst some viewed it as the only possible act which was long overdue and necessary. During this episode, the most interesting part was the rare unity and solidarity demonstrated by the ruling party, ZANU PF and almost all opposition political parties, chief amongst them the Movement for Democratic Change (Tsvangirai). Subsequent to this was the endorsement of the unseating of Mugabe by the masses from across the entire political divide in record crowds, as they peacefully marched along the streets and even got to close proximity with the State House on the historic 18th of November 2017 alongside the military, something which amazed the world. This paper examines the events in Zimbabwe as from the month of November 2017 as "the democratisation of revolutionary movements and the revolutionisation of democratic movements."

Key terms: revolution, democracy, democratisation, political parties, new dispensation

2. Background to the democratisation of revolutionary movements and the revolutionisation of democratic movements in Zimbabwe.

Makange and Dube (2014) argue that Zimbabwe inherited an authoritarian state and undemocratic institution. In fact, Rhodesia had draconian laws aimed at marginalising the black majority, especially the law and order legislation. These were inherited and modified when the political environment got hot with the coming of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the late 1990s, giving birth to the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

Makange and Dube (2014) argue that:

The continued existence of repressive laws governing public order, access to information as well as heavy handedness of law enforcement agents against opposition members, human rights activists, government critics, and members of the media fraternity is a clear demonstration of Zimbabwe's failure to democratise.

The first few years of post-independence in 1980 can also be best explained as a period in which Zimbabwe was a one party state. No any other meaningful political party nor participation was in existence besides that of the ruling ZANU PF party. This was after the only formidable option of ZAPU merged with ZANU PF during the Unity Accord of 1987 signed between former President Mugabe and former Vice President Joshua. Nkomo. The accord came after controversial tribal atrocities against the people of Matabeleland in a more or less genocide known as Gukurahundi, wherein thousands of people were killed by Mr Mugabe's 5th Brigade military wing. However, Mugabe's sincerity to the unity accord was questionable. Thus, there was no democracy to talk of during this era (Darnot and Laakso, 2003).

Makumbe (2009) was also of the view that it is generally agreed that Zimbabwe, as from the year 2000 moved several steps backwards in terms of democratisation process. This seemed true taking into account hoe the Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 was implemented. The policy seemed good for the majority of landless Zimbabweans, but implementation became questionable. Property rights and laws were violated. Deaths were recorded with most of them being racially motivated. Cases of corruption, nepotism and multiple

farm ownership were common during the reform. Several people lost employment and many people were displaced. Government sponsored inhuman scenarios like Operation Murambatsvina of 2005 became order of the day.

3. Forces of democracy in Zimbabwe

Darnolf and Laakso (2003) identified the hardships caused by the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) as to have been the genesis of what this paper describes as democratic movements or forces;

... The hardships caused by structural adjustment were accompanied by a revival of civil society, making the role of the trade unions and civil society important...

This explains the growth of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU), which later became the seedbed of the democratic icon, Richard Morgan Tsvangirai, who led the first strong opposition political party after the death of ZAPU in independent Zimbabwe. According to Tengende (undated) towards the end of the 80s, a major rapture had occurred as workers and students were becoming able to unite and successfully resist the government. One would also recall the student activism of the likes of Learnmore Judah Jongwe, Tendai Biti, Author Mutambara, Lovemore Madhuku, Nelson Chamisa and many others and their contribution to democracy which has also contributed to this New Dispensation (Darnolf and Laakso, 2003).

Various sectors of society became increasingly discontent with the country's major political institutions and political leadership, which at most showed a bias towards the ZANU PF government. Such institutions included the likes of the Electoral Supervisory Commission and the military, among others. Many critics of the government, or rather democrats rose to criticise such a state of affairs and called for what has come to be known as institutional reforms. Bowing to the pressure, some institutions such as the parliament and the civil service have been reformed although the Robert Mugabe led government strongly blocked the so-called security sector reforms, which they deemed to have been a western sponsored regime change agenda.

For decades, Zimbabwe has been made to understand that the top leadership was a preserve and a privilege only reserved for those endowed with liberation war credentials. The army's top brass at some point during the peak of the political crises is on record for stating that they would not salute anyone without war credentials. This made it almost impossible for anyone to dream of a top national leadership position especially that of the presidency.

However, the period as from the year 2008 saw a fierce battle to challenge such a status quo and make it clear that a leader did not need liberation war credentials to take over power from the national leadership (Magure, 2009).

This was achieved by opposition, democratic movements or forces through various means. There were a series of street protests, lobbying, advocacy and a number of strategic non-violent options. The Madhuku led National Constitutional Assembly played a pivotal role in clamouring for a new people driven constitution. Such concerted efforts culminated into a much better constitution of 2013 which has got a lot of guarantees in respect of human rights, civil liberties, rights of accused persons, gender, the disabled, political rights, freedoms, and so on. The constitution, was one of the major issues during the "talks" which led to the formation of a Government of National Unity in 2009.

4. To whom should the credit go?

Magure (2009) tackled a similar question in his thesis when he asserted that;

This thesis offers a general rethinking of who initiated and led the efforts towards fighting for the emergence of a broad based, participatory and inclusionary political dispensation in Zimbabwe

One would recall that after the nationally and internationally received unseating of Mugabe, there was a battle for credit between ZANU PF and opposition political elements. ZANU PF claimed to have initiated the process by way of recalling Mugabe as a party leader and eventually as president. They also claimed to have initiated the impeachment process which ultimately saw Mugabe bowing down to the pressure and tendered a letter of resignation before the Speaker of Parliament fearing shame and embarrassment. However, ZANU PF was quickly reminded that it was the MDC-T through the Mabvuku-Tafara legislature James Maridadi which had started plans of impeaching Mugabe years before, but the move was stifled. ZANU PF was also reminded of the fact that the "Mugabe must go" mantra had been an opposition jibe which was not tolerated at all by ZANU PF hardliners some of whom equated Mugabe to Jesus, angel Gabriel and the sweet cremora.

MDC also believed that the current status quo is something that they have clamoured for since a long time ago. Before masses even marched to the state House on the 18th of November 2017 undeterred, the MDC once organised what became known as the "final push" years back which was intended at marching to the State House, but the security agencies never took that lightly and it was stifled as well. More so, as espoused in their JUICE document or their election manifesto of 2012:15 they had long ago highlighted that;

We will shift government process from a highly digitirist, authoritarian and centralised system to an inclusive pro-poor social democratic economy with well-managed institutions informed by the party's

democratic principles.... At the core values of our policies will be respect for the rule of law.

An on-line news extract, which was quoting the Presidential Special Advisor, Ambassador Chris Mutsvangwa, also partly answers the question through a headline; Coup government Partly Owes its rise to the Independent Press, says Mutsvangwa. For a fact, it was the independent media houses, which gave the incumbent President, Munangagwa, a voice, at a time when the state controlled media, maintained a media blackout on him.

Since this is a continuous process, credit goes to several groups, be it the revolutionaries or the democrats. They all contributed to the New Dispensation in one way or another. What differs could be the extent, the percentage, the validity, the risks, number of casualties, and so on, encountered by each movement.

5. Comments on the changing political environment in Zimbabwe

The manner in which ZANU PF has dealt with or is dealing with its factional wars, though not being perfect, has somehow been next to peaceful and has thus averted a blood bath or an armed conflict. Years back, Onslow (2011:2) had made this similar observation when he propounded that;

ZANU PF is an extreme case study of the limits of how susceptible and receptive liberation leadership maybe to internal dissent and debate as they address the considerable difficulties of nation-state construction after independence.

The same explanation can apply in circumstances in which ZANU PF handled the unseating of Mugabe. Even before that, the mere agreement of ZANU PF to be part of a Government of National Unity of 2009 can be seen as part of the genesis of the democratisation of a revolutionary movement. Of course, ZANU PF had no option following a legitimacy crisis after the disputed polls of 2008 as well as a declining economy. The gist of this input is, some of the effects of ZANU PF having agreed to be part of a GNU is what Zimbabwe is currently enjoying in this dispensation. During the GNU some several politicians learnt that it is possible for political opponents to drink tea together whilst disagreeing at the same time. This was demonstrated during the popularised Monday meetings which took place between Mugabe and the late Tsvangirai.

6. Electoral Law amendment (2018)

Recently, the president signed an electoral Act which is partly aimed at ensuring “genuinely competitive elections” whenever due. The move is welcome although there is still much hullabaloo surrounding the management of elections in Zimbabwe (Reeler, 2012:12).

The following media extracts from local newspapers and on line news websites highlight some of the major tenets of Zimbabwe’s New Dispensation;

- ***A Zimbabwe Spring? ED Embraces surprising Freedoms:*** by Associated Press, 7th of May 2018
 - *Signs of change are clear. Late last month, a popular musician returned from exile in the United States to perform Protest songs in front of tens of thousands of people on the outskirts of Harare. Days later, an annual arts festival in Harare was allowed to invite as its headline act a South African band once banned for a video seen as mocking Mugabe*
 - *Arrests of political activists and opposition officials, once routine during Mugabe’s rule, have significantly slowed*
 - *The opposition has been holding campaign rallies without interference unlike in the past*
 - *Freedom of speech is remarkably improved, with Zimbabweans openly criticising the government without fear of retribution, especially in urban areas*
 - *However, in rural areas, non-governmental groups say they are still recording some cases of intimidation such as village heads demanding people’s voter registration details*
 - *Munangagwa publicly criticised his own ruling party for using police officers as polling agents during its internal elections, a first in a country long used to Mugabe’s sharp tongued defence of deploying security agents to conduct party business. See also the Herald of the 3rd of May 2018*
 - *his government has legalised marijuana farming for medicinal and scientific purposes*
 - *it allowed commercial sex workers to exhibit at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair, an event officially opened by Mnangagwa himself, as a way to educate the public about their work and safe sexual practices*
- ***ED Courts Gay Vote As ZANU PF In Surprising Meeting With LGBT Reps.*** 22nd of June 2018
 - *Top ZANU PF officials have met with representatives of the Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender community with signs President Emerson Munangagwa was keen on mending bridges with old enemies to bolster his election bid*
- ***ED: No more Imposition of Candidates.*** The Herald of the 5th of May 2018

- *“The days of imposition, chicanery and favouritism in our internal electoral processes are dead and buried. Never to be resurrected no matter the person’s status and standing. We have always been and will always be obligated to do everything in the interest of our people”*
- **Have Zimbabwe’s Generals Turned into Democrats?** BBC News
 - *Hundreds of international elections observers and foreign journalists are expected in Zimbabwe for elections.*
- **This is the Best Election Since 1964: Eddie Cross.** The Chronicles of the 19th of June 2018
 - *Zimbabwe’s new constitution, government and electoral commission have put the country on the right path towards the most “reasonable” elections since 1964, former MDC-T Policy Advisor and Bulawayo Legislature Mr Eddie Cross has observed*

7. Way forward

The most crucial thing which should take place in Zimbabwe at this stage is a credible, transparent, free and fair election. Whoever wins such an election is highly likely to take Zimbabwe to astronomical levels. The opposite is also true. Local, regional, and international people can only effectively co-operate with a Zimbabwean government elected by the people for the people in a democratic and free manner. Now that elections are over, there is a dire need to end the current prevailing polarity and unite Zimbabwe for one good cause. The recently established Peace Commission needs to pull up its socks in this regard.

8. In conclusion

Today Zimbabwe celebrates a New Dispensation. It’s new and unique in the sense that the revolutionary ZANU PF party is reforming towards democracy and at the other hand, those who have been chief advocates of democracy, the opposition political forces have also become revolutionaries after having also fought and for this change. In as much as both movements can share the blame for Zimbabwe’s woes, they can as well share the credit for this New Dispensation, although at varying degrees. The final and crucial stage will be how Zimbabwe deals with issues of legitimacy in a bid to win the International engagement, especially for the much needed Foreign Direct Investment. Sustainable dialogue amongst all the stakeholders can be a vital conduit.

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