Africa

Spectrum

Death or Dearth of Democracy in Zimbabwe?

David Moore

David Moore is a professor of Development Studies at the University of Johannesburg. He has studied Zimbabwean politics since 1984, and is now researching its "political generations". He co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, "Progress in Zimbabwe" (2012), with Norma Kriger and Brian Raftopoulos. He acted as an observer for the 2013 elections on behalf of a South African NGO.
E-mail: <dbmoore@uj.ac.za>

Has democracy in Zimbabwe – "lite" (liberal and concerning Schumpeterian *élites*) and "thick" (expanding participation in all social spheres) forms[1] – died? A combination of trickery, coercion, populism, the connivance of its regional peers, and the opposition's flat-footedness resulted in a ZANU-PF[2] "victory" in the election of 31 July 2013 so big even its planners were surprised (Moore 2013b; Southall 2013b). The ZANU-PF steamroller squashed the main opposition party's (MDC-T)[3] nearly fifteen years of efforts to make electoral politics benefit not only the MDC-T but also all Zimbabweans looking to expand their political choices. The results of July 31 – and what led up to them – may have sounded democracy's death knell.

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1   The two forms are not mutually exclusive: Expansion in both spheres is reinforcing *unless* the preservers of *status quo antes* are successful in stopping political equality spreading to the socio-economic sphere. Neither Southall's (2014) constitutionalism nor Ncube's (2013) "service delivery" will proceed without the other, and both must be deeply rooted in social structures and struggles. See Abrahamsen (2001) and cf. Saul (1997).

2   Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, led by Robert Mugabe.

3   Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai. This name, too, tells a story of debilitating division: The name of the original MDC has been retained by a splinter group led first by Welshman Ncube, then by Arthur Mutambara, and now again by Ncube, in classical "divide-and-rule" style, mixing ruling-party designs with opposition-party wrangling – as in much of Zimbabwe's history.

As Mugabe won 61 per cent of the presidential vote (34 per cent went to Morgan Tsvangirai) and his ZANU-PF won 197 seats in the national assembly (compared to 70 for the MDC-T), nearly five years of co-managing a tension-ridden "transitional inclusive government" (TIG) – in which the two main parties (along with Arthur Mutumbara as deputy prime minister in a party splintered from the main MDC) "shared" government – came to an end, but neither the TIG nor the election ushered in democracy in its wake. ZANU-PF will control the state for the foreseeable future: Evoking Stephen Chan's (2007) bidding "farewell to Mugabe" before the election of 2008, "farewell to democracy" seems like the more appropriate send-off now (Bracking 2013).

For the Solidarity Peace Trust (2013), the July election was "the end of a road". Henning Melber (2013) cited ZANU-PF's history of retaining power despite being voted out, convincing its neighbours in Southern Africa to condone such cheating, controlling the judiciary (the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe upheld an election date that would occur well in advance of electoral reforms that the TIG was intended to develop), marshalling the military and militias to torture, kill and rape for its cause (especially in the 2008 run-off), manipulating the TIG, and hiring election mercenaries. "If we accept this as 'African democracy'", he argued, "we can kiss […] the free will of the people [goodbye] and surrender our right to make choices to those who do not care for the[m]".[4] Ibbo Mandaza (2013) put it this way: "Do we have to wait for another such farcical electoral ritual […] before Africans themselves begin to examine the underlying reasons for such failures […]? Can there be an alternative mode – better than this […]?" But is democracy in Zimbabwe dead, or simply slow to be born?

A Victory for Ideology or for Politics?

ZANU-PF ideologue George Charamba (Manheru 2013) misused Gramsci to claim that his party's ideology was organically hegemonic and that liberal (democratic or "Western") ideologies do not suit Zimbabwe. The latter ideologies can serve only as cautionary tales.[5] Litanies of "liberation" win the day. For Charamba, what Thabo Mbeki calls Zim-

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4   Note Melber's question indicates open possibilities: He did not write "This *is* African democracy".

5   Thanks to Brian Raftopoulos for sending me Charamba's article, published under the pseudonym Nathaniel Manheru. Throughout Zimbabwe's media history, this has been the *nom de plume* of various information ministers and permanent secretaries.

babwe's "revolutionary party" (Moore 2010) need not raise – or answer – questions about *politics* because its *ideology* is right. Can it be that ZANU-PF's authoritarian populism (Southall 2014) has become "organic" or, as Ncube (2013) would have it, "hegemonic"? Gramsci's other themes need examination – coercion, of course, but also politics pure and simple: the hard work of alliance-building and organisation.

It is certainly not easy to create a democratic *modus vivendi* with the dead weight of past disenfranchisement, Ian Smith's plans for one thousand years of minority rule, Mugabe's dreams of ruling until he is a century old – divinities willing (Chinaka 2013; Moore 2005) – longer histories of chiefly rule (Moore 2013c), and shorter liberation legacies (Mhanda 2011). Old habits die hard, but Charamba does all Africans a disservice by denying that they are ready for the small freedoms that "democracy lite" advances. For scholars, civil society activists and politicians who do not agree with Charamba's assertion that Zimbabweans have conceded to ZANU-PF's ideological hegemony, serious interrogation of the election's politics is warranted. If democracy is not dead yet, how can it be revived before it is stillborn? How to turn dearth to excess? In more practical terms, what did the MDC-T do wrong, and how might it resuscitate democratic hope? The short answer might well be: Work harder, and be *almost* as Machiavellian as the enemy.

Southall (2013b),[6] and many others (African Union Commission 2013; Chan 2013; Moore 2013b; Bracking 2013; Martens 2013; *Thinking Beyond* 2013; Munusamy 2013; *Solidarity Peace Trust* 2013) have recounted how the MDC lost Zimbabwe's 2013 election, while Booysen (2012, forthcoming) and Zamchiya (2013) foretold how and why ZANU-PF would win. Some exaggerated the MDC-T's shortcomings and discounted ZANU-PF's chicanery too soon (cf. Matyszak 2013). A few months after the election, a journalists' collective (Sharife 2013) and the MDC-T (Corcoran 2013; *SW Radio Africa* 2013) released evidence confirming earlier documentation (Birrell 2013; Malone 2013; Silverstein 2013; Sole 2013) on trickery and the money circulated in and around ZANU-PF – although not all journalists accept the authenticity of the documents. Undoubtedly, ZANU-PF used every trick from "crafty" coercion – meaning, based more on verbal intimidation than on physical harm (Bracking 2013) – to concocted consent as soon as the 2008 election was over.[7] That ZANU-PF would not lose was a given: As Brian

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6   Southall (2013a) presents a comprehensive account of the *longue durée* of ZANU-
     PF's and other southern African ruling parties' patterns of patron–client politics.

7   After the March 2008 election, the vote count – which took five weeks – gave
     the MDC-T just over 47 per cent of the presidential vote along with a majority

Raftopoulos (2013b) stated in Cape Town in April, a "mere election" could not dislodge this "military-economic *élite* – a new capitalist class at an early stage".

Yet constructive analysis – transcending despair and blame while also realising that retrospective accounts of cheating will not rectify the election results themselves – is necessary. Those committed to democratic principles and processes – not those who think they have been granted carte blanche regarding inconveniences such as elections – may gain interpretive insights for the next round.

Whether a New or an Old Mode of Democracy: Both Require Hard Work

What lessons can be learned by those aspiring to stop democracy dying? There are ten useful themes upon which this inquiry could build:

1.   TIG

Raftopoulos' *The Hard Road to Reform* (2013a; Scarnecchia 2013) studies the TIG or "government of national unity" and concludes that ZANU-PF used the period of co-governance to consolidate its party structures and systems, strengthen its networks of power and accumulation (Kriger 2012) and exacerbate the divisions among and between the opposition parties. The MDC-T let its party structures and processes atrophy[8] whilst attending to governance issues (and spending too much time challenging minor discretions in the TIG's "road map"). Constituency duties were often ignored. Local government in particular was tainted by corruption and characterised by poor delivery of goods and services, although the latter may have been due more to ZANU-PF local government minister

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of the parliament seats – coincidentally matching the figure announced by the country's most prominent election NGO with scant statistical justification just a few days after the election. Many sources suggest the true percentage won by the MDC-T surpassed the mid-50s (Chan 2008; Ibbo Mandaza's remarks at a public meeting, Pretoria, Southern African Liaison Office, February 2009). The run-off inspired so much ZANU-PF violence that Morgan Tsvangirai pulled out of it, resulting in 1) a vote count that even the soporific SADC could not abide and 2) the realisation of SADC facilitator Thabo Mbeki's dream of a TIG that would usher in real elections in five years' time, giving ZANU-PF time to rebuild (Scarnecchia and Urban-Mead 2008).

8   Especially in finance, where funds from ZANU-PF's fortuitous diamond discoveries (Global Witness 2012) did not reach the appropriate ministry, nominally controlled by the MDC-T's Tendai Biti as part of the TIG arrangement; furthermore, the MDC-T gained little credit for its successes.

Ignatius Chombo making life very difficult for the municipalities managed by the MDC-T than to the MDC-T's self-inflicted malgovernance wounds. Although the MDC-T is no longer burdened with co-governance nationally, the lesson – make governance good and make it *look* good – could be equally applied to the cities and local councils where the party currently holds power.

2.   Lifestyle

A truth emerged about *élite* politics during the period of the TIG: Corruption and corrupt lifestyles arise alongside ascent to power. Tsvangirai's messy love life, following his wife Susan's tragic death in a suspicious car accident soon after the TIG began, was the tip of the iceberg. (Widespread rumours that ZANU-PF set "honey pots" and that important MDC-T insiders were intimately involved only added to popular ridicule). MPs scrambling for housing grants, cars and *per diems* for everything from local and global conferences to the drawn-out public participation process for developing a new constitution contributed to widespread apathy about possibilities for far-reaching political change. The lessons are clear, unless one believes Africans admire "big men (and women)" and that politicians can invoke God one minute and chase Mammon the next.

3.   Ignoring opinion polls

Public opinion polls in 2012 and 2013 gave ample warning both of the "eclipse of the MDC-T's golden era" (Booysen 2012, forthcoming; Bratton and Masunungure 2012) and of its losing the election, but the MDC-T ignored disaster's portents. Privately agreeing with the survey teams, the MDC-T suggested publicly that ZANU-PF's "margin of terror" accounted for the downswing – but still did relatively little of the hard work necessary to prepare for an election. Apparently the South African government also sent an Obama-team analyst to Zimbabwe a few weeks before the election, who predicted a very close race. However, these polls – which through direct and proxy questions did take ZANU-PF's creation of fear into consideration – did not count on cheating magnifying the victory, which leads us to the next point.

4.   Ignoring intelligence

Zimbabwe's gigantic intelligence community is rather leaky – it shares more than it conceals – and divided. Along with early media reports of ZANU-PF's plans to cheat, notably with the help of the Israeli election mercenary firm Nikuv, which possesses sophisticated computer technology for fixing elections (Birrell 2013; Silverstein 2013; Sole 2013), some agents privy to the "soft" plans for winning the election probably passed

information to the MDC-T or its friends. Morgan Tsvangirai's *BBC Africa* interview, which occurred just before the MDC-T released its fraud dossier, indicated his hesitation to reveal both what his party knew about the pre-election terrain and its reaction to that knowledge (Brown 2013, italics added).

MT: The whole rigging machinery was in place by 2012 […]

AB: But you were in government […]

MT: […] yes, but no one was aware […]

AB: But why didn't you stop it […]

MT: No, no […]

AB: But surely that's the sort of thing you would have been keeping an eye on […]

MT: We were keeping an eye […]

AB: Knowing who you were in bed with […]

MT: […] *It is the extent of the rigging – […] we thought with the momentum […] on the ground, […] it [the vote-rigging] would be overwhelmed.*

Did the MDC-T leadership know rigging was planned, but thought ZANU-PF would lose anyway? Did it think the result would be close enough to warrant a second TIG? Would the tainted election process have been accepted as long as the result was agreeable to the MDC-T? If so, the MDC-T's vision was myopic and unprincipled.

5.   Neglecting basic work

In the meantime, the MDC-T ignored basic preparatory electoral work. The huge rallies it organised were not enough. The rally in Harare on 29 July 2013 may have been the largest in Zimbabwe's history, but it was estimated that only 20 per cent of participants were registered voters. Chan (2013) claims the MDC-T did not even attempt to get people registered to vote. To be sure, ZANU-PF did everything possible to slow the MDC-T registering probable voters, amidst many other means of ensuring desired results – but years of advance work might have stayed those plans. Supporters' ideas to mobilise first-time voters were cast aside because they were not from inside the party proper – with one faction thinking another would take credit – and because of the impenetrable cordon surrounding the leadership. Surely Obama's campaigns – and decades of experience in American history about the necessity of enfranchising youth and citizens theretofore marginalised – should have alerted strategists (and their donors) to this reality. Yet not enough was done at this fundamental level, and what was done – including supporters' establishing a television station – came too late.

6.   Bad donor advice

Donor advice emphasising basics instead of supporting fancy-dress rallies might have been more effective. To be sure, donors funded the opinion polls and much else for the MDC-T. Could it be that – *à la* Charamba – the "Western" liberal-democratic ideal simply is not suited to Zimbabwe? Or is the die simply not moulded well: Are campaign spectacles and neoliberal-like policy not quite right for the country? If the post-2000 crisis has created a whole new social formation – bereft of strong trade unions and full of "new peasants", informal workers and a crony-capitalist class – does the donors–civil society–opposition troika need a complete strategic overhaul? How can the opposition – and donors – engage with new realities without resorting to ZANU-PF's mode of patronage-driven primitive accumulation?

7.   Diminution of global democracy discourse

As the above mode of political production has emerged, the politicians and policymakers behind the administrators of donor assistance have all but abandoned their post-Cold War platitudes about the need for democracy in the Third World. Security and order are the new buzzwords: "Pragmatism" trumps messy elections. Election-observation discourse is diluted. African elections need no longer be "fair" – "credible" is enough.[9] Ibbo Mandaza (2013) is correct: "The bar had to be lowered if any African election experience [were] to pass the test." The European Union stated before the elections that it would not send observers (none were invited!) and that it would abide by the final ruling of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Americans sent Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson to beg Mugabe to conduct the elections peacefully, but the two envoys were perhaps planning to accept a "credible", close election and a subsequent new version of the TIG. Simultaneously, negotiations for white farmers' compensation were renewed (Chivara 2013). However, the election margins were too gargantuan for these initiatives, so sanctions bluster will continue until the dust settles.

As Ian Spears (2013) suggests, "African" modes of inclusion may be given more consideration by local and international actors both in future

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9   The day after the election, self-proclaimed Gramscian Aldo Dell'Ariccia, EU ambassador to Zimbabwe (who asked the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission at an earlier press conference why it did not release the electronic copy of the voters' roll), stated that the international standard for African elections had been "credible" instead of "fair" for seven years. When asked how Gramsci would have assessed Zimbabwe's elections, Dell'Ariccia said "with a scientific survey of popular opinion", neglecting to use any adjective along the lines of "coercive" (interview by author, Harare, 1 August 2013).

contests and in future TIGs, if for no other reason than that those in pursuit of power will not be satisfied with election results, and because the "West" has tired of liberal imperialism. However, Spears also indicates that power-sharing cannot be externally imposed. If it merely accelerates patron–client political patterns it is counter-productive. All that can be said is that the weakening democracy discourse in the "international community" means internal (or regional) politics are more important than ever.

8.   Unities

"Internal politics" in Zimbabwe raises the "unity" issue. Many questions remain about why the MDC-T split in 2005, including about Tsvangirai's (2011) claims that South Africa's Thabo Mbeki sponsored it. Local observers suggest the leader of the breakaway group had been working for ZANU-PF since the late 1990s – and was paid to stall the belated attempts to unify the opposition parties ahead of the 2013 election (*New Zimbabwe* 2011; interviews by author: Johannesburg, February 2011; London, February 2012; Harare, October 2013).

     The other side of the unity question relates to plans for a second TIG. As journalist Violet Gonda (2013) put it after reported – then vigorously denied – moves by the MDC-T to ally with ZANU-PF military actors, many Zimbabweans "believe that the political parties in the unity government are […] just playing games with people and that what [will] happen after elections [will] be just […] a repeat of […] 2008/2009 where another unity government is formed". Tsvangirai himself hinted at the possibility of a "coalition government", in which some cabinet posts would go to ZANU-PF politicians – after he predicted he would win 65 per cent of the votes! (Moyo 2013) – but within days his party, with whom he had not previously consulted on the matter, rescinded the offers (Matshazi 2013). Days before the election, knowledgeable pundits and "facilitators" predicted a ZANU-PF win with a percentage somewhere in the high-50s: Consolation prizes would be a UN ambassadorship for Tsvangirai and ministerial posts for his two most visible colleagues, Tendai Biti and Nelson Chamisa. Even after the landslide, similar offers were made to the MDC-T losers, but their cries of "fraud" cost them that chance. Alongside speculation that the parties would unite are stories of strong ties between top MDC-T members and their ZANU-PF counterparts: There may have been a sort of "unity" for a long time.

     Zimbabweans are still waiting for the "full stories" on the speculated alliances between top members of both parties as well as on pre-election discussions of a new TIG: Until they are divulged openly there will be no closure to the debate about whether "inclusion" is a viable

way ahead. Although ZANU-PF's overwhelming victory makes such discussions moot, empirical resolution of the Zimbabwean rumours about pre-election unity plans and other forms of de facto inclusion might even inform theorists and debaters on "African vs. Western" ways of governance, development and security.

9.   SADC

Thabo Mbeki, the former SADC facilitator for Zimbabwe, is widely known for advocating "African solutions for African problems". He commended ZANU-PF for winning the 2013 election. For Mbeki, the election's problems did not arise from within Zimbabwe or the SADC, or Africa at large, but instead because "we, as Africans, don't know enough about ourselves and continue to be enslaved by a narrative about ourselves told by other people" (Mbeki 2013). After including his "old friend" (probably referring to Ibbo Mandaza, whose predictions of a huge MDC victory were proven wrong) in that category of mental dependency, he went on to say that in terms of the elections (and land), "Zimbabweans have been [on] the frontline in terms of defending our right as Africans to determine our future, and they are paying a price for that."

Lindiwe Zulu, who led the South African facilitation team under Jacob Zuma's imprimatur, took a more pro-democratic stance, albeit often couched in appropriate pan-Africanist discourse. The differences between Zulu and Mbeki – both graduates of Soviet institutes for higher learning – foreshadowed the final showdown (Moore 2012) between South Africa and Zimbabwe regarding the TIG and the election. This faceoff demonstrated that big regional powers have replaced the colonial masters with the final say. In late June, as the SADC attempted to postpone an election date for which few of the TIG's conditions had been met, the facilitation team – of which Lindiwe Zulu was the public face – indicated that efforts would be made to support the MDC-T if the latter called for a halt to the process until the necessary reforms were undertaken (interviews by author, Harare, 1-4 August 2013; de Plessis and Masondo 2013; *Solidarity Peace Trust* 2013 for context). The "offer" – however informal – was not taken up: There were too many risks. Soon after, Robert Mugabe told Jacob Zuma to shut his "street woman" (Zulu) up or Zimbabwe would leave the SADC. The leader of the continent's most powerful country obeyed the 89-year-old president of a country with an economy the size of a small South African city. Why? Either he knew his electoral victory was assured or, as an Ottawa diplomat guessed, he was paid (interview by author, Ottawa, October 2013).

10. New modes of collective politics and analysis

Fredric Jameson (1986: 311) reminds us that magical realism can be an incisive theoretical tool for analysing politics in the world's peripheral parts, given that these regions are rooted in "a type of historical raw material in which disjunction is structurally present" due to the "overlap or the coexistence of pre-capitalist […] features" with the new world that Gramsci noted would be delivered from the old only after many morbid symptoms. Fuentes' *The Eagle's Throne* (2006) reveals all of ZANU-PF's trickery (minus Nikuv's high-tech mode of cheating), which was also used in Mexico in the 1920s. Doctorow (1984) thinks literary applications of magical realism express the "exhaustion of meaningful choice", yet for Jameson (1986: 321) the "radical fragmentation of modern life and the destruction of older communities […] is not necessarily an absolute loss or impoverishment", so recognising that politics today can be stranger than fiction need not be nihilistic, tragic or farcical. Much of magical realism's despair – and Zimbabwe's – only exists because history has been decollectivised, leaving it to ZANU-PF to "privatise" history and politics. New forms of collective action can overcome the nihilism marking both Zimbabwean power politics and the opposition's current desolation.

The "conquest of new kinds of relationships with history" (Jameson 1986: 321) can emerge in Zimbabwe – with hard political work.

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