

Review

The challenges facing opposition political parties in rural Zimbabwe within 2000-2008

Percyslage Chigora^{1*}, Tobias Guzura² and John Mutumburanzou¹

Department of History and Development Studies Midlands State University, Zimbabwe.
Department of Gender Studies at the Midlands State University, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

Accepted 2 June, 2010

It is recognised in greater circles that opposition political parties in both developing and developed countries have an insurmountable task to achieve in ensuring and enhancing democratic processes. They are the very institutions that are central in paving way for development in all spheres of life that is political, economic and socio-cultural. For Zimbabwe, it is apparent that, at most, opposition political parties have not been able to establish themselves or expand in terms of their operation, their quest for democracy in order to capture the hearts of the rural populace where the majority of the electorate resides. From this backdrop the paper seeks to examine the challenges and constraints militating against the operation of opposition political parties as well as analysing the centrality of opposition political parties in promoting development. The paper rounds off by making suggestions as to the future of opposition parties in rural Zimbabwe. It further submits that there is an array of causes into the ineffectiveness and inefficiency and subsequent failure of opposition political parties in Zimbabwe particularly in the new millennium where a vibrant opposition political party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), has been in existence.

Key words: Political parties, democracy, Zimbabwe, opposition political parties, development, land issue.

INTRODUCTION

At the inception of independence, Zimbabwe approached politics from a perspective that featured different political parties contrary to the well-advanced notion of a one party state system. The situation continued without disruption to the extent that elections since 1980 have been held when and wherever they were due. This meant that opposition political parties have been a feature in Zimbabwean politics. Interesting to note has been their failure to capture power and make great inroads in rural areas where the majority of the population resides. The

question that has been attendant to this recurring phenomenon and which has remained at the epicentre of academic debate, inter alia, is whether it is democracy that is under threat. It is from this backdrop that the paper seeks to analyse the key challenges that opposition political parties have been facing. In particular, it also seeks to critically examine why opposition political parties have failed to expand their political base in rural Zimbabwe, eventually capture power, entrench themselves as the ruling party and subsequently bring about development in Zimbabwe.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: chigorap2000@yahoo.com, chigorap@msu.ac.zw. Tel: 263 11 234568.

Abbreviations: ZANU-PF, Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front; ZUM, Zimbabwe Unity Movement; FPZ, Forum Party of Zimbabwe; ZUD, Zimbabwe Union of Democrats; NGOs, Non-governmental Organisations; NYS, National Youth Service; MDC, Movement for Democratic Change; ESAP, Economic Structural Adjustment Program; OF, Opposition Front.

A GENERAL BACKGROUND TO OPPOSITION POLITICS AND POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE ZIMBABWEAN SITUATION

The existence of opposition political parties either as an idea, or as completely autonomous institutions in their pseudo-capacity, is not novel to Africa in general, and Zimbabwe, in particular. Galbraith (1983) notes that

where there is one dominant party in a state, opposition political parties are inevitably bound to emerge because “power creates its own resistance.” In fact, the thirst for democracy, in Africa and beyond, has its roots stretching as far back as antiquity. It is beyond doubt that some of the most ferocious conflicts in Africa and the world have been sparked by either the lack or shrinkage of democratic spaces. This has been happening despite the fact that, even the most autocratic regimes on earth have tried to gain popularity and international recognition by claiming that they are democratic. The foregoing tells that democracy is a noble virtue that every regime wants to be associated with. Even though the concept of democracy has raised a lot of controversy among scholars, there are certain permanent features that have been conspicuous with democracy. One of these is political pluralism.

In Zimbabwe and other African countries, there is no doubt that one of the core reasons why liberation struggles started and spread was that the colonialists denied Africans their right to basic and fundamental freedom. Nationalist movements were convinced that it was through an all-inclusive approach to politics that development was to take place. Such an approach could only be attained by creating a conducive atmosphere for the growth of multi-partism. Neo-liberal thinking has argued that democracy is the *sine qua non* for development. For example, Lipset (1959) argues that development can only take place where democracies exist. Democracies, it has been argued, do not fight each other. This study also shares the same theoretical framework with the foregoing school. The birth of the ‘third wave’ of democratisation in Zimbabwe, in the early 1990s, witnessed a multiplicity of opposition political parties that have differed in their composition, power base, manifestoes, impact and significance, as well as life expectancy.

Although Zimbabwe has seen a lot of opposition political parties emerge on its political horizons in the years preceding 1990, not even one of them has succeeded beyond winning a sizable number of seats which made them eligible to take over power from the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. This, alone, is testimony enough that the history of opposition parties has been fraught with a lot of challenges. It has led Sithole and Makumbe (1998) to posit; “The fate of the opposition parties was decided during the war of liberation in the 1970s”. The reasons behind the failure of political parties to come to power in Zimbabwe have become the subject of intense debate both inside and outside Zimbabwe. Interpretations for the origins, forms and outcomes of the challenges have been many and varied. What is disturbing, however, is that despite their multiplicity, these explanations have done little to improve our understanding of the complexity of the problems confronting opposition political parties. The main problems of these explanations have not only been

that they have been parochial, trendy and partisan but they are also imagined, seeking to interpret the present challenges out of history and context. Moving away from the tradition of narrow and partisan explanations that abound on the topic, this study has invited responses from major informants on the topic in its analysis. It is quite interesting to note that despite the emergence of many opposition parties since 1980, it is regrettable that not even one of them has managed to oust the ruling ZANU (PF) from power. It is important to note that, among those parties that emerged, some of them made great contributions to democracy while others just disappeared from the political radar screen without making an impression or leaving a trail for the future to trace. During the first seven years of Zimbabwe’s independence (the pre-unity accord period), the government was preoccupied with the establishment of a one-party state (Mandaza and Sachikonye, 1991).

After winning the 1980 elections, ZANU (PF) went on to deal with the opposition through a combination of violence and manipulation of the constitution. The strongest opposition soon after independence came from ZANU (PF)’s nemesis PF- ZAPU. However, as events unfolded, being part of the government of national unity compromised PF- ZAPU’s role as an opposition (Laakso, 2009). Following the 1985 elections, ZANU (PF) did not allot cabinet seats to PF- ZAPU and the only option available for PF-ZAPU leaders, if they wanted to become ministers, was to join the ruling party. After winning 64 seats against PF-ZAPU’s 15, ZANU (PF) went on to celebrate their victory by engaging in an orgy of violence. Ncube (1991) remarked that the violence demonstrated virtually the total absence of a culture of democracy embracing tolerance of opposing views as expressed through a multi-party democracy. In order to end the violence, PF-ZAPU acceded to the signing of the Unity Accord with ZANU (PF) on 22 December 1987. According to Moyo (1992), “For Mugabe and his party; the merger ...ended a complicated exercise in removing PF-ZAPU as an obstacle to his dream of a one party state.” To deal with the white opposition, ZANU (PF) proceeded to put in motion constitutional requirements for erasing organized white politics in the Zimbabwean parliament. Thus, the constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (NO.6) Act abolished the 20 reserved seats and allocated them to party loyalists and a few whites who were deemed sympathetic to the ruling party. After the signing of the Unity Accord and the removal of the reserved cabinet’s seats in 1986, there remained no credible opposition to challenge ZANU-PF’s dominance. However, in 1989, after Tekere’s expulsion in October 1988, he went on to form the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM). Despite Mugabe’s dismissal of ZUM as the joke of the year and that it would soon zoom into doom (Makumbe and Compagnon 1995), ZUM became an instant hit. Tekere was outspoken on corruption by the vampire class in ZANU (PF). For ZANU (PF), the

expulsion of Tekere was a mistake.

Many from ZANU (PF) joined him. The 'Willow gate scandal' was the most notorious and it cost the ruling party dearly in terms of support and credibility. ZANU (PF) went on a smearing campaign and described ZUM as a divisive and reactionary force and of being a front for the Rhodesians wanting to recolonise Zimbabwe, they were also accused of receiving funding from United States of America (USA). Draconian instruments of the state were used to clampdown on the activities of the party. In the 1990 presidential elections, Tekere challenged Mugabe. Commenting on this election, Sithole argues that although ZUM lost, "Tekere's challenge to Mugabe and ZUM's challenge to ZANU (PF) broke the myth of ZANU (PF)'s invincibility. This is a contribution which Tekere and ZUM made at a critical hour in Zimbabwe's political development, when the country faced the real possibility of a one-party state." (Makumbe and Compagnon 1995), ZUM, afterwards strangely disintegrated. After the demise of ZUM, there emerged other parties like the Forum Party of Zimbabwe (FPZ) and the Democratic Party (DP), which were never more than of nuisance value to the ruling party. Muzorewa's attempt to bring all the opposition parties under one canopy, the United Parties (UP), failed abysmally because the party was riddled with chaos and lack of focus. It suffered from factionalism mainly from the Forum for Democratic Reform Trust (FDRT) which was based in Harare and the OF which was based in Bulawayo. Harold-Barry (2004) argues that in many respects opposition parties dug their own graves and they were deep dishonourable ones. Both within and among opposition parties, there seemed to be the Hobbesian state of nature (Harold-Barry, 2004). Thus, in 1995 only ZANU (Ndonga) and FPZ participated in the elections. The other eight opposition parties boycotted following a resolution reached at the Zimbabwe Multi-Party Consultation Conference. Later, after the demise of ZUM, attempts were made by independents to challenge the ruling party's monopoly and during this period, the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD) emerged with its leader Margaret Dongo, challenging the omnipotence of ZANU (PF). The leaders of ZUD split after some differences with Kempton Makamure and formed the Transparency Front (TF). Independent candidates showed a deep organizational void to which the lost sheep in ZANU (PF) and other displeased citizens could turn to for shelter.

THE CHALLENGES

With regards to opposition parties' failure in the post colonial state, the challenge lies, at most, with the nature of postcolonial African politics emanating from the way in which independence itself was achieved. The historicity of the African state ought to be put into perspective

particularly the way it regards colonisation and colonial policies. As Kagoro (2003) rightly puts it, it was, a violent and fraudulent process of colonisation and domination that dehumanised black people, characterised their past as barren of innovation and achievement, branded their intellect as infantile and denigrated African culture as atavistic. Furthermore, to the opposition's detriment the post colonial Zimbabwean state is a product of four autocratic systems namely, the pre-colonial, the colonial, the armed liberation struggle and ZANU (PF) rule in the post-colonial era (Ndlovu-Gatheni, 2003). According to Mair and Sithole (2002), the contemporary Zimbabwean political culture is a direct product of the above systems, which are all, characterized by autocratic tendencies. Starting from independence in 1980, the country's political history has been fraught with hiccups and intolerance. This is a country that witnessed a civil conflict that has been touted as having ethnic cleansing connotations in some quarters. Here is a country whose ruling elite has demonstrated gross intolerance of dissenting voices. Dissenting voices have always been ruthlessly crushed and rule by law is the order of the day rather than the exception. It is into such an arena that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) ventured into in 1999 and as was to be expected against such a background, it has not been a rosy outing for the opposition party. The emergence of post 1990 pro-democracy movements in Zimbabwe was linked to the contextual changes in global political economy as well as explicit donor interventions (Kagoro, 2003). However, it is misleading to note that, 'here it arose the curious alliance between the interests of international capital and that of the impoverished masses, despite the latter's objective critique of the global system' (Kagoro, 2003). It is of utmost importance to note that Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) created conditions of impoverishment and social exclusion particularly as it pertains to urbanites and the middle class. The situation obtainable in the 1990s that represented the triumph of neo liberalism as a form of ideology is far removed from the present situation on ground in the post-colonial state. Herein, lies one crucial challenge for the opposition in Zimbabwe.

The post 1990 opposition movement drew its ideological strength from an emphasis on political, civic and human rights, pointing to the democratic deficit of the incumbent ruling party and building on the cumulative popular frustration with ZANU PF after nearly two decades of one- party dominance. The stress on human and civic rights issues and on the importance of using available judicial spaces to contest authoritarian politics has often been interpreted as characterising the opposition's attachment to liberalism, and the rights of elites. The ruling party has capitalised on this apparent confusion to portray the opposition as a vehicle of neo colonialism hell bent on returning the country to white colonial rule. Thus, the ruling party has postured and

portrayed itself as a vanguard nationalist home grown party with its ideology firmly grounded in the people's welfare. Neocosmos (2005) in a very useful broad critique of such, liberalism has written; The politics of human rights is, at best, a state-focused politics and is predominantly reduced to a technicised politics, which is limited to a demand for inclusion into an existing state domain. Thus a struggle for rights, if successful, can end up producing the outcome of a fundamentally de-politicised politics. Unfortunately, the MDC seems to have failed to refute or separate itself from such a mentality especially in the wake of its apparent gaining of favour from the whites who had appeared to shy away from national politics only to re-emerge with the formation of MDC. This is at a time when the Mugabe regime has imposed a selective articulation of the issue of colonial redress, which has either forgotten, or completely marginalized the broader political rights questions that were just as central to the struggles against colonial rule. The opposition generally have not responded strongly to this position, and yet one could argue that this is a general challenge for any progressive opposition today. The limitations of turning to neo-liberal economic programmes in response to authoritarian nationalist regimes have become globally apparent.

The greater percentage of the people in Zimbabwe resides in rural areas and depends on agro-economy. However, from its inception the political opposition in Zimbabwe had the urban areas as its major focus, and it was only after the land occupations of 2000 and beyond, that it thought it had to make inroads into the rural areas. However, once the state's land occupation programme effectively cordoned the opposition out of the rural areas, the disjuncture between ruling party domination in the rural areas, and opposition urban dominance was consolidated. This process has created major strategic and political problems for the opposition, and emphasised a long-standing historical weakness of the Zimbabwean trade union movement in dealing with rural issues. Thus, the MDC simply inherited the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTUs) weaknesses and lack of linkage with the rural populace. The result has been a break in the political connections between the experiences of rural and urban livelihoods, and the deepening of the despotic politics of ZANU PF in the rural traditional and local governance structures. In the urban areas, the state has undermined elected local government structures, through the imposition of rigid central government administrative and financial controls, (Kamete 2003) and a recent state assault on the urban 'surplus' in the informal sector through its notorious "Operation Restore Order". The opposition, as a result of a combination of state repression, mass exhaustion, inadequate planning and preparation, and a weak conceptualisation of the relations between land and livelihood struggles in the rural and urban areas, has not yet been able to strengthen opposition politics through new rural-urban

political linkages. In the near future the result of such state policies will be the increasing ruralisation of Zimbabwe, (Kinsey, 2004) and the weakening of the structural urban basis of civic politics. Clearly the challenge of developing a broad citizenship rights politics across rural and urban areas remains immense (Hart 2005). The MDC has failed to realise that between the rural and urban populace, political interests would vary, and interest articulation and aggregation would be resultantly affected. At the same time, they also failed to fully come to terms with the moral economy of the peasantry where peasants need to be spoken to in a language they understand; a position capitalised on by ZANU PF in its "the land is the economy, the economy is land" sloganeering. The opposition also seems to have overestimated the extent to which the local Africans have internalised democratic values. The human rights' question and democratic demands of the MDC have been dismissed by many rural dwellers as an extension of western intervention, with little relevance to the real issues of economic empowerment. According to Mutumburanzou (2006), it is not surprising to hear people voicing that they do not eat '*dhemokirasi ne mayumeni raiti*' (democracy and human rights) but were content that 'the land is the economy and the economy is the land' because *rukuvhute rwedu rwuri mvhu irori riri kurambwa naro naTsvangirai nevarungu vake vekuHingirandi. Ko iye mwana wevhu apindwa nei chaizwo kudai kubva ada kutidzosea kwamakei? Itsvigiri here mwanangu? Nditaurireka iwe ndiwe unotsvara patakasatsvara.* (My origins are on this land that Tsvangirai and his English friends are refusing. What has really got into this son of the soil that he wants to return us to yesteryears? Is it sugar my child? Tell me, you are the one searching where we have never searched before.) This makes it clear that in its quest for continued supremacy, and in order to extend its dominant economic and political objectives, the ruling party employed 'defensive radicalism' in which, using land as a key issue, it made a show of being on the side of the masses. By so doing, ZANU-PF connected itself with the aspirations of the masses while MDC was cast into an alien world of nothingness.

Furthermore, another challenge for the opposition lies with the origins of the dominant opposition party itself. The ZCTU having witnessed its power base of workers 'built formal alliance and alliances of solidarity with other civil society groups such as civil servants and student organisations' (Kagoro, 2003), leading to the formulation of a political party. This went further than their mandate in serving the constituency where in the 1980s, "organised labour had seen its role as that of collective bargaining for better wages for workers in urban industrial setting". According to Kagoro (2003), "the raw data report did provide the basis through which MDC as a political party did give a false impression that there was need for a more cohesive opposition party to contest the 2000

general elections and the 2002 presidential, implying, therefore that such an opposition political party was not yet in existence". Turning from civil leaders into political leaders in essence created a "moral quandary of whether civic leaders should assume an overtly political role by holding elective office in political parties" (Kagoro, 2003). This led to the new civil leaders been politically biased and actuated by self-interest and also led to the depletion of civic ranks in order to staff political parties (Kagoro, 2003). The new leadership had difficulties in separating itself from its predecessors. Association with commercial white farmers brought a dilemma into the party, "the white commercial farmers...were dissatisfied with the way things were developing in the country, and so threw their weight behind the MDC. They assisted in forming support groups within the commercial farming areas and made donations in cash and kind." (Kagoro, 2003). Hence the castigating of MDC as representing white interest, this precipitated the revolution. Herein lies the axis of evil in the eyes of ZANU PF; civics, MDC, and white imperial interests.

There has been a problem in the way the opposition calculated the social classes that made up its support base. According to Kagoro (2003), "these range from workers, peasants, students and young persons to businesspersons and minority races. As argued by Maroleng (2004) "as a political party, the MDC was created by a coalition of civic groups that were united more by distaste for Mugabe and ZANU-PF than by any unity of political programmes" It can be argued that the MDC came into being because the unifying vision of the liberation struggle had broken down, also the 'democratic deficit' and the failing economic environment had emerged as major challenges to the actual experience of liberation. For some analysts, the emergence of this opposition was merely an 'anti-Mugabe reaction', a counter to the glaring shortcomings of the ruling party. In short, it represented no positive alternatives. However, a close analysis clearly reveals that the party is mainly a marriage of convenience, for what common interests could labour share with capital and peasants and with white commercial farmers? The background has created problems of cohesion in the struggle between "the doves and the hawks, the leftists and the conservatives, the young and the old, patriarchy and the feminists..." (Kagoro, 2003). In the long run this has proved to be the party's Achilles heel and a soft spot for ZANU-PF's attacks on the opposition. Such a cosmopolitan composition was largely because the MDC was a hustle-made political party made with the intention of immediately capturing power in less than a year and as such lagged behind in many respects, in terms of building a political base and selecting leaders with honour and credentials. This further hampered the formulation of its ideology. The lack of a clear ideological understanding and basis is not really surprising looking at the loose coalition comprising the MDC. As such, it was far much

divorced from reality of its support base, in fact it had no 'street credibility' (Kagoro, 2003). There is a disturbing remark by some authorities, who argue, "Mugabe lost almost in every single urban area and the general feeling within urban Zimbabwe remains that Mugabe stole the presidential election and is therefore an illegitimate leader". (Kagoro, 2003) However, the reality is simply that the ruling party laid emphasis where it matters most; the rural constituencies while MDC in its infantile ignorance concentrated on the urbanites that are just a miniscule component of the voting population.

In terms of designing its policies both foreign and domestic, MDC has been a dismal failure in comparison to the ruling party. 'Smart sanctions imposed on Mugabe and his lieutenants have not resulted in any positive developments leading to the restoration of sanity in Zimbabwe' (Makumbe, 2003). Whilst managing to get diplomatic, moral and material support from the West it failed to articulate its issues to the electorate. While the opposition has been globe trotting, back home, the electorate were interested in practical issues; not regime change as espoused by the opposition, but sound policies for their immediate and future gains. If it had really wanted to gain a foothold into the political arena, MDC should have changed tactics. It should have been talking a language common to all Africans and former colonised countries, it should have been at regional level; eloquent in talking of struggling against neo-colonialism, at continental level; in support of the pan African agenda, and in the North-South divide; in support of the South's clamour for democratisation of the international order. Conversely, it has advocated for the sanctioning of the government, and leaders in the government, which does not function at all as a result of state immunity. The MDC concentrated on supporting the re-emergence of civil society and this has largely been because its viability depended on foreign funding and it has to be accountable to its funders. Funding was also a problem for the MDC, but given the claim of support by MDC this should not be so. A problem in this case because a less endowed party is not attractive to the common man as there exists, a likelihood of looting resources as the case of Zambia demonstrates. However, the presence of the Political Parties Finance Act also made it very difficult for MDC to get any financial assistance from outside the country. The Act makes it illegal for any local party to get foreign funding. Thus, the MDC has to by all means ensure that it gets adequate funding from local sources who are largely its members. Organisational strategies of the party also caused a major headache for the party. Internal contradictions, although occurring at a national level, had a negative trickle down effect on the organisational capacity of MDC at constituency level. Since its formation, MDC has been therefore left with the daunting challenge of fighting a war on two fronts: dismantling ZANU-PF's hegemonic project and fighting the 'common sense' view on one hand while on the other hand it had to

deal with the internal contradictions (Mutumburanzou, 2006). In addition, MDC was denied access to campaign in rural constituencies as the ruling party made effective use of the war veterans and the green bombers, as the NYS graduates are derogatively called, who embarked on an orgy of violence against perceived opposition party members and sympathisers. When it was allowed to campaign in the rural areas, after the promulgation of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) guidelines to democratise elections, a new form of challenge confronted them in the form of the struggle against the 'common sense' view (Mutumburanzou, 2006). In this case, they were not really given the leeway to campaign freely as a lot of areas are still no "go areas" for them especially in the wake of a scenario where despite the implementation of the guidelines, the government has steadfastly refused to allow external observers especially those perceived to be from 'hostile' countries. As if this was not enough, those that are allowed to participate as observers only get into the country just before elections when most of the victimisation of opposition candidates and supporters would have long since been done. In some cases, opposition supporters were not able to lodge their nomination papers with the nomination court after being barred from doing so by the ruling party supporters. Restructuring of the party is mandatory in terms of designing its policies and leadership in order to be accepted by the electorate and also in returning their confidence that has been lost. In the year 2000, this results to further deteriorating and loss of support...At most it has to be realised that, 'political parties seeking to unseat former liberation war movements do seem to have an uphill task...In the run up to the 2002 Presidential elections, Mugabe had 3 state helicopters at his disposal while Tsvangirai was denied access to the same privilege' (Makumbe, 2003). MDC's failure to unite and advance the cause of Zimbabweans' opposition as one will be very costly in our struggle against despotism (Shumba, 2007). The infighting in the MDC led to misdirection and misapplication of focus and energy. This reveals shallowness, an emptiness of depth and resolve that can be dangerous if they assume power (Shumba, 2007).

Faced with a stiff opposition and the prospect of losing power, ZANU-PF repudiated the reconciliatory politics it had adopted at independence and turned back the clock to the liberation war years. Calling on its liberation war credentials, the ruling party in the 2000 and 2002 elections fell back on its tried and tested campaign strategy of using the causes of the liberation war as its campaign platform. In this regard, 'the land issue, racism, violence and intimidation were the only effective weapons that could be used against political rivals' (Makumbe, 2003). In this strategy, the enemy was well defined as the white man, his puppets (the MDC), the former colonial master Britain and her allies. In a speech read on the

incumbent President's behalf at Nyamandi Primary School, it eloquently stated that the Zimbabwean government has considered withdrawing the hand of reconciliation she had extended at independence since such a gesture had not been reciprocated because the British government rescinded on its earlier promise to fund the land reform in Zimbabwe (Mutumburanzou, 2006). More so, there followed another development in which the ZANU-PF party radically restructured the terrain of Zimbabwean politics towards a politics of frontal assault that had as its targets the former colonial power, Britain, the local white population and the MDC (Mutumburanzou, 2006). After the February 2000 referendum in which the 'No' vote triumphed over the 'Yes' vote, ZANU-PF, afraid that the June 2000 parliamentary election result would be a repeat of the referendum, embarked on re-building the walls of their melting dominance throughout the country. The 2000 referendum was the first defeat of ZANU-PF in 20 years and they got a rude awakening. Faced with the possibility of losing power to the newly formed opposition MDC, the ruling party became more determined and vigorous than before in building a hegemonic project, which would totally erase MDC from the contemporary political map of the nation in general and the rural constituencies, in particular. In this regard, as a starting point, the 2000 elections scheduled for March were inexplicably postponed to June to give the ruling party time to put into motion survival strategies to ensure that the elections would not be a repetition of the referendum. Also of particular importance in the hegemonic project was the key role of the media and the various pieces of legislation like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), Broadcasting Services Act, among others, which supplied a major input into the project. MDC and its supporters were vilified at ZANU-PF rallies. At such rallies, the people were told of whom the enemy was and how to deal with the enemy (Mutumburanzou, 2006). ZANU-PF declared a political war against the imagined and real supporters of the opposition MDC and in the process destroyed opposition structures that were in their formative and nascent stages of development. The war veterans and youth militia were quite instrumental to the execution of this task. Under the guise of "nationalism", 'patriotism', 'defence of state sovereignty and territorial integrity', ZANU-PF continued to deploy violence, intimidation and other coercive forms before and after the years 2000 and 2002, in order to subdue the voices of dissent and broadly constructed 'enemies of the people'(Mutumburanzou, 2006). The nature of the ruling party and its liberation war history also presented an uphill task to any opponents. In this regard, 'a few weeks before the presidential elections, the chiefs of staff warned the nation that they would not cooperate with or salute a presidential candidate whose liberation war credentials were questionable' (Makumbe, 2003). In this

case, it was clear that the military's top brass comprising the then Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces General Vitalis Zvinvashe; Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri; Zimbabwe Prison Services Commissioner Major-General Zimondi (Retired); Zimbabwe National Army Commander then Lieutenant-General Constantine Chiwenga and Zimbabwe's Airforce Commander, Air Marshal Perrence Shiri's appearance on national television stating that, they would not at any moment salute a President without liberation war credentials was an apparent reference to Tsvangirai. This ultimately was a subtle threat to the Zimbabwean populace to vote MDC at their peril. In the face of such threats, a ZANU (PF) victory was more or less assured as the majority of Zimbabweans especially the rural majority were 'fed up' of war, thus would not vote in a manner likely to result in the outbreak of a war.

The construction of the hegemonic project saw the emergence of revived nationalism delivered in a particularly virulent form with race as a key trope within the discourse. Also, a selective rendition of the liberation history was deployed as an ideological policing agent in the public debate. ZANU-PF decided to rethink land, state and nation in the face of stiff competition and the prospect of losing power to the newly formed MDC. The result of the revived nationalist assault by the ruling party was a repudiation of the national policy of reconciliation that was enunciated by the newly independent state in 1980. ZANU-PF radically restructured the terrain of the constituency politics towards a politics of frontal assault that had as its major targets the former colonial power, Britain, her allies in the West, the local white population, the opposition MDC and its supporters. MDC was largely portrayed as a 'sell-out, puppet party' and its supporters as 'enemies of the state' and 'traitors' who deserved the full wrath of the state coercive machinery. The party's leaders were labelled stooges of the West and agents of neo-colonialism. To take the contest a step higher, the ruling party began to use food aid as a campaign tool. In this regard, in most rural constituencies, food aid could only be accessed upon production of a ruling party card and at ruling party rallies. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were directed that they could only disburse food aid in the presence of 'government' officials (meaning ruling party members). Against such a scenario, many people opted for survival in the face of the virulent droughts affecting the country and the only way to do this was by chanting party slogans. To further worsen the situation, food aid was only distributed at ruling party rallies, making it inaccessible to opposition supporters. In this regard, 'both the MDC and civil society groups continued to note instances where food was repeatedly used as a political tool or where the MDC was impeded from gaining access to rural areas' (Makumbe, 2003). Such policies have effectively made it difficult, nay impossible for the opposition to campaign in rural constituencies. In cases where NGOs went ahead to

disburse food aid without government attendance they faced sanctions. Cases abound of organisations that were either banned or stopped from carrying out any activities in rural areas. Violence has exacerbated the unevenness of the political landscape. The reality that needs to be known is that a government in power remains in charge with the authority to, as empowered by the constitution, design policies and laws in their favour as they are the majority. Thus, the ruling elite in Zimbabwe have resorted to rule by law rather than the rule of law. In this regard, the police have many a time stopped opposition party rallies from being done ostensibly because they did not have adequate resources to ensure the 'safety' of the opposition's leaders and that of its supporters. Surprisingly when it comes to ruling party rallies such fears seem not to be taken into consideration. Also, when the opposition leaders go ahead and stage their rallies without authorisation, they face the wrath of the law. In addition, the ruling party adulterated the National Youth Service to its advantage. Graduates of the NYS have become de facto ruling party militia with the authority to engage in rampant victimisation of opposition members.

The policy issue, which has been advanced by the MDC with regards to the land question, has also cost the MDC votes in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. In this discourse, the land issue became the epicentre and foundation on which the spirit of the liberation war was fought and it was brought back and built on by the ruling party. As a result, MDC lost the much-needed rural votes especially in the Mashonaland provinces. MDC's criticism of the way the ZANU-PF government distributed land through the fast land programme was perceived as total denial of the whole programme. In this way ZANU-PF put itself close to the people while it pushed MDC away from the people and portrayed it through the media, it wholly controlled, as a party whose aim is to safeguard the interests of the minority white population, Britain and her allies. The MDC is an African opposition party, rooted in Zimbabwean nationalism and the history of the liberation war. Its major critique of the chaotic ZANU PF land reform program was predicated upon a belief that there was need for a land revolution in Zimbabwe. Land was part of the basis of the national armed struggle (Mutambara, 2007). However, the MDC made a distinction between a noble notion of land revolution and the criminal conduct and corruption on land that Robert Mugabe and his surrogates have carried out in Zimbabwe. It was not a land reform program; rather, it was a visionless and directionless destruction of agriculture that benefited a few elites at the expense of the majority. (Mutambara 2007). At the centre of the MDC's land policy was the holistic use of technology and scientific innovation. Proper mechanised agriculture requires training, planning, technological innovation and research, not uncreative public display of a few tractors and ploughs (Mutambara, 2007). The MDC claimed to

seek neither reconciliation nor accommodation with the mindless despot Robert Mugabe. Tractors and combined harvesters would not do it.

A global kaleidoscope also had an inherent influence on the electorate. According to Kenneth Kaunda, leaders in the West say that President Mugabe is a demon, that he has destroyed Zimbabwe and he must be gotten rid of - but this demonising is made by people who may not understand what Robert Gabriel Mugabe and his fellow freedom fighters have gone through (The Herald, 2007). At the Lancaster house talks, the people of Zimbabwe were assured that they were going to be independent the following year, 1980, but that wonderful news was conditional. The new government of Zimbabwe was not to deal with land issues but was to "leave that in the hands of the British government". Nationalists from Zimbabwe accepted this rather harsh and complicated condition. The Thatcher government began to deal with the land issue, as did her successor, John Major. When Tony Blair took over in 1997, it was understood that a young lady in charge of colonial issues within that government simply stopped doing anything about it (The Herald, 2007). Global factors also played an important role in the opposition's failure. The failure of international monetary fund (IMF)/World Bank structural adjustment policies was used by ZANU-PF as a clear sign that globalisation was not good for the developing world. This is at a time when the MDC was trying to make a presentation of neo-liberal ideology as a panacea for the ills of developing countries. Furthermore, opposition politics as a tool for development was totally misplaced. There is a need to note that the circulation of political elites has not contributed to stability in any way to the post colonial state in Africa. The people/electorate's opinion has many a time never been sought when foray into opposition politics are made by budding politicians. The issue of whether people feel better in democratic condition or not has often been disregarded and it has always been thought that public opinion favours democracy to authoritarian rule. During election time the candidates of the major parties masquerade as dedicated servants of the people, overseeing their welfare, in order to solicit votes and win office. A witty sociologist has observed that for the ordinary politician there are two sides to every question: the inside and the outside. The outside will use any means to get on the inside where the power and the troughs are (Novak, 1968). Politics is about patriotism; patriotism being the inestimable and unquantifiable irrevocable love for one's country and its people. Patriotism is the ideology that builds countries. In the absence of patriotic faith, countries collapse from indifference. Patriotism overrides the selfishness of the individual. It inspires justice, equality and unity. In itself, patriotism is a fuel awaiting ignition at the very onset of national betrayal (Shumba, 2007).

In addition, leadership plays an effective role in contributing to the success of a political party. Part of

being a good governor before venturing into discussions about good governance, has to do with the ability to make priorities, to be flexible, accommodating, evaluative, reconsidering, take responsibility and being accountable. Accountability requires that not only should the MDC tell the people why they have allowed this expensive split to interfere with the core business of the party but why they are failing to effectively deal with it. This fallout has all the traces of weak minds. One would be forgiven for asking if the MDC really knows what the pressing needs of Zimbabweans are outside their self-indulgent struggle for personal power (Shumba, 2007). People do not become good leaders because they are in government; they become a good government by bringing with them important leadership attributes they hold outside the structures of power (Shumba, 2007). More so in a world where issues of accountability and transparency play a key role, people's expectations are raised and where signs of failure appear it adds to discontent among supporters. In such a scenario, one would be forgiven for viewing the MDC as a bunch of looters. In this regard, an already evident looting new committee of elites would replace corrupt, self-seeking and authoritarian political elite that needs to be dismantled, but would this have solved the political crisis in the country becomes the crucial question. The opposition has also found it difficult to put its message across to the rural electorate especially in the face of a situation where the print media has not been accessible to the rural populace where the majority lives. At most, the rural electorate continue to be bombarded with endless ZANU-PF propaganda to an extent that they are brainwashed. Consumption of media products, despite this, is limited because only a few can afford to buy a newspaper on a daily basis and those who buy the newspaper can only buy those pro-government papers which serve the interests of the ruling party. Furthermore, there has been the use of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act by the ruling party to muzzle any potential outlets of expression by the opposition in the form of the independent press. Lastly, the judiciary remains weak, lacks capacity, and is highly patronised. There is no clear separation of powers between the judiciary, the executive and the legislature. This has seen many chief justices fired because they did not give a ruling that favours the ruling party. There is a tendency to appoint pro-ruling party staff in the judiciary system to the extent that those who commit orgies of violence go scot-free if they happen to be pro-ruling party. To ensure that the ruling party retains political power, such pillars of the state as the judiciary are reformed and refashioned to make them comply with the dictates of the executive (Makumbe, 2003). This seems to indicate that the executive is some kind of an animal which by all means tries to manipulate the environment at the expense of the entire nation. In this regard, the executive has gone to all extents possible to refashion and populate the judiciary to

its desire. This has entailed the enforced retirement of judges seen as not being sympathetic to the status quo. Thus, the likes of Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay, Justice McNally, Justice Smith and Justice Ebrahim among others have been removed from the bench. In their place were brought in known ZANU-PF sympathisers and members including the new Chief Justice Godfrey Chidyausike a former post colonial minister; Ben Hlatshwayo a former member of the Information and Publicity arm of the government driven Constitutional Commission and George Chiweshe a former guerrilla during the country's liberation war. Ultimately the executive has seen to it that even when the opposition has any legal queries, they will never succeed as they will be attended to by its lackeys on the bench.

CONCLUSION

The factors contributing to the success of opposition political parties in rural Zimbabwe is not solely hinged on a commitment by the ruling party to carry out political reform but rather a commitment by the opposition political parties towards self-reform and correction. There is dire need for the opposition political parties to identify with an ideology that links them with the rural electorate where the majority of the people reside. Apart from this there is also need to fight and exorcise the ghost of factionalism that has prevented them to fight as a united front for a common cause. There have been unnecessary struggles within a struggle and this has been because of sheer greediness and selfishness among the leaders of the opposition parties. Instead of pandering to the whims and caprices of the western nations, opposition parties should acknowledge the centrality of the land issue to the rural electorate. Judging by the degree to which everything in Zimbabwe has been politicised, the opposition really needs to display extreme political astuteness and use politics of influence to pull through. Also, if ever the opposition wishes to make an impact on the Zimbabwean political map, it has to identify itself more with the ideological foundations of its African kith and kin. Without taking heed of this and other reasons noted above, the opposition political parties will continue to cling tenaciously to its status as opposition while the ruling party continues to succeed.

REFERENCES

- Galbraith JK (1983). *The Anatomy of Power*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin,
- Harold Barry D (2004). *Zimbabwe, the Past is The Future: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the context of crisis*, Harare, Weaver Press,
- Hart G (2005). 'Denaturalising Dispossession: Critical Ethnography in the Age of Resurgent Imperialism.' Centre for Civil Society Reports.
- Herald Reporter (2007). 'Western countries wrong' in *The Herald*. Thursday, June 14.
- Kamete A (2003). 'Contestable Nationalism: The Liberation Movement and Urban Constituencies in Zimbabwe.' Paper presented at the "Futures for Southern Africa" symposium organised by CIIR, ICS, NAI AND SACBC, Windhoek 15-17 Sept.
- Kinsey B (2004). 'Zimbabwe's Land Reform Programme: Underinvestment in Post-Conflict Transformation.' *World Dev.*, 32(10): 1669-1696,
- Laakso L (2009). "Opposition Politics in Independent Zimbabwe." @ <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a6.htm> retrieved 10 May. *Afr. Stud. Q.*, 7: 2-3
- Lipset SM (1959). 'Some Social Requisite of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy' in *Am. Pol. Sci. Rev.*, 53: 1.
- Mair S, Sithole M (2002). *Blocked Democracies in Africa: Case Study of Zimbabwe*, Harare, Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Makumbe JM, Compagnon D (2000). *Behind The Smokescreen: The Politics Of Zimbabwe's 1995 General Elections*, Harare. University of Zimbabwe Publications,
- Mandaza I, Sachikonye LM (1991). *The One Party State and Democracy: The Zimbabwean Debate* Harare, SAPES Trust.
- Maroleng C (2004). "Zimbabwe's Movement for Democratic Change: Briefing notes." ISS Situation Report, 3 May.
- Moyo JN (1992). *Voting for Democracy: Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe* Harare. University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Mutambara A, Clumsy ZANU PF propaganda on farms won't work, @ www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/farm57.16536.html, retrieved 06/14/2007, 14(54): 48.
- Mutumburanzou J (2006). 'The challenges facing opposition political parties in rural Zimbabwe: The case of MDC in Gutu South Constituency (2000-2006).' Unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation Midlands State University, Zimbabwe, August.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni SJ (2003). Dynamics of the Zimbabwean Crisis in the 21st Century. *J. Conflict Resol.*, p. 1.
- Neocosmos M (2005). 'Re-Thinking Politics Today: Elements of a Critique of Political Liberalism in Southern Africa.' In Centre for Civil Society, *From Local Processes to Global Forces*. Research Reports, University of Kwa-Zulu, Natal. Vol. 1.
- Novack G (1968). Third Parties in American Politics in *International Socialist Review*, May-June, 29: 3.
- Shumba C (2007). MDC is losing moral and political authority to oppose, @ <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/mdc104.16536.html>, retrieved: 06/14/14:54:24.
- Sithole M, Makumbe J (1998). 'Elections in Zimbabwe: the ZANU PF Hegemony and its Incipient Decline.' *Afr. J. Pol. Sci.*, 2: 1.