

**NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND THEIR  
VOCATION FOR PARTY POLITICS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.  
THE CASE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND  
ZIMBABWE AFRICAN NATIONAL UNION**

**Dan Petrica\***

---

DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2021.1.03

Published Online: 2021-06-30

Published Print: 2021-06-30

---

**Abstract**

*The paper aims to shed light on the particularities of two national liberation movements - turned political parties and how they embraced their new role after the liberation struggle had ended and majority rule had been obtained. South Africa's ANC and Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF are analyzed in an attempt to ultimately underline why democracy was approached distinctively by the two. We also bring some arguments as to why South Africa failed to stop ZANU-PF's descent into autocracy, amidst internal and international pressures to intervene. After a short historical background of the two NLMs, we discuss the links between them, the particular political and social conditions which shaped their behaviours and the commonalities and differences in said behaviours. We argue that, as long as the democratic principles identified with ZANU-PF's struggle for the empowerment of a new elite, the former were pursued; when the two no longer overlapped, stronghold politics and policies took primacy. We also argue that faced with similar contestation as ZANU-PF, the ANC might choose to sacrifice democracy for the sake of regime survival.*

**Keywords:** party-politics, international relations, regional influence, democracy, colonialism, discourse

---

\* Dan Petrica is Teaching Assistant at Agora University, Oradea.  
Contact: don\_ptk@yahoo.com

## **Introduction**

In the following parts, we will delve into two of Southern Africa's most prominent national liberation movements (NLMs), the African National Congress (ANC) and The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), trying to follow their transformations into political parties. We do so by providing some historical background, after which we approach their ties and mutually recognized interests. We then shift to their identities and political parties, which, arguably, have steered South Africa and Zimbabwe towards different approaches to democracy. We dedicate a distinct part to how the ANC's leadership has engaged Zimbabwe's social crisis, which is coupled with the resurgence of anti-colonial narratives in the latter state and with overall Sub-Saharan NLM solidarity. A later part of the paper reinforces the claim that, if faced with similar circumstances – such as a struggle for regime survival, the ANC might behave similarly to ZANU-PF. In the final part, we assess the different intraparty power transfers, as distinct ways of ensuring or mimicking internal democracy.

This work is mainly descriptive and analytical. It follows seemingly distinctive subjects, united by some common denominators, the most important of which is the plethora of transformations taking place in the identities and political practices of the two aforementioned entities. Democracy, while key to our endeavour, is for the most part tangentially or implicitly tackled, as we did not intend to make a comparative assessment of the levels of democratization in South Africa and Zimbabwe at any given point in time.

From a temporal perspective, our research mainly focuses on the period 1994-2014, but information regarding events that exceed the two-decade span is used mostly to establish context.

## Context

National liberation movements (NLMs) are distinct entities that challenged the domestic social order in several states across the globe, during or in the aftermath of the decolonization process<sup>1</sup>. In Southern Africa, and particularly in Zimbabwe and South Africa, the major objectives of these types of movements were to restructure the political landscape and to empower the historically oppressed majority population.<sup>2</sup> While the intricate histories of the two movements demand an extensive account, for the purpose of providing context, we have attempted to briefly present major events for the sake of context. We are, however, the first to admit that the summary below is intended to be taken as a comprehensive account.

The ANC was founded in 1912 in Bloemfontein and is the oldest liberation movement in Africa. At its onset, it comprised tribal chiefs, people's representatives, church organisations, and other prominent individuals, united by the objective to bring Africans together and to enable them to defend their rights and freedoms. In 1948, the National Party unexpectedly came to power in South Africa and apartheid was created, as an extreme form of institutionalized racial segregation. The ANC's resistance to the apartheid regime was initially modelled after the Indian independence movement and was limited to non-violent defiance campaigns. After the Shapeville Massacre<sup>3</sup>, an ideological reorientation took place and the organization's military wing was created in 1960. Through its military wing, a plethora of guerrilla actions were pursued, including the targeting and sabotaging of government facilities or targeted killings. The ANC was labelled a terrorist organization, banned and forced to operate underground and from other countries. The liberation

---

<sup>1</sup> See, *inter alia*, Sergiu Mişcoiu, Hygin Kakaï, Kokou Folly Hetcheli (eds.), *Recul démocratique et néo-présidentialisme en Afrique centrale et occidentale*, Iași, Institutul European, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> In Zimbabwe, securing the country's independence can also be noted as a major objective.

<sup>3</sup> An dramatic incident in which police fired at a group of black protesters, killing and injuring approximately 250 people.

movement gradually shifted its narratives to a more conciliatory tone. This, alongside pressures from inside and outside the country, made the government lift its ban on the ANC in 1990. A settlement was negotiated to end apartheid and in the 1994 elections, the ANC obtained a landslide win alongside the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

ZANU was formed on 8 August 1963, drawing members from Zimbabwe's Shona and Ndebele tribes. In 1976 - Robert Mugabe's side of ZANU, which was unwilling to abandon the armed struggle and embrace détente, formed ZANU-PF alongside some members of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)<sup>4</sup>, the party from which ZANU had initially split. Like the ANC, it used guerilla tactics and ensued violent campaigns. The signing of the Lancaster House Agreement in December 1979 was followed by a transition to majority rule and by Zimbabwe's independence the following year. ZANU-PF won the 1980 elections and merged with ZAPU in 1986. Since 1980, ZANU-PF has managed to stay in power in Zimbabwe.<sup>5</sup> Its first serious signs of political contestation appeared in the early 2000s, while it attempted to grant more powers to the executive presidency through constitutional changes. In a pushback against opponents from politics, the legislative, civil society and the media, ZANU-PF gradually became more authoritarian and more violent, plunging Zimbabwe into a series of crises and attracting international criticism.

Since 1994, South Africa's democracy has expanded – albeit progress has not been linear, and periods of reversal can be identified, while Zimbabwe's democratic space has gradually contracted. If we were to provide a transversal comparison, one might say that every single year, especially since the late 1990s, South Africa's democratic scores were higher than those of Zimbabwe, regardless of who conducted the studies and made rankings and indexes.

---

<sup>4</sup> Militant socialist party formed in 1961, that campaigned for majority rule in Zimbabwe.

<sup>5</sup> From February 2009 to July 2013 a government of national unity was in place, ZANU-PF sharing power with the former opposition parties, MDC-T and MDC-M.

## Of blood ties, ruptures and shared interests

The ANC and ZANU-PF share a historical connection that goes beyond their common historical trajectories of liberation-movements-turned-parties. Mavivi Myakayaka, ANC's Chief of International Affairs and Policy during the Thabo Mbeki's presidency, once stated, in sharp criticism of those who urged South Africa to adopt a firmer stance on Zimbabwe: "*We can't do that as the ANC. We have historical ties ... These are our comrades we fought with in the struggle ... Our relations have been sealed in blood*"<sup>6</sup>. The aforementioned stance has since been reinforced in both narrative and action by the ANC on a multitude of occasions.

However, as some commentators<sup>7</sup> argue, the 'blood ties' uniting the two rethreaded liberation movements don't necessarily run as deep as other critics envisage<sup>8</sup>, nor was the pair's relationship overwhelmingly harmonious, especially since the end of apartheid in South Africa. Following Zimbabwe's economic turmoil that debuted in the late 1990s, and the increasing undemocratic practices perpetuated by the government under Robert Mugabe, the rapports between the ANC and ZANU-PF faced sizable internal and external constraints.<sup>9</sup> Even before the Zimbabwean social crisis ensued, fuelled by the growing rise of South Africa to regional hegemony, some authors argue that "*by the end of Mandela's term in office*

---

<sup>6</sup> Mavivi Myakayaka quoted in Chris Alden and Maxi Schoeman, "The Hegemon that Wasn't: South Africa's Foreign Policy Towards Zimbabwe", in *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 25 (1), 2003, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Adelman, "Quiet Diplomacy : The Reasons Behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe Policy", in *Africa Spectrum*, 39 (2), 2004, pp. 256-257.

<sup>8</sup> Alec Russel, *Bring Me My Machine Gun: The Battle for the Soul of South Africa from Mandela to Zuma*, New York, Public Affairs, 2009, pp. 416-417.

<sup>9</sup> The internal constraints emanated from ANC elites and national partners alarmed by South Africa's quiet diplomatic stance in the face of degrading conditions in Zimbabwe. They were both fueled and seconded by the international community's expectations that South Africa, acting as a regional hegemon, engage Zimbabwe's government swiftly and decisively.

*relations between him and Mugabe were frosty, and there was a virtual 'cold war' between Pretoria and Harare".<sup>10</sup>*

Nevertheless, we claim that the two NLMs have never had an openly cold relationship, not even as political forces from the developed North pushed for the ANC's denouncement of ZANU-PF's increasingly illiberal practices. We argue that there was always a central, mutually-recognized interest uniting the two, one that goes beyond ideology and relates to the imperatives of survival (and national political hegemony): the ANC sought to retain its central position in national politics, in the same way that ZANU-PF did. While the main concern for parties is survival, large parties move beyond struggling to exist and fight to secure and subsequently maintain, a central role in national politics and, where possible, the international arena. Thus, we can argue that the ANC fully understood the importance of party supremacy, not only that of survival and, consequently, what ZANU-PF strived for. The violent campaigns against the opposition and their supporters, the seizure of media outlets, the submission of the judiciary, the public vilification of civil society, and the blatant disregard for private property were all employed by ZANU-PF so its members could cling on to power amid an economic collapse brought about by their own kleptocracy and poor resource management. While the ANC chose not to engage their internal political opponents in the same way that ZANU-PF did, arguably, there was no need for any such engagement, granted the former successfully erected and fortified its bastion in national politics. Faced with the same choice: to cede power or suspend a plethora of democratic practices in order to keep it, there is no telling how the ANC might react. Of course, several other reasons could be invoked, such as the security uncertainty posed by a power void in Zimbabwe, ANC's insufficient leverage to further regime change therein, or its unwillingness to even openly solicit change due to regional perceptions of sovereignty.

---

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Landsberg, "The Impossible Neutrality? South Africa's Policy in the Congo War," in F. John Clark, (ed.), *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, Palgrave, 2002, p. 177.

The success of liberation movements has inspired heroic narratives about the parties they directly descended from<sup>11</sup>. The aforementioned fact is mostly true for South Africa and is reflected in the election results therein after 1990. The ANC is the first choice of an overwhelming number of South Africans, winning five consecutive elections throughout the period analysed herein. While ANC was re-elected with increasing majorities in 1999 and later, in 2004, a slight fall is visible in the last three elections, from 69% in 2004 to 65.9% in 2009, 62.1% in 2014 and 57.5% in 2019. The same narratives of colonial heroism erected a pedestal for ZANU-PF, and have since replicated in Zimbabwe; subsequently, even in times of political crisis, the party could withstand pressures for democratic change, partly based on its historical significance for the majority population. ZANU-PF won every presidential election since 1980,<sup>12</sup> and all elections for Parliament, except that of 2008, when it lost the majority in the House of Assembly and was forced to form an inconvenient, but 'lucrative' unity government with the opposition, after Thabo Mbeki, the ANC's president was called to mediate by the South African Development Community (SADC).

### **Of changes in identities and practices**

Once majority rule had been attained, it became apparent that Southern Africa's decolonization process was going to be very different from the national liberation that had taken place earlier. The NLMs were visibly more complex than their predecessors from the first period of

---

<sup>11</sup>For a wider analysis of the heroic narratives in Sub-Saharan Africa, see Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Afrique et politique" in Simona Jișa, Sergiu Mișcoiu, Buata B. Malela (eds.), *Littérature et politique en Afrique francophone. Approche transdisciplinaire*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2018, pp. 345-348; Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Du récit conflictuel au conflit des récits" in Simona Jișa, Sergiu Mișcoiu, Modibo Diarra (eds.), *Raconter les politiques conflictuelles en Afrique. Regards croisés*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 2021, pp. 7-19.

<sup>12</sup> Even amid accusations from opposing parties, politically-fueled violence and the conflicting accounts of international observers. In 2008 Mugabe's opponent in the run-off withdrew. ZANU-PF lost the majority in the House of Assembly in the same year, even if it gained the most votes out of the participating parties.

decolonization. They were endowed with qualities that made them special, such as sophisticated ideologies, class representativeness, and an overall “*commitment to high-minded principles*”.<sup>13</sup> The promise of real transformation replaced flag independence, as these movements tried to keep away from any form of “*postcolonial national bourgeoisie*”.<sup>14</sup> There was a consensus that the age of militant, low politics had ended in Southern Africa with the demise of apartheid and ANC’s ascension to power.

However, the liberation movements in South Africa and Zimbabwe have, to varying degrees, mislaid their moral compasses somewhere along the way, especially after they managed to seize political power. Failing to fulfil the initial promise: a mixture of socialism, nationalism, and liberalism, both discussed liberation movements became party-states, pursuing self-interested gain, in the detriment of the initial promise of ‘democracy for all’. The ideal of democratization was not abandoned, rather it was shelved, as other issues seized the attention of intraparty elites. One could make the argument that the NLMs in Angola or Mozambique followed similar paths.

In their attempt to fight the highly unequal structures in their respective countries, these liberation movements quickly went from improving their societies through democratization and development, to securing governmental positions that would facilitate the apparition and empowerment of black elites. By building the bureaucratic apparatus based on party loyalty rather than merit or competence, the parties became solely responsible for allocating resources<sup>15</sup>. The party’s elites, friends and loyalists were favoured, while all others were left to divide any leftovers amongst themselves. The ‘democratic revolution’ had come, privileges had shifted, but economic disparities remained to a large extent in both South Africa and Zimbabwe. Moreover, the general picture only changed in that

---

<sup>13</sup> Roger Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa*, Boydell & Brewer, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 274.

<sup>15</sup> This was also the case in Cameroon, see Sergiu Mişcoiu, Louis-Marie Kakdeu, “Authoritarian Clientelism: The Case of the President’s ‘Creatures’ in Cameroon” in *Acta Politica*, 2021, 1(56), accessed on 28 April 2021.



it allowed for the emergence of new racially constructed elites. In addition, the awaited effective redistribution of wealth, which was to aid the masses, never materialized. Although it may seem redundant, we must note that the above-presented shifts, by no means represent a particularity of the two discussed states or of Sub-Saharan Africa as a region: countless parties from different places have become pieces of machinery, vehicles “*for the upward mobility of party elites and for material accumulation justified ideologically by reference to the historical rightness of transformation*”.<sup>16</sup>

Identifying common and distinct traits in the behaviours of these NLMs across Southern Africa, while complicated, is possible. However, finding which movement is the originator of which type of practices becomes even more difficult to trace. ZANU-PF is admittedly guilty of fostering hostile relations with the Zimbabwean private sector - a situation that culminated in 2008, when the country fell into the most profound economic and political crisis in history. ANC seems to fully understand the importance of having a good working relationship between the private and public sectors, *videlicet* between the administration and the business environment.

ANC was from the onset of its days as a political party a more complex entity compared to ZANU-PF. While the latter had a mostly rural, tribal base,<sup>17</sup> the former secured the support of the middle and working classes in both rural and urban areas. ANC's identity was also a mixture of three separate ideologies: one of the far-left type, social democracy, and liberalism. These three distinct strands of doctrine somehow succeeded to strike a balance within the party, albeit the structured equilibrium was fragile. By comparison, Mugabe's party remained latched to left-wing African nationalism, which it used discursively to legitimate its predatory political practices against the former elites and to shrug off any

---

<sup>16</sup> Southall, *op cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> In places where the importance of land redistribution outweighs that of ambiguous concepts such as democracy, ZANU-PF has traditionally captured more votes than any political opponent.

international call for democratization by labelling it neo-colonialism. In South Africa, ANC managed to transform nationalism into a unifying force through the use of inclusive narratives which made racial reconciliation possible. In Zimbabwe reconciliation was also advertised in the 1980s, to ensure the minority population that they would not be punished for the crimes against blacks. However, ZANU-PF has done very little to alleviate racial tensions. In the context of the white-owned commercial farm invasions orchestrated by his government since the early 2000s, Mugabe tried to legitimize said actions by labelling them as historical retribution favouring *“rightful indigenous, black owners who lost [the farms] in circumstances of colonial pillage”*.<sup>18</sup>

As NLMs gradually became disciplined parties, with clear hierarchies, some never managed to create any form of leadership accountability, as the case of Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF demonstrates. Mistakes and abusive behaviours were covered up, and, in the case of Zimbabwe, there was little to no criticism of Robert Mugabe and his inner circle inside ZANU-PF until the period leading to his ousting. Of course, opposing parties did provide some domestic critique, and the international arena was not blind to blatantly abusive practices; however, Zimbabwe was, for a long time, immune to criticism from other members of the SADC and other African-based institutions, mostly due to an unwritten rule that discourages open criticism amongst partners. Furthermore, as an elder of the region and a champion of majority empowerment since the liberation struggle, Mugabe was widely respected among regional peers, subsequently, he was rarely openly criticized by the former.

### **Of quiet diplomacy and the resurrection of anti-colonial narratives**

Zimbabwe’s economic meltdown was followed by the unearthing of the various governmental practices that led to the disaster. In turn, this

---

<sup>18</sup> Robert G. Mugabe, Statement on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, 2 September, 2002, <[www.un.org/events/wssd/statements/zimbabweE.htm](http://www.un.org/events/wssd/statements/zimbabweE.htm)>, accessed on 19 March 2021.

gave birth to the increasingly oppressive manifestations of ZANU-PF in its attempt to stay in power amid contestation. During this entire period, ANC has been constantly pushed to intervene decisively in Zimbabwe. Its preferred method of approaching ZANU-PF has been quiet diplomacy – a form of interaction that discourages open criticism towards ZANU-PF, its leaders and its practices<sup>19</sup>.

ANC's public reasoning behind quiet diplomacy was mostly related to stability and security at its borders. R. W. Johnson brings compelling evidence that there was an overlooked motive behind South Africa's diplomatic approach to the Zimbabwean crisis.<sup>20</sup> After Mugabe had been defeated in the constitutional referendum of 2000, Southern Africa's NLMs started holding very secret summit meetings – with no press and no later *communiqués*.<sup>21</sup> Johnson writes that:

*“NLMs -- whatever venial sins they may commit - are [regarded as] the righteous; they not merely represent the masses but in a sense they are the masses, and as such they cannot ... be wrong ... No further group can succeed them, for that would mean that the ... forces of racism and colonialism ... had regrouped and launched a counter-attack. Thus it follows that having won, an NLM should stay in power”.*<sup>22</sup>

This firm belief of being the only legitimate representatives of the people is what connected all Southern African NLMs. As Zimbabwe's situation was worsening, the said 'theology' started to waiver; thus, it needed resurrection. Johnson further claims that as decline manifests itself in multiple countries, implicitly diminishing the powers of NLMs, old

---

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of quiet diplomacy see Dan Petrica, “Quiet Diplomacy: South Africa's Way of Dealing with Zimbabwe During the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki”, in *Studia UBB Europaea*, 61(4), 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See R. W. Johnson, “The Final Struggle is to Stay in Power”, in *Focus*, 25, 2002, <<http://hsf.org.za/resource-centre/focus/issue-25-first-quarter-2002/the-final-struggle-is-to-stay-in-power>>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*.

enemies – such as imperialism, apartheid, or colonialism - need to be unearthed.<sup>23</sup> This phenomenon is best understood through the lens of Discourse Theory, which we've decided to briefly tackle - particularly in what it says about the construction of *social antagonism and the creation of identity*.<sup>24</sup> In Zimbabwe, social antagonism was numbed down to avoid racially motivated contestation and violence, but it abruptly became evident that the former discourse needed to be empowered. Through simplification, an extraordinarily vivid and cosmopolite society was shaped to fit the image of a dualist block, marked by a unique source of tension - race. Where the tension is pre-existing, the reanimation of the dualist block is possible with more ease. In simple words, one can create an enemy to have against whom to wage war. As society is a vast network, comprising the body of all individuals, these individual identities take shape according to specific issues. Simplification allowed for race, racial discrimination, historical retribution, and numerous other subjects belonging to this lexical spectrum to be the ones that create distinct camps – such as imperialists versus nationalists. We have argued that simplification had been used in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, first by the colonial discourse and later, by its reminiscences, the apartheid and the white minority rule discourses. Simplification had been reanimated by NLM's after the Zimbabwean crisis and masterfully deployed by Mugabe in his country. The colonialists had been dead and buried but could be brought back with the aid of carefully crafted discourse. As most of the population in Zimbabwe could not be attached to imperialist or neo-colonial narratives, the government simply had to pose in anti-imperialists/colonialists. It was not even a situation that implied posing because, at heart, indubitably Zimbabwe's government been 'anti-all-the-above' in sentiment; thus, their efforts only entailed tailoring and putting

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed account see Dan Petrica., "Discursive Struggle and Social Change in South Africa in The Mid 1990's", in *Annals of the University of Oradea: International Relations and European Studies*, VIII, 2016.

on the old clothes that had gathered dust since 1980. We support the claim that ZANU-PF knew very well that if you revive the anti-whites/anti-farmers/anti-British discourses, then you revive the need for Mugabe. Being involved in a new struggle against the North that wanted to breach sovereignty also legitimized a fight by any means necessary to protect what had been gained in the previous liberation struggle.

A possibility to be considered is that Mugabe had been so convincing in deploying his rhetoric that the ANC's leadership indeed perceived the situation in Zimbabwe as a fight against neo-colonialism. Regardless if the ANC was convinced or not, one can observe that they played along for quite an extended period; in the early 2000's they remained unmoved by the violent outbreaks in Zimbabwe that included assaults, torture, and killings, and by the continuous hunt that ZANU-PF had orchestrated against the opposition.

Furthermore, while South Africa could seemingly exert a great degree of leverage on Zimbabwe if we were to invoke the classical traits that enable one country to wield political power over another,<sup>25</sup> Zimbabwe managed to punch above its weight and determine South Africa to treat it, on occasions, as an equal partner. Thus, it becomes unclear whether South Africa ever had the necessary leverage over Zimbabwe to affect the latter's domestic policies in such a way as to ignite the spark of the rapid democratization the North was waiting for. The critics of the nexus of power theories come with a twist to the classical interpretations that delineate where power stems from in interstate relations. Bischoff, for example, argues that:

---

<sup>25</sup> The size of its economy, the size of its territory and population, the availability of essential resources – most notably gas or oil, the overall size of the industry, its strategic position, its military strength, its track-record of dealing with issues relevant to global power-houses and key players, and, of course – the capacity of its government to interact with others.

*“the legacy of apartheid and liberation politics had given rise to a balance of power based more on history and ideology than on formal power, inhibiting Pretoria from playing the role of a local hegemon and enabling Zimbabwe to pose a rival source of influence”.*<sup>26</sup>

### **Of paths, shortcuts and shortcomings**

Furthermore, we claim that similar historical trajectories on crucial issues or when dealing with key events do not necessarily lead to similar outcomes; instead, they shape similar visions of a path that needs to be followed. The history of colonialism and white minority rule has given birth to solidarity amongst blacks, to NLMs - and the solidarity between them, to democratic regimes, and to a complex land redistribution issue that remains unresolved in a number of former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa, thereby festering constant conflicts between ethnic groups. Zimbabwe's land seizures can be viewed as a milestone on a wider timeline, one which South Africa could still reach at a later time. One needs to keep in mind that Zimbabwe has made some efforts to solve the land issue without conflict, on a willing buyer, willing seller basis, but to no avail. As South Africa struggles to redistribute land according to the willingness to trade of its citizens, in the absence of both internal and external funding, the dangers of it reaching a tipping point and of incorporating Mugabe's way of handling things remain very high. Zimbabwe has had more than a decade of majority rule on South Africa. As Zimbabwe faced some issues before its neighbours, it allowed the latter to learn from its experiences and add 'best practices' to its governance toolkit. In this case, forcefully grabbing land from whites can hardly be described as 'best' practice. Still, it is a pragmatic practice that ultimately quenches the majority population's thirst for a land to which they are entitled as a form of historical retribution. On the question of NLM's the same applies.

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul-Henry Bischoff, "External and Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy Ambiguity: South African Foreign Policy and the Projection of Pluralist Middle Power", *Politikon*, 30(2), 2003, p. 189.

ZANU-PF has held power for three decades until genuine contestation emerged. ANC, however, has had no real political contestation. If a counter-hegemonic political discourse were to appear nationally, as a result of mismanagement, or a major crisis, we reiterate that ANC might have difficulties in choosing the high road over the example laid in front of them by ZANU-PF.

### **Of elders and liberation pedigrees**

One commentator argues that the 'big man syndrome' draws its energies from colonialism's nature, being tributary to the struggles that took place during the liberation days,<sup>27</sup> as several African governments are structured around poignant leaders, who starkly resemble past authoritarians envisaging a lifelong presidency. But while the reluctance of presidents to leave office can, from time to time, be shrugged off by the party, the party is undoubtedly reluctant to leave power. Thus, we can speak of a 'big party syndrome'. The party capable of ensuring succession will, from time to time, call back its government and replace it with fresh blood, either as an attempt to mimic internal democracy or due to real power-clashes amongst its members. For example, Sam Nujoma of Namibia refused to pursue a fourth term and, in 2005, handed power to Hifikepunye Pohamba, a prominent member of the same SWAPO party. Nonetheless, Nujoma served as president for 15 years, amid contestation that the Namibian constitution had been tailored to allow his third term. For a long time, ZANU-PF could not act to remove Mugabe because he was the NLM's virtual owner and the face of liberation. He was the party's 'face value', and the insurance ZANU-PF can stay in power because their electorate trusted the father of the liberation more than the political platform offered.<sup>28</sup> As foreign powers couldn't tackle Mugabe successfully, and the people did not act convincingly against him in elections, the party

---

<sup>27</sup> See Alec Russell, *Big Men Little People: Encounters in Africa*, London, MacMillan, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> See Patrick Chabal, Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, The International African Institute, 1999.

did, in light of a saturation fuelled by unsatisfactory succession talks. Robert Mugabe had repeatedly refused to name his successor, even removing possible candidates, such as Vice-president Joice Mujuru back in 2014. Mujuru was barred by the ruling ZANU-PF from its strong central committee after a fallout with the president amid accusations of assassination plots.<sup>29</sup> Starting with 2017, even his wife and political partner, Grace, had urged him to choose who will lead the party. Grace Mugabe was actively seeking the leadership of ZANU-PF and the country for herself, after she had previously stated about upcoming elections, in power-hungry morbidity: *“If God decides to take him, then we would rather field him as a corpse.”*<sup>30</sup> Robert Mugabe finally resigned after a coup d'état orchestrated by military forces supporting one of his political opponents inside ZANU-PF and a subsequent loss of party support.

In 1994, Mandela set the tone for ANC leadership, by stepping down after his first term in office. Since then, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma have stepped down amid pressures from the ANC.

## Conclusions

We have argued that several contrasts can be identified in the behaviours and practices of the two NLMs-turned-political-parties, which are a result of differences in (1) identities (2) perceptions (3) social and political climates – to the structuring of which they massively contributed, and (4) timelines – or, perhaps, milestones of a common, overarching timeline.

---

<sup>29</sup> BBC News, “Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF Ousts Joyce Mujuru from Top Party Post”, 26 November 2014, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30208133>>, accessed on 21 May 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Associated Press Foreign Staff, “Mugabe's Wife Says He Could Run in Election «as a Corpse»”, *The Telegraph*, 17 February 2017, <[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/17/mugabes-wife-says-could-run-election-corpse/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/17/mugabes-wife-says-could-run-election-corpse/)>, accessed on 19 March 2021.



The ANC was since its onset a more complex entity, with an expressed preference for ethnic reconciliation after South Africa embraced majority rule. For ZANU-PF, reconciliation never truly materialized.

While both the aforementioned parties embraced democratic principles, their support for democratic consolidation was mostly a by-product of the creation of new elites and the expansion of the said elites' power, rather than a *sui genesis* effort. This, too, is far more visible in Zimbabwe.

Granted that ZANU-PF has more than a decade of status-quo construction and image erosion, it was quick to pursue autocratic practices once it realized it needed to either fight off contestation or renounce its privileged position on the national political stage. We have also argued that the ANC surely understands ZANU-PF's struggle for maintaining political supremacy, and that, faced with similar circumstances, the former might resort to the same anti-democratic practices furthered by the latter from the late 1990s onwards.

When investigating why the ANC did not do more to limit ZANU-PF's antidemocratic practices, amid pressures emanating from South Africa's territory and the international arena, we've argued that both solidarity and sovereignty impeded them. Furthermore, we are unsure if the ANC had the leverage to decisively intervene, or the will to do so amid a convincing anti-colonialist narrative deployed by Mugabe.

Although the limited events presented in this paper relate mainly to the two decades between 1994-2014, the current situation in Sub-Saharan Africa reveals that, even under new ZANU-PF leadership, some practices related to and views of democracy have remained unchanged.

## **Bibliography:**

1. Adelman, M. (2004), "Quiet Diplomacy: The Reasons Behind Mbeki's Zimbabwe Policy", *Africa Spectrum*, 39 (2), 249-276.

2. Alden, C.; Schoeman, M. (2003), "The Hegemon that Wasn't: South Africa's Foreign Policy Towards Zimbabwe", *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 25 (1), 1-28.
3. Associated Press Foreign Staff (2017), "Mugabe's Wife Says He Could Run in Election 'as a Corpse' ", *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/17/mugabes-wife-says-could-run-election-corpse/>.
4. BBC News, (2014), "Zimbabwe's Zanu-PF Ousts Joyce Mujuru from Top Party Post", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30208133/>.
5. Bischoff, P. H. (2003), "External and Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy Ambiguity: South African Foreign Policy and the Projection of Pluralist Middle Power", *Politikon*, 30(2), 183–201.
6. Chabal P.; Daloz, J.-P. (1999), *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, The International African Institute, 1999.
7. Johnson, R. W. (2002), "The Final Struggle is to Stay in Power", *Focus*, 25, <http://hsf.org.za/resource-centre/focus/issue-25-first-quarter-2002/the-final-struggle-is-to-stay-in-power/>.
8. Landsberg, C. (2002), "The Impossible Neutrality? South Africa's Policy in the Congo War," in F. John Clark, (ed.), *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, Basing-stoke: Palgrave.
9. Mişcoiu, Sergiu; Hygin Kakaï ; Kokou Folly Hetcheli (eds.) (2015), *Recul démocratique et néo-présidentialisme en Afrique centrale et occidentale*, Iaşi: Institutul European
10. Mişcoiu, Sergiu (2018), "Afrique et politique" in Simona Jişa, Sergiu Mişcoiu, Buata B. Malela (eds.), *Littérature et politique en Afrique francophone. Approche transdisciplinaire*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2018, pp. 345-348.
11. Mişcoiu, Sergiu (2021), "Du récit conflictuel au conflit des récits" in Simona Jişa, Sergiu Mişcoiu, Modibo Diarra (eds.), *Raconter les politiques conflictuelles en Afrique. Regards croisés*, Paris: Editions du Cerf, pp. 7-19.

12. Mişcoiu, Sergiu ; Kakdeu, Louis-Marie (2021), "Authoritarian Clientelism: The Case of the President's 'Creatures' in Cameroon", *Acta Politica*, 1(56).
13. Mugabe, R. G. (2002), Statement on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, 2 September 2002, <http://www.un.org/events/wssd/statements/zimbabweE.htm/>.
14. Petrica, D. (2016), "Discursive Struggle and Social Change in South Africa in the Mid-1990's", *Annals of the University of Oradea: International Relations and European Studies*, tom VIII, 171-180.
15. Petrica, D. (2016), "Quiet Diplomacy: South Africa's Way of Dealing with Zimbabwe During the Presidency of Thabo Mbeki", *Studia UBB. Europaea*, 61 (4), 151-165.
16. Russel, A. (2009), *Bring Me My Machine Gun: The Battle for the Soul of South Africa*, from Mandela to Zuma, New York: Public Affairs.
17. Russell, A. (2000), *Big Men Little People: Encounters in Africa*, London: MacMillan.
18. Southall, R. (2013), *Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa*, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer.

