

The Quest for Democracy in Zimbabwe: Patriotic History as an Obstacle to Civil Society's Struggle for Democratic Governance, 2000–2013

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Abstract: This paper examines Zimbabwe's struggle to establish substantive democratic governance between 2000 and 2013, focusing specifically on the interplay between civil society and the state's deployment of patriotic history. In the post-2000 period, Zimbabwe's ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), increasingly relied on patriotic history, which framed loyalty to the party as synonymous with patriotism. This framing elevated ZANU–PF's liberation credentials and delegitimised dissenting voices, particularly those emerging from civil society, as unpatriotic and Western-founded and sponsored. The study draws on Eghosa E. Osaghae's (2004) distinction between institutional and substantive democracy, where he emphasises that genuine democratic governance must go beyond formal institutions to deliver outcomes that empower citizens and encourage pluralism. By applying this theoretical lens, the paper interrogates how patriotic history frustrated civil society's quest for democratic development in Zimbabwe. Methodologically, the paper adopts a conceptual approach, utilising document analysis and a

critical review of historical and scholarly texts on Zimbabwe's state–society relations. The findings reveal that patriotic history functioned as a strategic tool for political legitimation and social control, enabling ZANU–PF to justify authoritarian practices and marginalise alternative political narratives. At the same time, civil society actors often attempted to contest and reframe the national discourse, albeit within a constrained and often repressive political environment. This paper contributes to broader debates on post-liberation politics and democratic transitions in Africa by illustrating how state-sanctioned historical narratives can be weaponised to undermine democratic accountability and restrict civic space.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, civil society, democracy, patriotic history, governance, ZANU–PF.

1. Introduction

The current state of democracy in Zimbabwe is characterised by the dominance of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF), suppression of the opposition, shrinking civic space, militarisation of politics, a captured judiciary, rule of law issues, and corruption (Mutekwe, 2023a). While this has always been the case, especially in the post-2000 era, there was renewed hope for a better Zimbabwe in 2017 when President Emerson Mnangagwa promised to usher in a new dispensation after taking over from the late President Robert Mugabe (Tagwirei, 2022). However, this transition brought little change, and critics suggest that Zimbabwe is in a worse situation than before (Mutekwe, 2023b). In the post-2000 period, Zimbabwe experienced economic, social, and political challenges that culminated in what has been termed the Zimbabwean crisis (see Sachikonye, 2002; Freeman, 2005; Raftopoulos, 2009, 2006, 2005; Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012).

The Zimbabwean crisis indicated that ZANU–PF was unable to transform into a broad democratic movement, and its resort to violence for electoral advantage illustrates its weakness (Sachikonye, 2002). The crisis has forced ZANU–PF to rely heavily on patriotic history to appeal to the masses and maintain its hold on power. Patriotic history frames ZANU–PF as the alpha and omega of

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Zimbabwe's past, present, and future (Tendi, 2008). Zimbabweans are encouraged to be patriotic, which implies supporting ZANU-PF, with anything short of this being considered unpatriotic (Tendi, 2008). Using patriotic history, ZANU-PF has often labelled all domestic critics as 'unpatriotic' and grouped foreign critics together as 'imperialists' (Sachikonye, 2002). This framing reinforces ZANU-PF's authority while marginalising alternative narratives and opposition voices. As such, this paper identifies patriotic history as a democratic obstacle in the post-2000 era. Thus, to promote a mature democracy, civil society has countered patriotic history by challenging how ZANU-PF narrowly defined it (Tendi, 2010) and through discourses of democracy, the rule of law, constitutionalism, and human rights (Mutekwe, 2023a).

This paper does not categorically reject patriotic history; instead, it critiques its instrumentalisation by ZANU-PF as a political tool aimed at delegitimising dissent and alternative voices while consolidating authoritarian rule. It observes that, although patriotic history can serve as a legitimate source of national identity and collective memory, its selective and coercive application by the ruling party, which equates loyalty to ZANU-PF with patriotism, poses significant challenges to democratic pluralism. Sachikonye (2011) asserts that, in conceptualising democracy, scholars often differentiate between the 'procedural' and 'substantive' values of democracy. A procedural perspective emphasises the importance of political aspects such as electoral processes and political and civil rights (Bratton et al., 2005). Conversely, a substantive understanding of democracy focuses on economic and social rights (Osaghae, 2004, p. 2). Southall (2016) contends that for Zimbabwe to attain democracy, a fully inclusive constitutional settlement, independent management of elections, and the assertion of civilian control over the military are essential.

The literature on democracy in Zimbabwe has predominantly concentrated on the failure to conduct free and fair elections, indicating that the country has not met the standards of democratic governance (Institute for Security Studies, 2023; Hove & Harris, 2015). Reeler and Chitsike (2005) investigated the perspectives of Zimbabweans on democracy and found that those affiliated with ZANU-PF expressed greater satisfaction compared to those who were not. Some literature examines multiparty democracy in Zimbabwe (Chigwata, 2021; Rwodzi, 2024). However, this body of work pays scant attention to the intersection of democracy and patriotic history in Zimbabwe, with the exception of Muwati et al. (2010), who explored the relationship between liberation war history and democracy in Zimbabwe. This paper contributes to the existing literature on democracy by investigating how patriotic history has served as an obstacle to democratic governance in Zimbabwe, with a focus on elections, constitutionalism, constitutional reform, and the land reform programme (LRP). The following objectives underpin the arguments presented in this paper:

- To examine how ZANU-PF used patriotic history to legitimise, control, and justify authoritarian practices.
- To establish how civil society counters the government's narrative and use of patriotic history.

This paper unfolds by unpacking the methodology employed in the study, followed by an analytical framework, the meaning of patriotic history, a discourse on the constitutional reform debate, an examination of the 2000-2013 elections, and the land reform programme (LRP), before concluding with a summation of the key arguments of the paper.

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative, conceptual approach to examine how patriotic history was employed as a political tool to undermine democratic governance and civil society activism in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2013. The paper engages in critical discourse analysis (CDA) and historical interpretation of existing sources to understand the ideological and political dynamics of the period. The data corpus comprises two primary categories of texts, namely published historical and political literature on patriotic history and civil society, as well as alternative narratives such as position papers, reports, and advocacy materials from key civil society organisations (CSOs). Texts were

selected based on their relevance to the central themes of patriotism, constitutional reform, elections, and LRP. The temporal boundary of 2000–2013 was chosen to coincide with the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a political force, the intensification of state repression, and the subsequent formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU), which significantly shaped state–civil society relations. The selected texts underwent thematic coding, wherein each text was read holistically to identify dominant themes and rhetorical strategies. These themes were then coded into analytical categories such as patriotism, constitutional reform, elections, and LRP. Employing CDA, the study examined how language was utilised to construct binary oppositions (e.g., patriots vs. sellouts), legitimise state authority, and discredit dissent. CDA facilitated the analysis of both explicit and implicit power relations embedded within the texts, with particular attention to how historical memory was strategically mobilised. To ensure reliability, cross-textual comparisons were conducted across different types of documents (state vs. civil society) and across various years within the study period. Secondary academic literature was employed to triangulate findings and contextualise interpretations.

3. Presentation of Major Arguments

3.1 Analytical framework

This paper draws on Eghosa E. Osaghae's 2004 work, "Making Democracy Work in Africa: From the Institutional to the Substantive." In this analysis, Osaghae contends that for democracy to effectively foster development in Africa, it must progress beyond the mere establishment of formal institutions to achieve substantive outcomes that directly benefit citizens. Osaghae (2004) posits that, although the political liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s, characterised by the adoption of multiparty systems and constitutional reforms, represented a significant milestone, it prioritised formal structures over tangible improvements in the lives of citizens. Consequently, this emphasis on institutional frameworks, often influenced by external pressures, resulted in the construction of democratic facades that lacked depth and failed to address the core needs of the populace (Osaghae, 2004). Osaghae's (2004) framework asserts that democracy must transcend mere institutional presence to yield substantive benefits, including the protection of civil liberties, inclusive participation, accountability, and social justice.

When applied to the context of Zimbabwe, this framework facilitates a critical examination of how patriotic history has served as a barrier to the transition from institutional to substantive democracy. This paper highlights that the Zimbabwean government's promotion of patriotic history contradicts Osaghae's advocacy for a democracy grounded in legitimacy and accountability. In this analysis, Osaghae's framework has proven instrumental in examining the relationship between the state and civil society by illuminating how authoritarian regimes resist transformation by controlling political narratives and suppressing dissent. By employing Osaghae's conceptual distinction, the paper demonstrates that Zimbabwe's democratic project between 2000 and 2013 has remained entrenched in the institutional phase, with civil society's efforts to advance towards substantive democracy being systematically obstructed by ideological mechanisms rooted in patriotic history.

3.2 The contested meaning of patriotic history

The notion of patriotic history can be traced to a political division marked by the coercion of opposition, state propaganda, a shrinking democratic space, and the emergence of the opposition party, the MDC (Ranger, 2004). In 2000, in response to strong opposition from the MDC and CSOs, ZANU-PF manipulated its role in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, beginning to repackage and disseminate the country's liberation history in a superficial and totalitarian manner (Tendi, 2008). Tendi (2010) noted that patriotic history covered four themes, namely, land, race, sell-outs versus patriots, and anti-Western rhetoric. Moreover, patriotic history embodies racial essentialism by asserting that Africa is for Black Africans and Zimbabwe is for Black Zimbabweans; it posits that

white individuals cannot be considered African or Zimbabwean (Tendi, 2008). The emphasis on race and the references to historical Western injustices, such as colonisation and slavery, enable ZANU-PF to dismiss any form of criticism from white individuals as “racist” (Tendi, 2008). Furthermore, patriotic history framed land as the singular justification for Zimbabwe’s liberation struggle, thereby minimising the social, economic, and political objectives of the movement (Tendi, 2008). Additionally, patriotic history has played a pivotal role in the tension between human rights and sovereignty. Human rights are perceived as “Western” and a form of “moral imperialism” (Tendi, 2008, p. 379). ZANU-PF interprets sovereignty as a response to colonialism and a means of self-defence against external interference, which is viewed with suspicion due to the country’s history of colonial exploitation by white settlers. Consequently, patriotic history utilises the negative legacy of colonisation to invalidate any external intervention (Tendi, 2008).

Prominent public intellectuals in government and academic institutions played a crucial role in framing, articulating, and preserving patriotic history for citizens, utilising their unrestricted access to public spaces (Tendi, 2010). The intellectuals that ZANU-PF primarily relied on to repackage patriotic history included Tafataona Mahoso, Vimbai Chivaura, Claude Mararike, Godfrey Chikowore, Sheunesu Mpeperekwi, and Ibbo Mandaza (Ranger, 2004). Patriotic history was disseminated through state media, educational institutions, and the National Youth Service, where the youth were seen as ‘warriors into the third chimurenga’ (Ranger, 2004, p. 219). Scholars at the University of Zimbabwe, such as Masipula Sithole, John Makumbe, Elphas Mukonoweshuro, Brian Raftopoulos, and Lovemore Madhuku, challenged ZANU-PF’s definition of patriotic history by circulating critical articles in independent daily and weekly newspapers (Tendi, 2008). Tendi (2008) states that Sithole was disturbed by how ZANU-PF and its intellectuals had distorted Zimbabwe’s past and present history. He argued that too many people were preaching liberation history, resulting in Zimbabweans not knowing whom to follow:

Whether Jonathan Moyo or Joseph Made? Border Gezi or Chenjerai Hunzvi, etc., including Joseph Chinotimba. All men whose credentials as freedom fighters during the war of liberation are in doubt (*The Financial Gazette*, 23 to 24 May, cited in Tendi, 2008).

Sithole criticised ZANU-PF’s scholars for their recklessness and argued that Jonathan Moyo, as the information minister, was overturning the democratic principles he once advocated for as a professor at the University of Zimbabwe (Tendi, 2008). Apart from criticising Moyo for abandoning democratic principles, Sithole maintained that while Moyo was ‘among the most gifted’ intellectuals, he was not a politician because he was ‘too much of a polariser rather than a consensus builder’ (*The Financial Gazette*, 29 March to 4 April 2001, cited in Tendi, 2008).

This section illustrates how ZANU-PF used patriotic history in both an inclusionary and exclusionary manner, labelling any form of opposition as sell-outs while including anyone who supports it as a patriot. It also claimed legitimacy as the rightful party to rule Zimbabwe, asserting that it had fought in the liberation war and preserved the gains of liberation in post-independence Zimbabwe. Tagwirei (2022) argued that under Mugabe’s regime, nothing escaped the confines of patriotic history; all post-2000 elections, human rights debates, and ZANU-PF factional battles were interpreted through this lens. Therefore, the sections below examine some key events in the post-2000 period where patriotic history played a significant role, beginning with debates surrounding constitutionalism and constitutional reform. These sections demonstrate how patriotic history directly contradicted Osaghae’s call for a democracy rooted in legitimacy and accountability in two ways. Firstly, they show that patriotic history promoted political legitimacy based on the liberation struggle, with ZANU-PF justifying its authority by portraying itself as the sole guardian of Zimbabwe’s independence and labelling any opposition, particularly from the MDC or CSOs, as neocolonial puppetry rather than legitimate democratic competition. Secondly, the sections highlight how

patriotic history justified state control of democratic institutions, wherein elections, the judiciary, and the media were manipulated to reinforce patriotic history, ensuring that political power remained in the hands of ZANU-PF rather than being distributed according to democratic principles.

3.3 The debate on constitutionalism and constitutional reform

The concept of constitutionalism and the necessity for a democratic constitution in Zimbabwe represents one of the critical arenas in which the struggle for democracy has been contested. This domain has also been utilised by ZANU-PF, employing patriotic history to legitimise its grip on power, while the civic front exerted patriotic history to advocate for a new constitution aimed at consolidating democracy (Tendi, 2008). The demand for constitutionalism and a new constitution emerged from the deficiencies of the Lancaster House Constitution (LHC), which was established following the Lancaster House Agreement in London at the conclusion of the liberation war (Sachikonye, 2011) and was not to undergo significant amendments for a decade. However, between 1990 and 1998, there were no efforts to review it; instead, the ZANU-PF government continued to amend it to centralise and consolidate its power, stifling opposition political parties and creating a life presidency with extensive executive powers (Mapuva, 2007; Sachikonye, 2011). These developments led to heightened pressure for a new constitution that would facilitate political and social change and enhance democratic governance. This culminated in the establishment of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) by a consortium of CSOs in 1998 (Mapuva, 2007; Sachikonye, 2011).

In response to this mounting pressure, the ZANU-PF government sought to monopolise the constitution-making process, resulting in a conflict wherein the NCA advocated for a broader, inclusive, and participatory constitutional process, whilst ZANU-PF promoted a top-down approach to constitutional reform, predominantly controlled by itself (Sachikonye, 2011). Through advocacy efforts, the NCA successfully mobilised citizens to vote against ZANU-PF's findings and recommendations, achieving a victory with 55% of the vote. ZANU-PF's defeat in the referendum marked its first electoral loss since 1980 and indicated a decline in its popularity (Mapuva, 2007). The failure to establish a participatory constitution-making process, which resulted in the rejection of the 2000 constitutional referendum, marginalised civil society and hindered meaningful democratic reforms. In their advocacy for a new constitution, NCA-affiliated scholars employed historical arguments aligned with patriotic history. For example, Professor Lovemore Madhuku posited that there were no written constitutions in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, as social contracts governed acceptable behaviour between chiefs and their subjects (Tendi, 2008). He further asserted that "chiefs were not all-powerful leviathans, as spirit mediums represented another seat of power acting as a check on chiefs" (Tendi, 2008). This historical application resonates with patriotic history as it underscores the organic relevance of democratic principles and constitution-making processes in Zimbabwe.

While ZANU-PF constricted the narrative of the second Chimurenga, in accordance with patriotic history, as a struggle for land, NCA-affiliated scholars contended that the second Chimurenga should be interpreted as a struggle against an autocratic constitution that favoured and safeguarded colonial privileges for whites at the expense of blacks (Tendi, 2008). They maintained that independence facilitated universal suffrage but failed to realise the ideals of the liberation struggle, as constitutional amendments concentrated power in an executive presidency and skewed the electoral system in favour of ZANU-PF. This argument aligns with the observations of Osaghae (2004), who noted that the political liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s prioritised formal structures over substantive improvements in the lives of citizens. Professor Welshman Ncube remarked that "some of ZANU-PF's constitutional amendments directly contradicted the values of the liberation struggle" (Tendi, 2008). This illustrates that the NCA invoked patriotic history to demonstrate that

the liberation war was fought with the goal of establishing inclusive constitutions, thereby engaging in counter-history as a method of resisting disciplinary power (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014).

The NCA and its associated scholars were banned from Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) programmes and labelled as agents of colonial powers, more interested in party politics than in constitutional reform (Tendi, 2008). These labels align with patriotic history, which links any form of opposition to ZANU-PF with Western interests. The exclusion of the NCA from ZBC demonstrates ZANU-PF's control over democratic institutions, specifically the media, to reinforce patriotic history and maintain its political power rather than distribute it based on democratic principles.

Following the 2000 constitutional referendum, the writing of a new constitution was undertaken by the GNU (2009-2013). The Global Political Agreement (GPA) stated that it was the fundamental right and duty of the Zimbabwean people to draft their constitution; however, political parties dominated the constitution-making process (Sachikonye, 2011). In an effort to silence citizens, ZANU-PF launched Operation Chimumumu (Operation Dumbness), instructing citizens to remain silent and allowing only a select few to speak during the Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) meetings (Civil Society Monitoring Mechanism [CISOMM], 2010). This operation may have violated citizens' constitutional right to freedom of speech and active participation in the constitution-making process by privileging ZANU-PF supporters (patriots) over others in expressing their views on the constitution. During the drafting process, ZANU-PF consistently blamed drafters for straying from the people's views and labelled COPAC a "mafia outfit" that was unaccountable to parliament (Moyo, 2012). ZANU-PF's labelling of COPAC aimed to portray it as an unpatriotic committee and influence public perceptions of its competencies. Unlike the 2000 constitution-making process, where CSOs collaborated with the MDC, CSOs opposed the COPAC process, resulting in strained relations between some CSOs and the MDC. These CSOs, including the NCA, campaigned for a No Vote. Zhangazha (2013) notes that the No Vote campaign was weak and under-resourced, ultimately defeated by ZANU-PF, the MDCs, and other CSOs. The NCA and its allies were financially disadvantaged because donors channelled funds to organisations supporting the MDC-T's position. The NCA's opposition to the COPAC process led to its loss of virtually all funding from donors who were backing the COPAC process (Munyikwa, 2018). This indicates that the 2013 constitutional debate created a rift between the MDC and its allies from the 2000 constitutional referendum, highlighting that, in addition to patriotic historical polarities, reliance on donor funding among the opposition is also an obstacle to democracy.

The debates on constitutionalism and constitutional reform presented in this section resonate with Osaghae (2004), demonstrating the superficial adoption of democratic institutions without a genuine commitment to democratic principles. This is evident in ZANU-PF's amendments to the LHC, manipulation of the constitution-making process, and the labelling of critics, revealing a tendency among many African nations to establish democratic structures that lack substantive democratic practices, often leading to the manipulation of democratic processes to maintain the status quo (Osaghae, 2004). This section also illustrates how the civic front employed patriotic history to advocate for a democratic constitution, while divisions within the civic front acted as further obstacles in the struggle for a new constitution.

3.4 Patriotic history and the 2002-2013 elections in Zimbabwe

This section focuses on how the Mugabe regime used patriotic history during the 2002–2013 elections. While the primary emphasis is on patriotic history, it also acknowledges that the Mugabe regime employed several election strategies, such as “the use of presidential powers, repressive laws, gerrymandering, media control, partisan electoral institutions, state financing of parties, and patronage” (Kriger, 2005, p. 2). Kriger (2005) examined ZANU-PF's strategies in elections between 1980 and 2000. In this context, Kriger (2005, p. 2) noted that ZANU-PF consistently engaged in “political violence against its opponents and in a polarising discourse which depicted itself as the

democratic and revolutionary force and the MDC as British-sponsored, anti-democratic, subversive, and reactionary." This discourse aligns with patriotic history, indicating that patriotic history has been used in elections since 1980. This paper builds on Kriger's (2005) work by examining the elections from 2000 to 2013.

As part of the ZANU-PF power-retention matrix, patriotic history "delegitimises the MDC as a party without liberation war credentials and a threat to the country's independence and unity" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009, p. 945). It presents ZANU-PF's history as a long narrative of greatness, patriotism, and heroism. Thus, in its 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2013 election manifestos, ZANU-PF deployed patriotic history to portray itself as the unwavering defender of Zimbabwean interests in matters concerning socio-economic development, political stability, as well as land and its restoration to black Zimbabweans. Simultaneously, it redefined concepts such as "independence" and "sovereignty" with the express purpose of excluding all organisations and individuals whose visions conflicted with its own (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). ZANU-PF's reframing of these concepts informed the undermining of all organisations and individuals that sought to challenge it, branding them as traitors that the "revolutionary party" had to deal with. The interests of such organisations and individuals were portrayed by the ZANU-PF regime's information and publicity department as regime-change interests of former colonial masters, whose vehicles were "unpatriotic" black Zimbabweans. Through this manipulation of the nation's story, ZANU-PF managed to depict itself as a regime not so much in conflict with the MDC, but with the British and their allies in the West (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). For ZANU-PF, patriotic history meant that a choice between the MDC and ZANU-PF was a choice between the return of colonial domination or the continuation of rule by ZANU-PF, which had brought independence (Freeman, 2005). Moreover, patriotic history was used to justify ZANU-PF's violence against MDC leaders and supporters, who were seen as sellouts yearning for the return of colonial powers. This is aptly captured in Mugabe's explanation below:

The MDC ... is immovably and implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces wittingly or unwittingly the repulsive ideology of return to white settler rule. MDC is as old and as strong as the forces that control it ... It is a counter-revolutionary Trojan horse contrived and nurtured by the very inimical forces that enslaved and oppressed our people yesterday (Freeman, 2005).

In this quotation, Mugabe sought to paint the MDC as a party that does not have the right to take power, even if it gains majority support, and that it represents an illegitimate and alien force. While the ruling party viewed the MDC as unpatriotic, Gwekwerere and Mpondi (2018) observed that the MDC considered itself a patriotic, homegrown movement that should be given political space to govern through free, fair, and credible elections. In 2000, Tsvangirai stated that nationalism was "trapped in a time warp" and had become "an end in itself instead of a means to an end" (Southern Africa Report 2000 in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). This denunciation of the patriotic history as packaged by ZANU-PF was in line with the MDC's self-definition as a workers' party determined to counter ZANU-PF's elitist appropriation of history (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). The MDC argued that the liberation war was spearheaded by the working class and subsequently hijacked by nationalist elites (MDC, 2000). Furthermore, ever since its formation, the MDC worked hard to prove to Zimbabweans, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African continent, and the international community that ZANU-PF had become an elite project of wealth accumulation that had abandoned its emancipatory agenda, while the MDC sought to restore economic sanity, democracy, and human rights (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). This demonstrates that, to counter patriotic history, the MDC positioned itself as a patriotic movement and challenged ZANU-PF's appropriation of history.

With a support base that encompassed the nation's working class, the unemployed, and university students, the MDC thrived on electoral narratives of socio-economic, cultural, and political change.

In these narratives, ZANU-PF faced criticism as a former liberation movement that had failed to live up to the agenda of the liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). The narratives highlighted the ease with which the ZANU-PF establishment resorted to strong-arm tactics and the arrogance present in its relations with the people, drawing attention to the need for an alternative political dispensation (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). With Morgan Tsvangirai as its chief exponent, MDC electoral narratives critiqued the petit-bourgeois inclinations of the ZANU-PF regime and its self-proclaimed identity as a people's regime (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). The MDC challenged ZANU-PF's self-celebration as the only patriotic force in the history of Zimbabwe, including its constant references to its heroism in the anti-colonial struggle and its attempts to claim exclusive ownership of that struggle (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). Thus, from the outset, MDC electoral narratives in Zimbabwean politics contested what the opposition party understood as ZANU-PF's polarising political praxis (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). The slogan, "Chinja Maitiro" (Shona) / "Guqula Izenzo" (Ndebele), an exhortation to reframe one's political orientation, captured the party's commitment to running the country differently if elected to power (Gwekwerere & Mpondi, 2018). As a rallying call for change, the slogan encapsulated MDC visions of a new Zimbabwe that ZANU-PF was accused of failing to bring into existence since taking over from Ian Smith and the Rhodesia Front in 1980. This illustrates that while the ruling party viewed the MDC as an unpatriotic outfit, the MDC regarded itself as patriotic and questioned the ruling party's abandonment of its liberation promises in line with patriotic history.

In the 2002 presidential elections, Mugabe was worried about the MDC's potency, and he turned to patriotic history as one of the means to win. An interesting element in the 2002 elections was the open declaration by the army, through its then commander, Vitalis Zvinavashe, that they would not salute anyone who did not participate in the liberation struggle. Ruhanya (2020, p. 188) noted that 'in 2002, the army declared that the office of president was a straitjacket office, whose incumbent must satisfy certain attributes - chief among them participation in the liberation war'. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2006) asserts that the army not only pledged its allegiance to ZANU-PF but also threatened a military takeover should a party other than ZANU-PF win the presidential elections. This declaration targeted Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC presidential candidate in the 2002 elections, who did not take part in the liberation war. The army's declaration resonates with patriotic history as it advocates for political legitimacy based on the liberation struggle. Additionally, it explains the basis of the army's role in the post-2000 election violence, which may have been undertaken to defend the gains of the liberation struggle. Tsvangirai defended his failure to participate in the liberation war by blaming his family's poverty on the colonial era. He lamented that:

Perhaps I would have become a political activist, but my parents needed financial help to support the other children through school, and politics aside, I was increasingly concerned about the future of our own family and my role in pulling them out of poverty (Tsvangirai, 2011, p. 25 and 31).

The army's declaration echoes Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2006) observation that the alliance between the army and ZANU-PF has stood in the way of democracy and a post-nationalist dispensation. Similarly, this paper adds that patriotic history has aided this alliance by empowering those aligned with ZANU-PF to claim a monopoly over the country's affairs. The army's declaration not only threatened the MDC but also posed a threat to democracy and the constitution in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2006). This paper analyses the army's declaration in terms of patriotic history and argues that patriotic history has acted as a democratic obstacle in Zimbabwe, facilitating ZANU-PF's manipulation of democratic institutions at the expense of substantive democracy.

Masipula Sithole viewed the 2002 presidential election dispute as a clash between human rights and sovereignty (Tendi, 2008). Sithole's argument was based on the fact that Mugabe believed he had been fairly elected in accordance with Zimbabwe's laws as a sovereign state. Conversely, Tsvangirai and foreign powers contended that Tsvangirai lost the 2002 election because it was not conducted in

line with international human rights values and that Mugabe was an illegitimate president (Tendi, 2008). Tendi (2008) noted that Sithole recognised the interplay of human rights and sovereignty. Sithole argued that sovereignty was 'becoming obsolete and moribund in the era of globalisation and internationalism, while human rights threaten to be the preoccupation of the 21st century in the march of history from primitive to contemporary notions of human community' (The Financial Gazette, 9-15 January 2003, in Tendi, 2008). Sithole's problematisation of Zimbabwe's political crisis as a struggle between human rights and sovereignty highlights how patriotic history perceived Western intrusion on Zimbabwe's sovereignty under the guise of human rights. This indicates that ZANU-PF used patriotic history, through claims of sovereignty, to legitimise its power, while the MDC employed human rights as a counter-discourse.

Just as in the 2000 and 2002 pre-election campaigns, political violence and manipulation also dominated the 2005 parliamentary polls. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the ruling party was hostile towards civic education, which can be attributed to its belief that human rights and democratic principles were Western imperialist tools intended to 'destabilise', 'polarise', and 'recolonise' the country (Ngoro, 2005). Consequently, individuals and civil society organisations (CSOs) registered to implement human rights programmes were threatened with closure. This demonstrates that violence against CSOs and individuals who facilitated voter education was justified as a means of exorcising Western imperialist tendencies.

In early June 2007, constitutional amendments were proposed that harmonised the presidential and parliamentary terms of office in 2008. The run-up to the harmonised elections on 29 March 2008 was more open than in previous elections, despite restrictions on the opposition's ability to organise freely in rural areas (Morris & Raleigh, 2024). For the first time in the history of Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF lost its majority in parliament, garnering 99 seats out of 210, while the Morgan Tsvangirai-led formation of the MDC secured 100 seats, and the faction led by Arthur Mutambara gained 10 seats (Morris & Raleigh, 2024). In the Senate elections, ZANU-PF won 30 of the 60 contested seats, while the MDC-T and MDC-M received 24 and 6 seats, respectively (Munyikwa, 2018). The MDC-T President, the late Morgan Tsvangirai, defeated the late President Robert Mugabe but fell short of securing an absolute win, needing over 50% of the vote plus one (Morris & Raleigh, 2024). This shortfall necessitated a presidential run-off election scheduled for 27 June 2008.

The period between the 29 March polls and the 27 June 2008 presidential election run-off saw a decline in human rights conditions in Zimbabwe due to the killings and torture of MDC supporters and human rights defenders. These abuses took place in ZANU-PF torture camps or bases, which were run like *pungwes* (night vigils) conducted during the liberation war. This indicates that the technologies of power deployed by ZANU-PF in the 2008 elections were learned from the liberation struggle (Chitukutuku, 2017). Consequently, ZANU-PF employed its liberation strategies to invoke memories of the liberation war among the elderly while orienting the youth towards these historical events that resonate with patriotic sentiment. These events instilled a sense of fear regarding the return of the liberation war, especially among the elderly, which may have resulted in self-governing behaviours when it came to choosing between the MDC and ZANU-PF. The run-off elections raised the need for the SADC mediation process, culminating in a power-sharing agreement signed on 15 September 2008 between ZANU-PF and the two MDC formations (Mutekwe, 2023a). This led to the establishment of the GNU, where Robert Mugabe remained the President of Zimbabwe; Morgan Tsvangirai became Prime Minister, and Arthur Mutambara became one of the Deputy Prime Ministers.

The end of the GNU necessitated fresh elections held after the passing of the new constitution in 2013. In this election, ZANU-PF adopted a populist stance, positioning itself as a pro-poor movement that had fought the liberation war for the people and was still advocating for their interests. The then Minister of Local Government, Dr Ignatius Chombo, directed local authorities and parastatals

involved in basic service delivery, such as electricity and water, to cancel debts owed by residents, citing people's suffering (Matenga, 2013). The then President of the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe, Femias Chakabuda, dismissed the order, instructing local authorities to ignore it (Mpofu, 2012 cited in Mutekwe, 2023a). Similarly, the then chairperson of the Combined Harare Residents Association, Simbarashe Moyo, remarked that the minister was 'just politicking. This is a populist statement that is not worth celebrating' (Mpofu, 2012 cited in Mutekwe, 2023a). Thus, CSOs and the MDC failed to produce a counter-discourse to challenge ZANU-PF, which positioned itself as a pro-poor party by cancelling debts. In 2013, the lack of funding for CSOs affected their ability to exercise power in this election. In the 2013 election, ZANU-PF won 197 seats, MDC-T won 70, and MDC-N won 2. Mugabe won the presidential election with 61.09%, while Tsvangirai received 33.94% (ZESN, 2013 cited in Mutekwe, 2023a).

This section has demonstrated that the post-2000 election violence can be best understood in the context of a patriotic history that is legitimised by appealing to the national liberation war. These appeals to the liberation war, alongside the equating of Tsvangirai and the MDC with Western powers, justified violence against them as a continuation of the struggle against whites and their puppets. Osaghae (2004) critiques the superficial adoption of democratic institutions without a genuine commitment to democratic principles, which often results in the manipulation of democratic processes to maintain the status quo. The post-2000 elections in Zimbabwe illustrate this manipulation; despite the existence of democratic institutions, the elections were marred by allegations of unfair practices, including voter intimidation, violence, and tampering with electoral rolls. These actions undermined the credibility of the electoral process, reflecting the disparity between institutional and substantive democratic governance in Zimbabwe. The MDC has also positioned itself as a patriotic, homegrown movement that would govern the country more effectively than the ruling party, which it accuses of abandoning its liberation promises.

3.5 Zimbabwe's fast track LRP 2000 - 2013

While ZANU-PF has employed patriotic history to restore its diminishing popularity, it has also utilised the land question. The impetus to address the land issue arose following ZANU-PF's defeat in the 2000 constitutional referendum and during the parliamentary election period of 2000, when the MDC posed a significant threat to ZANU-PF's grip on power. Consequently, the land question emerged as a pivotal political resource (Sachikonye, 2011). The Land Reform Programme (LRP) became a mechanism through which individuals deemed patriots were rewarded with land, while those labelled sell-outs, including white farmers and farm workers, were deprived of their land and employment (Mutekwe, 2023a). The LRP commenced in February 2000, and ZANU-PF referred to it as the Third Chimurenga, signifying the Third War of Independence (Sachikonye, 2011). This designation was inspired by Zimbabwe's first and second wars of independence, collectively known as Chimurenga (Willems, 2004). Chimurenga is founded on a doctrine of perpetual nationalist revolution aimed at combating imperialism and colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). It encompasses the utilisation of precolonial and colonial historical events to construct an indigenous and vernacular interpretation of a nationalist revolution, effectively linking the resistance of the 1890s to the nationalist struggles of the 1970s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). This narrative is continually revitalised by leaders of ZANU-PF, and the designation of the LRP as the Third Chimurenga signified the ongoing struggle against Zimbabwe's adversaries. Therefore, the LRP was intrinsically connected to the revolutions of the 1890s and 1970s to afford it legitimacy. This alignment resonates with the concept of patriotic history, which is predicated on land as a fundamental component and concurrently commemorates ZANU-PF's role in the liberation war. The economic decline that ensued after a tumultuous LRP implementation and economic sanctions imposed by Western powers was interpreted through the lens of patriotic history as a manifestation of colonialism's persistence and the ongoing struggle for freedom (Thram, 2006). ZANU-PF designated young individuals as war veterans to acknowledge their contributions to the Third Chimurenga. In this manner, ZANU-PF

forged a connection between its historical episodes of violent resistance and its post-2000 violence (Kriger, 2006).

ZANU-PF leveraged state-funded media to align the LRP with patriotic history to capture the allegiance of the Zimbabwean populace. The state media framed the LRP as a means of rectifying a colonial legacy characterised by racially biased land distribution and underscored the atrocities committed during the colonial era (Tendi, 2010). The LRP was further legitimised through songs, including an album titled *Hondo yeMinda* (The Struggle for Land), as well as tracks such as *Chave Chimurenga* (It is Now War) and *Rambai Makashinga* (Continue to Persevere) (Willems, 2004). The LRP was promoted under the slogan 'Land is the economy, and the economy is land' (Mugabe, 2001). Mugabe (2001, pp. 92-93) articulated the land issue as follows:

We knew and still know that land was the prime goal for King Lobengula as he fought the British encroachment in 1893; we knew and still know that land was the principal grievance for our heroes of the First Chimurenga, led by Nehanda and Kaguvi. We knew and still know it to be the fundamental premise of the Second Chimurenga and, thus, a principal definer of the succeeding new Nation and the State of Zimbabwe. Indeed, we know it to be the core issue and imperative of the Third Chimurenga that you and I are fighting for, and for which we continue to make such enormous sacrifices.

The slogans, songs, and Mugabe's speech in support of the LRP were designed to persuade citizens to support the programme. By encouraging people to endure the hardships associated with the LRP, the ruling party aimed to preempt possible criticisms arising from the programme's negative effects. Additionally, the slogan sought to position land as the solution to the country's economic woes, suggesting that those desiring economic prosperity must embrace the LRP. Mugabe's framing of land as central to the liberation struggles was intended to convince the population that the LRP was essential to complete the liberation effort.

Regardless of the government's portrayal of the LRP, an alternative view posited that ZANU-PF pursued the LRP to contain, coerce, and demobilise the structures and support of the MDC (Raftopoulos, 2009). This perspective also highlighted that all the land went to individuals with elite connections who benefited from political patronage, a situation that persists (Scoones et al., 2011; Lewanika, 2014). Furthermore, the LRP was not related to the unfinished business of the liberation struggle; rather, it was a response by the Mugabe regime to a significant challenge posed by the MDC to its power since independence. Thus, the LRP was a cunning endeavour by the government to salvage popular support (Freeman, 2005). Consequently, the LRP served two primary purposes: to seize land and to punish white farmers and farmworkers for their political stance while blocking the MDC from campaigning in commercial farming areas to prevent a recurrence of the referendum loss (Sachikonye, 2011). This illustrates that while the LRP appeared to provide benefits for the masses, it was a manipulation of substantive democracy aimed at compensating for the ruling party's failures to effectively embrace institutional democracy (constitutional reform and elections). In addition to the aforementioned debates, there was also discussion among critical public scholars who argued that land was not the sole reason for the liberation struggle as presented by ZANU-PF. Masipula Sithole cited Wilfred Mhanda – a former member of the ZANLA High Command and a signatory of the 1976 Mgagao Declaration that made Mugabe head of ZANU – as he condemned ZANU-PF's version of the liberation war. Mhanda argued that:

It has been said that the liberation war was waged for land, and we hear of another struggle for land again in the so-called Third Chimurenga. As participants in the national liberation struggle, we wish to set the record straight about the original aims and objectives of the national liberation struggle. Our national liberation struggle was driven by political, economic, social, and cultural demands and not by land, as has been alleged. Land redistribution was just one

of the key economic demands and not the purpose of our struggle (The Financial Gazette, 9 - 15 August 2001, in Tendi 2008).

Sithole noted that the popular view was that the liberation war was fought for the 'good life, whether on the land, in factories, in classrooms, shuffling papers in the office, or, indeed, in the State House' (The Financial Gazette, 20 - 26 April 2000 in Tendi 2008). He argued that the failure to achieve the good life was crucial to understanding post-colonial Zimbabwe and the reasons many Zimbabweans were migrating in search of the good life, rather than to till the soil (Tendi, 2008). Sithole recognised the land question, but contended that those raising it were asking the wrong question and approaching it in the wrong way, believing that the factory question should have been posed, as only increased industrialisation could provide gainful employment for Zimbabwe's growing population (Tendi, 2008). The international community, including the British, condemned the LRP. Representatives of farmers' unions, the financial sector, and agro-business viewed land reform as vital for political stability and economic development but expressed reservations over the failure to place agriculture on a properly planned and adequately resourced basis (Utete, 2003b). The Commercial Farmers Union argued that the land policy, combined with a lack of security and insufficient collateral for credit, harmed the production of most commodities by both existing and 'new farmers' (Utete, 2003a). The International Crisis Group (2002, p. 6 cited in Mutekwe, 2023a) stated that '(t)he international media's over-concentration on the plight of white commercial farmers has given Mugabe's liberation rhetoric greater resonance in many African quarters, reinforcing the belief that the West cares about Zimbabwe only because whites suffer'.

This section has highlighted that ZANU-PF used patriotic history to frame the land seizures from white farmers as a rectification of colonial injustices, portraying any form of opposition as unpatriotic. In doing so, the ruling party undermined alternative viewpoints regarding the implementation of the LRP under the guise of democratic and nationalist rhetoric, which ultimately served to entrench its power and suppress dissent, demonstrating a lack of substantive democratic governance. Civil society challenged the patriotic history surrounding the LRP by emphasising that the liberation war was not fought solely for land and advocating for how the programme ought to be carried out. They also highlighted that the programme was executed for political and patronage purposes.

4. Conclusions

This paper examines how patriotic history has been a stumbling block in civil society's quest to establish a mature democracy in Zimbabwe by employing both substantive and procedural meanings of democracy. It investigates how ZANU-PF has used patriotic history to legitimise, control, and justify authoritarian practices. The findings indicate that the ZANU-PF government has packaged patriotic history in a way that consolidates its hold on power, portraying itself as the only party fit to rule Zimbabwe. This framing has obstructed the opportunity for free and fair elections that could lead to a democratically elected government in post-2000 Zimbabwe, as all elections have been marred by violence against the opposition, which has been labelled as Western-founded and funded sellouts. The ruling party has also characterised the LRP as the third chimurenga in alignment with patriotic history, linking it to the liberation war and viewing land as the sole reason for that struggle.

The paper notes that civil society has challenged patriotic history by positioning itself as patriotic and contesting the narrow definition of patriotic history espoused by ZANU-PF. Civil society has also invoked historical events to justify the need for a constitution, arguing that the liberation war was not fought solely for land but also against an undemocratic constitution. Furthermore, civil society has utilised human rights and democracy discourses to counter ZANU-PF's use of patriotic history.

Additionally, the discourse illustrates that the interplay between patriotic history and insights from Osaghae's (2004) analysis reveals how the superficial implementation of democratic institutions and manipulative nationalist narratives have subverted genuine democratic processes. The paper demonstrates that Zimbabwe's elections from 2000 to 2013 highlight how these dynamics can perpetuate political dominance and suppress meaningful democratic engagement. It concludes that for democracy to be meaningful in Zimbabwe, it must transcend electoral rituals and constitutional provisions that have left the country in a pseudo-democratic state, where elections and constitutionalism exist in form but not in substance.

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