

# The nexus between ZANU PF, Mbuya Nehanda and the liberation struggle

## Abstract

Zimbabwe has a very rich history, deep rooted in its liberation struggle. However, this deep attachment to the liberation struggle has overshadowed and impeded basic government functions leading to the demise of the economy as the ruling party is entangled with the past and clearly lacking political will and innovation for the future. In the discourse of liberation war movements and activities, it is important to analyse the causes that give rise to their existence, which therefore becomes a backdrop on which their successes and failures can be analysed. This paper therefore will establish the main causes which fueled the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and using such causes as benchmarks analyse how ZANU PF is faring forty years after independence. In this regard there are historical figures such as Mbuya Nehanda and the history of the liberation war which have become construed and contorted in political gimmicks such that the separation of such facts and ZANU PF have become difficult over the years. Hence, this paper seeks to analyse the relationship between ZANU PF, Mbuya Nehanda and liberation struggle. In making such an analysis it also becomes clearer whether ZANU PF still represents what it purports to have gone to war for, and the extent to which it has been successful in realising its objectives.

**Keywords:** liberation struggle, Zimbabwe, ZANU PF

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## Introduction

Zimbabwe, a former British colony gained independence on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1980 after a protracted liberation war. The war of liberation, locally termed *Chimurenga* was long and arduous, mass-based and had its fair share of external supporters.<sup>1</sup> The ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), which was established in 1963 in the midst of the struggle, has been in power since independence. More than four decades after independence, ZANU PF still uses the liberation struggle as its mainstay. Former President Robert Mugabe was notorious for bringing up the struggle at every chance he got, something that his successor Emmerson Mnangagwa has taken up. By ZANU PF's standards, liberation war credentials are the most important attribute that one should possess in order to have any position of authority in government. Terms such as 'comrade' are revered and reserved for top liberation war heroes showing the deep ties the country still has to the war of liberation; a sentiment now perverse among ZANU PF supporters even at grassroots levels. The country's sole television station ZBC TV frequently airs liberation war footage and programmes that aim to teach viewers of the liberation struggle and its importance, programming many view as propaganda. Much emphasis is placed on the national burial place of those deemed as heroes, known as the National Heroes Acre. Those who are selected to be interred at the shrine are described as gallant sons and daughters of the soil heroes, without whose contribution Zimbabwe wouldn't be independent today. Thus, central to the ZANU PF ideology is the rhetoric of the liberation struggle which in real sense wields little or no contribution to the political and socio-economic challenges the country continues to face. This reflects on the desperation of ZANU PF to cling onto power despite offering no viable solutions to the seemingly insurmountable problems the country continues to face.

This deep attachment to the liberation struggle has overshadowed almost everything else which has seen the party focusing on the past rather than moving the country forward. Ndlovu-Gatsheni,<sup>2</sup> states that the liberation struggle is still being glorified, and the former nationalists are still leading the country with the party political rhetoric emphasising that it is the party that bestowed democracy and human

rights on the Zimbabwean people. Hamill<sup>3</sup> adds that chief ZANU PF principles include; "the belief that it is entitled to rule indefinitely, its refusal to view itself as an ordinary political party, its conflating of party and state, and its demonising of other parties as 'enemies of liberation' seeking to restore colonialism or white minority rule." While the liberation struggle is an integral component of Zimbabwean history and its importance cannot be understated, there is need to move past the struggle and focus on the development of the country. Zimbabwe is not the only country to have fought a liberation struggle as many African states such as Namibia, Mozambique, Algeria and South Africa were also colonised and fought for liberation. Internationally, the United States of America waged the American War of Independence resulting in independence on the 4th of July 1776 and for Australia, the Australian War of Independence resulted in independence in 1859. The difference between these countries and Zimbabwe is that they have moved past the liberation struggle rhetoric and have turned their attention to national developmental issues such as advancements in technology, social security and economic stability among other issues. While continuously referring to the liberation struggle, the ZANU PF party has failed to move with the times which has seen Zimbabwe lagging behind most countries in the region and the world at large in terms of development. As it stands, Zimbabwe is a country in crisis. Its economy has been in free fall for decades with every aspect of its society such as health, transport, the education system, energy and infrastructure on the brink of collapse. The government has failed to address these critical issues while continuously praising itself for bringing independence. Zimbabwe, though possessing many natural resources such as gold, diamonds and platinum, is one of the poorest states in the world with 90% unemployment and almost half of its population living on less than US\$1,90 a day.

The party has used the liberation war card as a means to hold on to power and anyone who attempts to criticise the government is viewed as an enemy of the state, harbouring a colonialist agenda. Southall<sup>4</sup> states that, ZANU PF claims to embody and represent the whole nation, anyone or anything that opposes the ruling party is seen as

opposing the nation and therefore becomes the enemy. The party's nationalistic rhetoric has also roped in famed spirit medium Mbuya Nehanda who was influential in masses uprising during the liberation struggle. The national heroine has been monopolised by ZANU PF in its bid to cling on to power. ZANU PF has distorted Nehanda's legacy by claiming that she would never allow the opposition to rule as that would be akin to recolonisation. While most of the existing scholarly work on ZANU PF focuses on violence and election irregularities, little attention is paid to the systematic distortion of historical symbols by the ruling party. As a means to sustain its power, the party's elite has continued the cycle of manipulating historical events and figures for political and personal gains.

The main objective of this paper is to analyse the relationship between ZANU PF, Mbuya Nehanda and liberation struggle. Excavating the relationship between the three variable would help validate or demystify claims put forward by ZANU PF and what they purport to represent. To effectively realise this goal, this paper will start by analysing major historical events from the first Chimurenga, the second Chimurenga and finally the post independent era.

### Theoretical framework

The elite theory will serve as the theoretical underpinning of this article. Elite theory envisages society as divided between the ruling class and the masses; the minority and the majority. The minority which makes up the elite has control over the state and its resources, thus power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals which uses them to exercise power over the rest of the population. Political power, military power and economic power is concentrated within the elite which makes these few the most powerful actors in the state with the power to take and impose decisions valid to the whole society.<sup>5</sup> The theory gained prominence due to the writings of Vilfredo Pareto but has since become broad with several branches and various interpretations. However, the common interpretation is that power resides in an elite group that makes decisions for the majority resulting in an inequality of power in any given society.

In this paper's context, the elite is the ZANU PF top hierarchy who are also former liberation war fighters. The Zimbabwe state's elite is made up of the liberation movement party's top officials who maintain their role in the decolonisation of the country has earned them the right to this power. This elite has influence over most of the country's significant institutions such as the military, the police, the judiciary, parliament and the elections body. The liberation movement elite has managed to hold on to power not only in Zimbabwe but in several other former colonised states. Ayittey<sup>6</sup> adds that although nationalists who won freedom for their respective countries were honoured and hailed as heroes, they have strenuously resisted any attempts to vacate their posts, even many years after the attainment of independence of their countries. Over four decades after independence, the elite continues to reiterate that those without liberation war credentials will not have access any power in Zimbabwe. Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi<sup>7</sup> describe the ruling elite in Zimbabwe as a liberalised autocracy that pays lip service to basic freedoms but continues to govern in heavy-handed fashion, paying no regard to democratic principles. Sachikonye<sup>8</sup> adds that the elite circle has effectively undermined the effectiveness of the state administration by using it for systematic patronage in order to maintain political order and perpetuate its hold on power. Thus the elite theory best explains the relationship that exists between ZANU PF and the liberation struggle.

### The first Chimurenga: African grievances

The arrival of the Cecil Rhodes and the British South African Company (BSAC) in Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe) presented

the indigenous population with a plethora of problems. British colonial settlers arrived in Salisbury on September 12, 1890, formally annexing Zimbabwe as a British Colony. The white population arrived with the intention to mine minerals rendering any such African activities illegal despite the trade being the chief occupation of most Africans who had engaged in the production of, and trade in, gold for over nine centuries.<sup>9</sup> The arrival also saw an increase in demand for fertile land for agriculture by the white farmers under the BSAC which resulted in the seizure of African land by the new arrivals forcing the indigenous populations into reserves that were characterised by poor soils.<sup>10</sup> This disproportionately affected the livelihoods of the Black majority, impacting their economic security, socio-cultural and political systems. The land grab was facilitated by a number of treaties such as The Lippert Concession which was used as justification for the occupation of most of the Mashonaland areas in 1890, by granting the settlers the right to take over land rights from the indigenous people, the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) and the Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA) among others. Africans not only lost their land but the connection they had with their ancestors through the land. African traditions place an importance on graves which according to beliefs create an essential connection between the dead and the living, hence the loss of the land and graves left them exposed without any ancestral connection and guidance.<sup>11</sup>

Boggie and Davis<sup>12</sup> adds that while the settlers struggled to turn the wilderness into farms, they managed to introduce electricity, roads, railways among other 'symbols of modernity' which was accomplished through forced labour of natives (Chibaro), a process characterised by systematic oppression. The aggregated effects of such activities created resentment of white people and the system they represented. In order to pressure Africans into conformity and to work for the colonisers, indigenous Africans were even forced to pay a wide range of taxes - hut, dog, cattle and poll taxes even after being settled in unproductive land and these constrained their already compromised livelihoods.<sup>13,14</sup> This made their lives even harder, as they were bound to lose their belongings if they failed to meet the required tax payments. The perilous situation was compounded by natural disasters that took place during the same period as life became hard and unbearable for the indigenous population. The spiritual mediums [Nehanda included] and natives believed that the natural disasters were a curse from the ancestors who were angered by the status quo. The 1898 BSCA report titled '*Reports on the Native Disturbances in Rhodesia, 1896-1897*' states that: A drought, abnormal like in its duration and intensity, had set in...and continued...locusts which...had never made their presence felt, now appeared in swarms that literally darkened the sky, devastating both the veld and the gardens of the country, eating up the crops on which the natives depended for their food.

The arrival of the colonisers coincided with the arrival of swarms of locusts that had not been seen in almost five decades and was much more destructive than the ordinary species. This resulted in the locusts being termed *Matabele Zintente za Makiwa* (Locusts of the White Man). And as if these plagues were not sufficient, the rinderpest, then a new and unknown disease, suddenly seized the cattle of the Matabeleland and mowed down herds. The action of the government in shooting live and healthy cattle with the view to checking the spread of the disease appeared to them more terrible and unaccountable than the rinderpest itself. Therefore, the natural disasters worsened an already difficult situation, further compounding the losses of the African people and robbing them of the little they had remained with. Like many other Africans, Mbuya Nehanda was also infuriated by the natural disasters and the undertakings around their social world, and this inspired her through the will of Mhondoro to take a lead in bringing the end to the suffering of the indigenous people.

Many MaShona rulers were also infuriated with the vast immigration to the interiors of their region, the confiscation of their land and cattle, and the sexual abuse inflicted on their women, which they held in very high esteem.<sup>11</sup> The controversy was that allegations of African rape on White women was punishable by jail sentence or even death while no such sentences existed against Black women. Despite being a chauvinistic society, this was taboo by African standards and contributed to the disgrace and humiliation of African society. Therefore one can conclude that the war thereof, became a war against this inhumane and degrading behaviour; becoming more of a war for freedom, human rights and autonomy of African chieftaincy the order of governance then more than it was a racist or nationalist revolution as such ideas were still none existent to this ancient society.

### The rise of Mbuya Nehanda

The above historic overview helps to further understand the reasons for the rise and the role played by spirit mediums; Mbuya Nehanda in particular, as an embodiment of African cultural values and liberation. According to Kaoma,<sup>15</sup> “The strongest challenge to indirect rule came from spirit mediums, who were the bridge between the two worlds—the spiritual and temporal. In the context of colonial protests, spirit mediums’ traditional authority, though unrecognized by colonial authorities, was fundamental to the mobilization of people to participate in the struggle for liberation.”

Nyamhita Nehanda was a respected and influential ancestral spirit (Mhondoro) that possessed other spirit mediums after her death. Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, who is popularly known as “Mbuya Nehanda”, was a powerful spirit medium and heroine of the First Chimurenga war against British settler colonialism<sup>16</sup> who was possessed by the spirit of Nyamhita Nehanda. The role of spirit mediums in the liberation struggle was pivotal through divination and it was believed Nehanda could interpret the orders and wishes of God, (Mwari), the supreme creator and the spirit mediums she possessed communicated her messages to the masses. Collier<sup>17</sup> adds that one of the most memorable and inspirational mediums that claimed Nyamhita Nehanda’s spirit was Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana who was born around 1863 and became possessed in 1884. She quickly became the center of communication between the living and the ancestral spirits and was very influential in the masses uprising that led to the First Chimurenga.<sup>15</sup>

Mutunhu<sup>11</sup> adds that, Nehanda witnessed her people being forcibly removed from their ancestral homes, subjected to racial and political oppression, economic exploitation, dehumanising forced labour and debilitating physical torture by the settlers. After experiencing the racial segregation and the exploitation of her people by the colonial rule, Nehanda became “a symbol of resistance for her work and legacy in various liberation movements in the 19th and 20th centuries.” Charumbira. She stood firm against racial arrogance which relegated the Black population to a condition of endemic poverty and perpetual suffering. She was also pivotal in the outbreak of the Second Chimurenga which saw the participation of another spirit medium, a descendant of Charwe, who also took on the title Nehanda.<sup>18</sup> Today, Nehanda, is a popular spirit medium whose role in the liberation struggle has made her synonymous with the independence of Zimbabwe.

Muntunhu<sup>11</sup> posits that, “In her (Mbuya Nehanda) defiance against Cecil Rhodes and colonial rule, she held strong morals and sacrificed her life in the fight for her people to one day gain independence.” Before the war fully broke out in Mashonaland, Nehanda established her military headquarters in the Husaka Mountain’s network of caves and began to mobilise the masses for the war against their oppressors

in collaboration with other leaders like Mkwati and Sekuru Kaguvi which resulted in the First Chimurenga escalating in both Mashonaland and Matabeleland. In December, Nehanda was captured in the Dande district and taken to the capital Salisbury under heavy guard. She was charged for the murder of Native Commissioner Henry Hawken Pollard and the rebellion against colonial authority.<sup>11</sup> In 1898, she was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. The Nehanda medium, Charwe was hanged in 1898 for her contributions in mobilising communities against colonial rule and before she was hanged she declared that her bones would rise again to lead a new, victorious rebellion.<sup>16</sup> This declaration became the rallying point that carried the struggle throughout the Second Chimurenga and ultimately led to victory. According to David and Johnson,<sup>19</sup> in 1976, the spirit of Nehanda inspired guerrilla fighters during the Second Chimurenga, through possessed spirit mediums. Following Nehanda’s execution, British forces took her head, and those of other rebels, as war trophies which are believed to be held at the Natural History Museum in London.<sup>20</sup>

Nehanda was not only a significant resistance leader in the struggle for independence but also played a critical role in empowering women. Under the traditional and colonial patriarchal rule, women in colonial Zimbabwe had no control over the economy and their powerlessness was grounded in traditional African culture and colonial concepts.<sup>21</sup> Her role paved the way for women’s involvement in the liberation movements, exemplified by women’s involvement in the nationalist movement’s protests and the Second Chimurenga. Known as ‘chimbwidos,’ women played instrumental roles in the liberation struggle as they helped freedom fighters by housing them and giving them food and clothes.<sup>22</sup> Many other women also joined in the actual fighting and became guerrilla fighters. The contributions made by women were highlighted by former President Robert Mugabe who stated that “Without women’s full participation, the struggle for a social, political, economic and cultural independence of a country may not have been achieved”.<sup>23</sup> Hence Mbuya Nehanda remains an influential figure as she stood out against the odds of a chauvinistic society to become a pillar of a people’s struggle, a phenomenon that is not so prominent in African history.

### Weaponisation of Nehanda and its controversies in the post 2000 era

With the formation of the MDC in the 1999, ZANU PF for the first time came up against a formidable opposition which threatened its hegemony. According Nare<sup>24</sup> The political economy between 1990 and 1999 was marked by mismanagement of public funds, corruption and poorly formulated policies which led indirectly to the establishment of the biggest opposition party in Zimbabwe since independence, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Feeling the pressure, panicking and revealing its desperation to cling to power, ZANU-PF resorted to its usual strategy of employing violence against opponents. In the wake of this detrimental political violence, ZANU PF also weaponised the name ‘Mbuya Nehanda’ perpetrating violence in her name most notably during the Land Reform Programme that began in 1999. The programme turned violent as rowdy war veterans evicted white farmers and redistributed the land amongst themselves. According to Gusha this process resulted in several deaths while many others were injured. Others fled from the country while their property was either destroyed or looted and due to the violent nature of the programme, the international community responded by placing sanctions on the Zimbabwe government. While ZANU PF claimed the programme was to address the colonial injustices, in which white colonisers forcibly took natives’ land and relocated them to areas with poor soils, evidence suggests that most of the land was shared

among top ZANU PF officials (Ibid). While it cannot be argued that the land question was by far the key issue at the heart of indigenous populations' grievances and the key contributor for both Chimurenga wars, many will agree that the elitist Land Reform Programme has failed to redress these grievances.

Land grabs and evictions have continued even beyond the violent 1999 programme. According to Human Rights Watch,<sup>25</sup> "By order of Statutory Instrument 50 of 2021, the Zimbabwe government is evicting thousands of people from an indigenous, minority group from their communal land. The order of eviction has affected more than 13,000 people of the Shangani minority." To make matters worse, the Human Rights Watch adds that the government failed to reallocate them land, reasonable compensation, nor to replace infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and places of worship. Farm invasions by the powerful and affluent has continued since 1999 as witnessed by the eviction of hundreds of villagers from Manzou farm in Mazowe to pave way for Grace Mugabe's game park in 2015<sup>26</sup> and villagers in some areas of Mutoko and Uzumba face the same fate.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the government has also sanctioned demolitions of people's homes and businesses which heightened during Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 and has remained in force ever since. In essence, one would be forgiven for thinking that the same repressive system from pre-1980 is still in place and that the only difference between then and now is the different skin colour of the oppressors. The land grabs and eviction of thousands of Zimbabwe from their tribal lands were key reasons for rise of Mbuya Nehanda, to protect the interest of her fellow countrymen and yet inversely her name is being used to take land from the same people who she sacrificed her life for. Such contradictions reflects on the poor framing of political ideology and perhaps confusion on what ZANU PF purport to stand for vis a vis Mbuya Nehanda's ideology.

Onslow,<sup>28</sup> asserts that the ZANU-PF government inherited the settler state's authoritarian political culture which resulted in a marked failure to reform or democratise the traditional structures of power. The government also inherited the power of the colonial state, including the monopoly of the use of force as well as executive and legislative capacity. The majority government continued using this power in the same fashion as the colonial government which rendered the independence that was attained in 1980 as ceremonial and marked a regime change that did not bring with it freedom and liberty, political goods which are yet to be realised in Zimbabwe (Ibid). The ZANU PF government continues to be at the forefront of land grabs (against black people) and forced evictions which leaves one questioning the legacy of the liberation struggle. ZANU PF has manipulated its role in the liberation struggle and has been labeled as 'black neo-colonialists' by continuing to suppress its citizens more than four decades after independence as the party has made Zimbabweans subject without rights, and continues to act without any responsibility towards its citizens for their welfare.<sup>29</sup> In echoing the same sentiments, Hamill<sup>3</sup> adds that ZANU PF has "colonised" Zimbabwe since 1980 and maintains a vast web of deep rooted patronage networks that facilitate the looting of the country's resources. As a result, a strong opposition that would lead to a change of government poses a huge threat to these networks and such privileges are unlikely to be surrendered without intense resistance, which has seen the party doing all that it can to destroy the opposition.

Post 2000, the use of systematic violence to silence opposition has remained a critical tool for ZANU PF to control and retain power. Since then, the government has stepped up efforts to silence opposition through the use of violence. The opposition bracket includes opposition political parties, human rights activists as well

as member of the civil society. The ZANU PF regime has throughout the years also employed tactics such as state orchestrated abductions and disappearances to deal with dissenters. One of the abductions cases that remains unsolved is the disappearance of Itai Dzamara, a government critic and human rights activist who disappeared after being abducted by alleged state agencies on 9 March 2015.<sup>30</sup> While many thought the end of Mugabe's tenure in 2017 would bring an end to government use of terror, the use of violence and intimidation has become even more pronounced post-Mugabe.

A Human Rights NGO Forum Report<sup>31</sup> reveals that since President Mnangagwa came into power in November 2017, it has documented and verified hundreds of organised violent abductions and torture, indicating an increase from the previous regime. According to the United Nations<sup>32</sup> in 2019 alone, 49 cases of abductions and torture were reported in Zimbabwe and no meaningful without investigations were conducted which means no one was held accountable. Cases of violence and torture against government critics continue to rise and may continue to do so as Zimbabwe heads towards the 2023 election. Zimbabwe has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) which makes it even more difficult to stop incidences of torture and violence and demand accountability. To add to the dilemma, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), a body established under the constitutional framework to "ensure post-conflict justice, healing and reconciliation" is led by commissioners appointed by the President which greatly hampers its work. In essence, violence, repression and torture were also tactics that were used during the colonial era to suppress dissidents, the very system Mbuya Nehanda was against. Surprisingly, ZANU PF systematic use of violence against its own Citizenry has become a key tool to its survival and yet claim monopoly and alignment to Mbuya Nehanda's, the very same person who stood and fought against such tyranny on the same population ZANU is inflicting such atrocities upon.

This therefore clearly shows that, ZANU PF is now at a cross road where it has now trampled its own ideology for survival. The very same party that claimed to represent the interest of the people has become the predator destroying its own people, economically, socially and politically. Even though ZANU PF claims allegiance and monopoly of Mbuya Nehanda, they have crossed the line by militating at the very founding principle that Mbuya Nehanda stood for, that is, freedom and flourish of the Black man. The very principle ZANU PF is trampling on.

In contemporary times, Nehanda's legacy as a revered liberator has seen her living on centuries after her demise. Resultantly, she has been commemorated in various ways. Streets throughout Zimbabwe have been named and many songs and poems praising her prominent freedom fighter image have been penned.<sup>21</sup> One of the most cherished but also controversial monuments of Nehanda is the ten-foot-tall statue of her image that was unveiled by President Emmerson Mnangagwa in Harare in May 2021.<sup>20</sup> Zimbabwe is a predominantly patriarchal society so the recognition of Nehanda and the erection of her statue in the city centre of Zimbabwe's capital Harare is progressive and points to the recognition and empowerment of women. However, this significance has been eroded by the custodian stance the ruling party has taken with regards to the heroine. The unveiling of the statue was turned into a ZANU PF event and what was supposed to be a national occasion was turned into a ruling party event with the ruling party supporters affirming their support for President Emmerson Mnangagwa while threatening to unleash violence against opposition supporters ahead of the 2023 elections.<sup>33</sup> But in reality was Mbuya Nehanda ZANU PF?

The timing of the recognition, especially so close to the 2023 elections, has led many to think that this recognition is nothing more than a political gimmick which has turned a treasured national heroine into a ZANU PF pawn in its bid to maintain its hold on power. The construction and the cost of the statue has since caused a public outcry as many feel that the extravagancy is insensitive given the worsening socio-economy problems in the country. For government to prioritise the erecting of a statue when the country is facing many challenges is not only ill timed but also insensitive to the suffering of the multitudes of Zimbabweans who have to bear the brunt of the economic challenges. This is more so when one considers the statue had to be redone after President Mnangagwa stated the initial one looked nothing like the revered spiritual medium as evidenced by available photographs captured during her trial in 1898. Although the total cost is not known, R2, 2 million worth of material was brought over from South Africa and R1, 5million used for transportation only.<sup>34</sup>

Of particular concern is the state of the country's health system. The once vibrant health system has collapsed, compounded by challenges in the economy which has also resulted in brain drain. One of the major maternity hospitals in Zimbabwe, ironically called the Mbuya Nehanda Hospital is one of the worst hit by the nationwide health sector crisis. According to the Health Times,<sup>35</sup> the maternity hospital is hit by staff shortages with one midwife attending to more than 20 women, a lack of beds which has resulted in expectant mothers sleeping on the floor and there are also shortages of basics such as water and gloves. Maternal deaths are unsustainably high, with about eight women dying everyday while giving birth due to the poor state of the country's healthcare system.<sup>36</sup> Private hospitals provide better care but they are priced beyond the reach of many which has resulted in many Zimbabweans, especially expectant mothers, going to South African government hospitals which provide free healthcare. Recent statistics showed that 80% of women giving birth at Musina and close by areas are illegal Zimbabweans which has left South African women sometimes not being able to get help.<sup>37</sup> This has inevitably exacerbated tensions between Zimbabwe and South Africa with cases of xenophobia on the rise. Recently, a video of a South African doctor from Limpopo berating a Zimbabwean patient over taking up space meant for South Africans went viral on social media.<sup>38</sup>

In the video, Limpopo Health MEC Dr Phophi Ramathuba was recorded telling off the Zimbabwean patient that they were putting a strain on the South African health system; "What is Mnangagwa doing? Mnangagwa is out of order. He must do his work. I'm going to bill him. Let's really be serious. Let's cost all the foreigners, especially with our rural health matters. We (will) send the bill. All the bills, including the (child) deliveries that we have had, must be sent to their government. This is exactly why, when the people of Limpopo want access to health systems, they cannot get it. That is angering the community. You guys aren't even registered here, you are not counted and some are illegals. It's unfair. I cannot go to Zimbabwe and get help."

Dr Ramathuba reiterated that the health system was failing to provide the required health care for Limpopo citizens because of illegal foreigners who were putting a strain on the system. She added that hospitals in the area were allocated resources based on the number of citizens in the area and that illegal foreigners were not accounted for. This has resulted in the health system facing difficulties in providing quality healthcare to Limpopo citizens because of budgetary constraints and this state of affairs was also adding to xenophobia attacks against Zimbabweans.<sup>38</sup> After delivering the hard truths to the patient about the state of illegal immigration in South Africa and its impact on the public healthcare system, Dr Ramathuba

informed the patient that they would not be discharged from the hospital until they had settled their bill, irrevocably making it clear that the Limpopo government was not going to absorb the cost of operating and caring for foreign nationals any longer.<sup>37</sup> Ramathuba has however been criticised by many for her outbursts which many say are improper, especially from someone in her profession.

This embarrassing incident ought to be a wakeup call for the government to fix the health system. In 2020, then Health Minister Obadiah Moyo was involved in the embezzlement of US\$60 million COVID-19 funds.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, experts estimate that all of Zimbabwe's central hospitals need US\$50 million to run efficiently for the whole year.<sup>38</sup> The embezzling of funds meant for the health sector continues despite of the poor state of the country's health system, with medical professionals constantly on strike over poor salaries and lack of medical equipment. The elite continue to seek medical help beyond the country's borders while the majority of Zimbabweans have to contend with the dilapidated health system. More worryingly, Moyo was acquitted on all charges in 2021 and the money never recovered.<sup>39</sup> This highlights the culture of impunity in Zimbabwe as corruption by top government officials is usually overlooked. The endemic levels of corruption have cascaded to every government department and everyday life which has seen the country continuously being ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index.<sup>40</sup> Due to Zanu-PF's corruption and looting, Zimbabweans have become an embarrassment regionally and something ought to be done to fix this predicament as soon as possible.

### Manipulation of the liberation struggle

The above discussion reflects not only the failure of ZANU PF to move past historiographical pedagogies forty years after liberation but also depicts its cluelessness in contemporary policy making geared towards current settings problem solving. Political manipulation of historic facts have not only taken place in the form of construing historical figures such as Mbuya Nehanda as discussed above, but also the intrinsic essence of the liberation struggle. Hence forth this section will discuss how the liberation war is being weaponised to manipulate the general populace into viewing ZANU PF as the 'messiahs' of Zimbabwe, yet in reality, the people themselves and ZAPU had a far share in shaping the independence of Zimbabwe.

When the masses supported efforts to liberate Zimbabwe, not all of them would have certainly been ZANU PF members. The struggle for independence in Zimbabwe was a collective enterprise yet attempts have been made by the political elite to privatise the war and its history. The First Chimurenga<sup>15</sup> was initiated by the masses without any political party backing which shows that the masses were capable of organising themselves without the influence of organised political parties. It was only during the Second Chimurenga which began in the 1960s until 1979 that African nationalist movements began to feature.<sup>9</sup> According to Fogel,<sup>41</sup> ZANU PF was formed in 1963 as a breakaway group from the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) which was formed in 1961. For most of the struggle, ZANU PF led by Robert Mugabe and ZAPU led by Joshua Nkomo were at logger heads and disagreed with each other over how best Zimbabwe would be freed. Bratton and Masunungure<sup>42</sup> add that the liberation struggle was characterised by intense distrust and intolerance, marked by violence, leadership assassinations and various instances of deception. ZAPU's military wing was known as the Zimbabwe Independence Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) while ZANU PF's military wing was called the Zimbabwe African Liberation Army (ZANLA).<sup>43</sup> The war of liberation finally ended in September 1979 when according to Reed,<sup>1</sup> all relevant parties, including British Prime

Minister Margaret Thatcher, Bishop Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe met in London for the Lancaster House Conference. The conference negotiated a transition to majority rule that culminated in independence on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1980. It is clear from the above that the struggle over Zimbabwe was a complex and long conflict, involving various actors who all had a significant impact on the struggle. However, ZANU PF continues to monopolise the struggle claiming it was the party that solely brought liberation to Zimbabwe thus giving it the mandate to rule eternally.

Soon after independence, ZANU PF which won the majority vote to form the first independent government, continued its intolerance of opposition that was conceived and developed during the liberation struggle, as witnessed by its rivalry with ZAPU<sup>42</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>44</sup> adds that those who dared to criticise the government were labelled as enemies of the state and the revolution, with the new government making it difficult (and dangerous) to criticise the leaders of the liberation struggle. Supporters of Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU were publicly branded and portrayed as ‘dissidents’ that needed to be dealt with and ZANU PF soon after embarked on state-sponsored massacres of these perceived enemies known locally as the Gukurahundi. The Gukurahundi massacres were state-initiated atrocities in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands provinces which began in 1982 against alleged dissidents and their supporters and resulted in over 20,000 deaths.<sup>45</sup> The atrocities finally ended when then President Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo signed the Unity Accord in December 1987, to end the ethnic violence. The Unity Accord saw the dissolution of ZAPU and the merging of the two rival parties. However to this day, the Gukurahundi issue remains controversial with the ZANU PF government still refusing to adequately address the issue. The government has made no attempts to recognise the victims of the massacres or offer compensation to their families and there has also been no public admission of guilt.<sup>46</sup> Sachikonye<sup>47</sup> adds that the current political rivalry between the ruling and opposition parties is an extension of the historical pattern of intolerance for political opposition that began during the colonial era.

This fixation with the liberation struggle by ZANU PF has seen the war of liberation being the party’s main rallying point and the mentality becoming the main feature of its policies, including an anti-colonialism campaign aimed at the opposition known as the Third Chimurenga. The fixation of ZANU PF on Chimurenga has taken a toll on policy formulation and addressing pervasive 21<sup>st</sup> challenges looming in Zimbabwe. Another policy was the granting of huge lump sums to war veterans in the late 1990s. The compensation packages, as a way of thanking them for their role in the liberation of the country, hugely affected the already ailing economy and added to its collapse a few years later. The party has mainly relied on nationalist rhetoric based on its role in the war of liberation, thereby gaining support not only from the majority black Zimbabweans, but also from many leaders in developing countries.<sup>48</sup> ZANU PF has tied the liberation struggle exclusively to its persona so much that the two have become conflated. These ties have been strengthened by party slogans such as “ZANU PF ndeye ropa” (ZANU PF is a party of blood) as a reference to the bloodshed in the struggle for independence and “Pasi ne mhandu” meaning down with traitors, a term that was widely used in the liberation struggle and now is used against opposition parties. The liberation war is seen as the most important aspect of Zimbabwean political life and is even etched into the Zimbabwe flag; the red colour representing the blood that was spilled in the liberation struggle. The Zimbabwe national anthem also contains several verses that emphasise the importance of the war lest anyone forgets. Heroes Day and Defence Forces Day, national holidays commemorated every August are usually filled with the party’s nationalistic rhetoric

and used to remind citizens of ZANU PF’s sacrifice and its right to rule. In highlighting the manipulation of the national struggle by the ruling party, Ndlovu-Gatsheni<sup>44</sup> states that; “Nationalism is a highly sediment phenomenon that has operated through privileging certain features of social life while suppressing or de-emphasising others that are considered repugnant to its chosen agenda. Zimbabwean nationalism is overlaid with ethnicity, militarism, neo-traditionalism, nativism, patriarchy and violence—very negative aspects that require urgent deconstruction.”

Muwati et al.,<sup>49</sup> adds that the liberation war has been made the most important expression of nationalism in Zimbabwe. This view which has been maintained by the elites has narrowed the conceptualisation of nationalism such that any other political or ideological perspective which has nothing to do with the liberation war is met with derision by ZANU PF. The idea of nation has also been restricted to this understanding of nationalism to the effect that those who seek to define nation differently, become what the elites call ‘puppets and stooges of the West’ (Ibid). ZANU PF has also perfected the art of personalising historical figures who initiated the liberation struggle in the 1890s such as Mbuya Nehanda. Nehanda has been monopolised by the ruling party which still claims to speak for her to this day. The ruling party has spewed propaganda that points towards Nehanda being against the opposition and being a ZANU PF supporter. However, Kaoma<sup>15</sup> states that it is important to note that Nehanda, who encouraged masses to rebellion against colonialism, was not a politician but spirit medium and many others who joined in the struggle were not affiliated with any party and just wanted to do their part in the liberation of the country.

#### The army as an extension of ZANU PF: fueling the war mantra

As shown earlier, ZANU PF comes from a radical nationalist background with socialist leanings and this with its liberation war history has also presented an uphill task to any opponents. The liberation struggle instilled in the party’s leaders and its supporters a militaristic conception of politics and political processes which ZANU-PF deploys to those who dare challenge it. ZANU PF has thus maintained a strong relationship with the security forces which are led by former liberation war veterans, making it difficult to get rid of the war rhetoric. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni.<sup>2</sup>

“The other legacy of a protracted war of liberation was the generation of suspicion and fear, and of a siege mentality. The nationalist movement became over anxious about being infiltrated and about the existence of ‘enemies within us’. The post-colonial Zimbabwean state under ZANU-PF failed dismally to make a break with the tradition of nationalist authoritarianism and guerrilla violence as well as colonial settler repression. The ruling party itself, having been a militarised liberation movement, failed to de-militarise itself, not only in practice, but also in attitude and style of management of civil institutions and the state at large.”

The party’s longevity has been sustained by a plethora of strategies, violence being chief among them. Zimbabwe has a long history of violence dating back to the struggle for liberation and after independence, this mentality proved hard to dismantle as the leadership of the country led by then President Robert Mugabe believed in the superiority of violence as a legitimate tool of solving problems and dealing with perceived enemies. The party relies on intimidation, the use of violence and coercive tactics originating from its liberation war legacy and has managed to whip people into line ensuring that its support base is strong come election time. In monopolising the liberation struggle, ZANU PF has also continuously resorted to violence against its opponents as a means to retain power.

Mugabe at several occasions even boasted of having ‘degrees in violence’ as violence and intimidation sustained his rule for 37 years until his ouster from power at the hands of his deputy Emmerson Mnangagwa in 2017. Regrettably, this state of affairs has continued long after Mugabe’s reign with known perpetrators usually accorded impunity. Post Mugabe, the security forces have continued with their reputation for being heavy-handed and for excessive use of force.

The liberation war has resulted in strong ties between the ZANU PF government and the military which has seen the two become inflated. This is despite the Zimbabwe Constitution in Section 208 explicitly stating that the army must not act in a partisan manner or further the interests of any political party or engage in civilian institutions. The army and ZANU PF have assumed ownership of the liberation struggle that led to the country’s independence and have reiterated time and time again, especially during election season, that they would not allow anyone without war credentials to become president. This strong bond has led to the interference of the army in politics with the army seemingly having the final say on who gets to rule the state. This has resulted in security forces being used to ruthlessly crush unarmed democratic demonstrations perceived as uprising over the years. The security forces also have a starring role in intimidation of voters especially in rural areas as has been widely witnessed in elections that have occurred post 2000. The formation of the MDC in 1999, coincided with the collapse of the economy which led to the MDC becoming instantly popular, especially with urbanites. Up until then, Zanu PF had enjoyed unchallenged success but the 2000 Parliamentary elections heralded the beginning of a new era of stiffer competition for the party when the MDC won 57 seats against Zanu PF’s 62.

The MDC’s strong showing seemed to foreshadow the 2002 presidential election that would see an aging Mugabe come up against the party’s firebrand leader Morgan Tsvangirai. For years, the army had reiterated that it would not allow Zimbabwe to be ruled by someone without liberation war credentials. According to Ndlovu<sup>2</sup> in 2001 then overall commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), General Vitalis Zvinvashe, openly announced, at a televised press conference, the security forces’ allegiance to ZANU-PF and that they would not allow the opposition to take over power. The chiefs also added and assured the nation that they would not cooperate with or salute a presidential candidate whose liberation war credentials were questionable.<sup>50</sup> The 2002 presidential poll was heavily marred by violence controversy and saw Mugabe who amassed 56.2% of the vote beating Tsvangirai who garnered 42%. The election was widely regarded as not credible by observers from the EU and the Commonwealth which resulted in Mugabe banning Western observers from observing future Zimbabwe elections. Tsvangirai would go on to win the 2008 elections but was blocked by the army from assuming power in 2008 through violence and bloodshed. The run off poll saw the army and suspected ruling party militias unleashing a wave of violence across the country that left an unspecified number of people dead and thousands displaced. In 2017 at the height of ZANU PF factional wars, when it appeared that a frail Mugabe was on the verge of ceding power to a faction fronted by his wife Grace known as the Generation 40 (G40), a faction of younger ZANU PF top officials with no war credentials, the army led by then commander Constantino Chiwenga quickly stepped in to prevent this from happening. The army in collaboration with the Mnangagwa faction removed Mugabe in a palace coup which they termed *Operation Restore Legacy*. According to Thornycroft, a few days before the coup, Chiwenga, flanked by several top army officials announced in a press conference on the 13 of November that; It is with humility and a heavy heart that we come before you to pronounce the indisputable reality that

there is instability in Zanu-PF today and as a result anxiety in the country at large. We must remind those behind the current treacherous shenanigans that when it comes to matters of protecting our revolution, the military will not hesitate to step in. There is distress, trepidation and despondency within the nation and the current purging, which is clearly targeting members of the party with a liberation background, must stop forthwith.

Chiwenga’s statement, if anything serves to emphasize the bond between the party and the army and how difficult it will be for anyone who didn’t partake in the liberation struggle to rule Zimbabwe. The army has thus been used to subvert the will of the people on several occasions and continues to be one of the biggest threats to the democratisation of Zimbabwe. By keeping close control of the security forces, the party has ensured that it can easily cow the populace into submission if ever they entertain thoughts of an uprising as evidenced by the force used whenever there are anti-government demonstrations or plans to demonstrate.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Although Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, the liberation struggle to free the country from colonial rule remains the most important political event in the country’s history. Much importance is placed on the war of liberation by the ruling ZANU PF party which has seen the party neglecting its duties to develop the country while continuously dwelling on the past. While the party continues to focus on the past, the country continues to lag behind its counterparts in almost all developmental aspects such as technology, infrastructure, health and energy, let alone economic security of the individual. The party has thus used the struggle to hold on to power with anyone who dares criticise the party being labelled as an enemy of the state. Famous national heroine Mbuya Nehanda, who met her demise long before the establishment of ZANU PF, has been monopolised and involuntarily dragged into the ZANU PF party and used as a means to hold on to power as well as to denigrate the opposition. Ironically, ZANU PF now resembles the colonial government it fought to liberate Zimbabwe from as ordinary Zimbabweans are yet to experience independence 42 years after its attainment. As it stands, Zimbabwe is a country in crisis with a near useless currency, an economy on the brink of collapse and worsening political and social conditions. The liberation war and nationalistic rhetoric has failed to develop and move the country forward which has seen Zimbabwe become but a pale shadow of its former self. It is therefore not difficult to imagine how those who sacrificed themselves for this country’s independence would feel given the state the country finds itself in four decades after independence.

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