

The Institute for Public Affairs in Zimbabwe (IPAZ)

GRAVITASLite Dialogue Series Brief No.1/2017

13 February 2017

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Marching From the *Deep End*: Coalitions and Nervous Reformers in Zimbabwe's Quick Sand Political Terrain. Tamuka C. Chirimambowa & Tinashe L. Chimedza***

Morgan Tsvangirai's Manoeuvres: Marching from the *Deep End*

The genius of Morgan Tsvangirai comes out like an avalanche when he is on the march and is building people power and not consumed by intra-party horseplay and administrative irritations. Coming back from destabilizing splits, a humiliating 2013 defeat and personal infractions it seems the real Morgan Tsvangirai is standing up and charging relentlessly at a decadent ruling class. In the past weeks, the MDC T leader paid no attention to a meeting held in South Africa to 'develop a framework' for a coalition and the MDC T dismissed the meeting as an attempt to 'constitute a cabinet of Presidents'. On the home front the MDC T and the ZIMPF have indicated that a 'coalition is inevitable' and this has ruffled the ZANU PF praetorian guard. The former Prime Minister opted to go on a re-engagement and mass rejuvenation mission of the provincial structures of women and men who have stuck to the MDC T and whose political power and voices substantially count in the coalition matrix. By adopting a force of character which defines where the MDC T is headed and at the same time isolating the voices of unreason the coalition is looking like a real possibility. There are a few leaders driven by self-ambition and are interpreting these contestations through the feudal prism of tribal enclaves but they are fatally riding on an explosive chariot of fire leading not to heaven but into oblivion. The charge out of the deep end should be one of the many electoral strategies for the MDC T and its 'cousins'. There is need to work on the MDC's footprint in the rural and farming areas and in the coalition matrix maybe the ZIM-PF may bring that strategic contribution. The 2008 '*bhora musango*' when ZANU PF lost considerable votes points to the potential of political formations to break the rural-urban jinx that has been maintained by ZANU PF's violent 'ring of fire' maintained by security services, youth militias, rogue war veterans and recalcitrant traditional leaders. ZANU PF is plagued by the political *legionnaire's disease* of factionalism and these convulsions are cracking the edifice already. Experiences from Kenya & Zambia indicate that former liberation movements can only be disposed when there is a powerful opposition aided by internal fragmentation of the ruling elites. The momentum built by opposition coalitions; the intense contestations by new social movements and traditional civil society all serve to create a political terrain which increases dissensions within the ruling elites and hasten the process of elite disintegration – even by attracting some sections of the former liberation movement.

Nervous Reformers: Mujuru, Zimbabwe People First (ZIMPF) and the very old guard

The ghosts of ZANU PF continue casting their long shadows on ZIMPF and will continue infecting the 'new kid' for a very, very long time. The elite class which constituted itself into ZIM-PF have too much of the ZANU PF political identity and culture running in their political nerves. Exorcising these ghosts will not be easy, others are already celebrating that ZIMPF is a 'false start' and expulsions and cross expulsions are already threatening to bludgeon them into a heap of dust. The purging of some of these characters who are the architects of what Professor Masipula Sithole called the 'margin of terror' maybe a necessary sanitizer. Unburdened with the meddling of 'dirty hands' perhaps Joice Mujuru can lead a process of building a real political movement distinct from the ZANU PF pedigree. This is a pedigree of coercion and authoritarianism, rampant corruption and

nationalist arrogance, exclusion and marginalization and a captured state and an immobilized parliament. The men and women who now lead ZIMPF are cut from the same cloth like everyone in ZANU PF where the political cauldron is driven and shaped by 'cloak and dagger' manoeuvres to maintain both party positions and by implication preside over a kidnapped state. For more than four decades they have clothed themselves in the clothes of a political sect where the leader is an all knowing infallible deity brooking no critique – no dissension was brooked. As the 'kids' duelled and labelled each other the 'dear leader' always appeared as a peacemaker yet we now know he was the one setting 'comrade against comrade'. Those who want a coalition must avoid Gumbo, Mutasa & company for these are old political gladiators who still reminisce about getting back to ZANU PF. After the election in Bikita West instead of counting the 2,500 votes their response was 'we never wanted to leave the party' and would gladly go back if they 'get an apology'. These are yesterday's men. They are too misogynistic to be led by a woman and believe that her only place is 'the kitchen'. These older guard gladiators have a secure place - in archival vaults.

Lessons from Kenya & Zambia: Coalition Building in Quick Sand Terrain

Political coalitions are never ideologically pure and they are always formed as a temporary bulwark to batter down the walls of an entrenched ruling class which has taken the state hostage. After the opposition formed a coalition Kenya's political terrain became much more fluid and in some cases explosive but the formidable coalition managed to batter down the 'big men syndrome' and Moi's iron fist rule was upended. Kenya introduced a much more liberal constitution; the Kenyan economy has a local 'stable' currency and has been 'generally' expanding. While Moi's party is now back in power they have had to work hard to mobilize support and the decks have been cleared of the old guard. Closer home a powerful block of political parties anchored around the labour movement also ended the 'one party' state dream by Kenneth Kaunda and his delusion to rule to the grave. In Zimbabwe firstly, the leaders of the political parties must be very deft at quickly isolating yesterday's people whose minds only salivate at prospects of personal gain while assertively mobilising the mass base for a coalition. Secondly in the case of the the MDC T it must become possible to engage its 'cousins'. These cousins matter as far as building momentum is concerned and swelling the ranks with men and women who have political spine. The MDC T's cousins (the PDP, Renewal Democrats & MDC N) contain some individuals who got side-tracked with intra-party infractions but such are the inevitable contradictions of any political movement. The MDC T cousins must not be discarded: give me a sober Tendai Biti than a crowd of non-thinkers; put here the finesse and results oriented David Coltart than a hundred praise singers; give me a Welshman Ncube than a choir of rouble rousers; give me a fiery Grace Kwinjeh, a robust Priscilla Misihairambwi and or a politically solid Mai Matibenga over any 'bum-dancing' characters. The organising capacity of Solomon Madzore is more strategic than a car load of weak fanatics. Such are the impure raw materials the coalition must mould its political power from.

Expanding the Momentum: Civil society & the 'new' social movements

The post-2000 civil society contestations have suffered two major setbacks. Firstly, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and its political power which shifted the political terrain in the 1990s has disappeared mainly because of de-industrialisation, informalization but also internal contradictions. Secondly the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) has veered into becoming a political party of sorts meaning it has ceded its capacity to be a civil society platform. Thirdly, the student movement under the aegis of the Zimbabwe National Student Union (ZINASU), that has always played a traditional youthful vanguard and '*voice of the voiceless*' role has been decimated by defunding and nationalist authoritarianism. Distinctively the ZCTU, ZINASU and the NCA were deliberate 'broad churches' and had *national presence* in the form of both institutional and political

presence. The political power of the ZCTU, ZINASU and NCA was partly swallowed by the MDC but once that was accomplished a glaring gap has emerged in the civil society terrain. While some civil society and some contentious 'new' social movements continue re-shaping social and political terrain there is no evidence of a 'national-popular' movement. What this means is that everyone is busy, very busy but the impact of that social and power is limited by the lack of a national platform which amplifies that social and political power and coalesces it into substantial *national political power*.

There are a few 'networks' and 'coalitions' but these are not organized effectively at a national level and they are severely weak and incapable of projecting national political power. To deal with this weakness decisively the civil society and these emerging social movements (#Tajamuka, #ThisFlag etc) must begin a process of building concrete demands. These can then be developed over the next few months culminating in some form of a *national assembly* of sorts which articulates these demands nationally. Residents groups must assemble issues of social services delivery; women's groups and movements must coalesce their demands; young people and students must be actively engaged; labour organisations defending workers' must also be key; farmers' groups who are abandoned by the state and have no land tenure must be nationally engaged and vendors, unemployed youths and cross border traders must be roped into a national dialogue driven towards some form of a *manifesto*. By deliberately building a national political process which distils itself into a *people's national assembly* civil society and these social movements will be able to project national power which can be translated into critical pre-and post-electoral influence. Meaning civil society and social movements must liberate themselves from the parochialism of thinking that they can make impact through sectarianism; personal fiefdoms and avoid being blinded by some form of 'technicism' which avoids building social and political power. Brilliant 'technocratic' solutions will gather dust in boardrooms and in the Director's email box without concrete political power organised nationally.

State Decomposition & Authoritarianism: Projecting a National Agenda for the Coalition

The post-colonial state is a schizophrenic paradox; the state has retreated from providing basic social services and taxes are spent on maintaining networks of patronage. As the state retreats it has to rely more on the coercive apparatus of the state which is why Zimbabwe's poorly maintained roads have toll gates and the police are perversely present and the corrupt ones openly extort citizens. To respond to this state of decay and authoritarianism a coalition must be informed by what we call *foundational issues*: In our view these are firstly, a *decaying economy* locked in permanent cycles of crisis and the failure of the ruling elites to put into motion a dynamic economic policy capable of growing the economy, expanding economic opportunities and importantly generating a sustainable tax base for the country to afford public sector wages, fund infrastructure and social services like health & education. Secondly the outright *capture of the state* has led to a national malaise of corruption and what has been called 'illicit elite accumulation'. Witness 40 bedroomed mansions in the Brooke and the rise of a free-loading 'black tenderpreneurs' class which feeds on state revenue with no sham. While they drive luxurious European made vehicles kids in Chitungwiza are hop-skipping through sewage ridden pot-holed streets. Pictures of surgeons at a local hospital completing surgery with 'mobile phones' deserve indignant outrage. Thirdly the *authoritarian character* of state institutions mean that the security services have been swamped by a ruling elite which equates their rule as 'national security'. This stiff-necked interpretation of national security has waylaid the country's security apparatus and diverted it from its constitutionally defined duties. The citizen is now mortified by state institutions and pretends to be content but inside seethes with inflammable outrage. Fourthly the *land and agrarian* insecurities will have to be dealt with so that the creation of wealth and expanding of opportunities for black businesses is not ephemeral to the rest of the citizen. By identifying and building a political platform which has a future political project the

coalition will be able to present itself as an alternative political formation with the interest of the *citizen* at the centre beyond the contestations for political power.

Exorcising a National Aberration: Words from the *Oracle of Vengere*.

The ruling elite and ZANU PF are a psychopathological condition which shuts the mind and blinds the national conscience from its own *agency* – meaning the capacity to subvert this status quo. Those whose conviction has been traumatized by ZANU F's superficial invincibility must take a cursory look into history. The long gaze of history has witnessed the collapse of far entrenched regimes where the terror and horror they visited on the people can only be understood by reading Dante's *Inferno*: feudal Tsarism imploded into cinders; the police state of West German where neighbours and family informed against each other collapsed and in recent times, closer to home, the iron fortress and citadel of Afrikaner white supremacy called apartheid collapsed. No one knows who will strike the blow that will crumble this parasitic edifice. In the meantime while every citizen pushes their nose above the drowning line to survive the scourge of this grinding aberration of a country in which the national psyche is now a deformed 'house of hunger' we have to provisionally rest in the words of Dambudzo Marechera when the *Oracle of Vengere* screamed on paper that '*I run when its I love you time, I run when its Aluta time*'.

The Institute for Public Affairs in Zimbabwe (IPAZ) is a public research organisation focused on empirical and theoretical research, debates, dialogues and exchanges pointed at enhancing public participation to expand, deepen and project citizen engagement and keep public power democratic, accountable, responsive and transparent.

This paper is published as part of an ongoing public engagement and thought leadership series. The dialogue series will carry articles on a Fortnightly Basis and articles can be sent to: gravitas@ipazim.com

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