

Africa

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Myths of the Past, Shades of the Future

IN THE past half century, when man has walked on the moon and global empires have fallen, no story ranks more compelling and poignant than the struggle of Africa's people — both on and off the continent — to be free. The yearning for dignity and self-determination is intrinsic in man. Their denial to some is rightly an offense to all. It follows, therefore, that every defeat of evil moves all of civilisation forward.

But at the risk of sounding glib, the toppling of the governmental and statutory structures of colonialism, apartheid and segregation was the easier task. It took the children of Africa — men like Nelson

Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr. — to demonstrate to our age the perversity of injustice: that the burden of freeing the oppressor falls to the oppressed. That work, thankfully, is done. Yet victory places an even greater burden on the previously disadvantaged.

At a time when Africa aspires to take ownership of its future, a critical question arises: Why are those societies liberated by movements that espoused inclusivity so intolerant of the freedoms they paid so dearly to attain? There are important continental ramifications to this question. There is little hope for Nepad when countries regard the most fundamental principles of democracy with ambivalence.

The greatest threat to emerging democracies is the loss of collective memory. As populations grow rapidly younger, it becomes easier for the ruling elite to assert its legitimacy by reinterpreting the past. The consequences can be costly.

When liberation credentials supersede performance as the basis of power — as they have by degrees throughout southern Africa — the purpose of the struggle is obscured. When a black man is called a puppet of neo-colonialists for challenging the failures of a liberation movement in power, the victory over oppression is lost. When access to economic power is predicated on patronage, the privilege to serve is replaced by the service of privilege. When courts are gutted and the media muzzled, the right of the people to their own version of history is stolen.

Certainly, the hard-won freedoms of liberation warrant more careful guardianship of the struggle.



Verbatim

“It’s completely stuck. I’d like to be more positive, but I can’t. Nothing has moved over the last year.” – A Western diplomat, on the long-standing border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

“After 6pm, when it starts to get dark, I stay inside. I’m afraid of many of my neighbours.”
– Kamanda Emmanuel, a Rwandan living back in his old neighbourhood after having been released recently from prison. Emmanuel admitted to having committed crimes during the country’s 1994 genocide.

“[The Movement for Democratic Change] now fear elections and are giving all sorts of lame excuses for boycotting elections. We dare them. Boycott or no boycott, well you are ripe for burial and we will put you to eternal sleep in March next year.”
– Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe, on the country’s impending parliamentary elections in 2005.

“At 24, we are much older than South Africa... have held national elections four times more... have a population that is more literate... claim to have more experience in multiparty democracy than Pretoria. But a comparison in the way we conduct our elections shows that we are still decades away from allowing our people to benefit from their experience and independence.”
– Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of Zimbabwe’s opposition Movement for Democratic Change.

“The worst civilian government is better than the best military regime.” – Nigerian daily *The Vanguard*, after reports of an attempted coup in that country.

“Although the regime of President Lansana Conte has not reduced all the areas of freedom available to citizens to zero, it has transformed the social and political life of Guinea into a caricature of democracy in which the rights and freedoms enshrined in the constitution are violated.”
– International Federation for Human Rights, a Paris-based human rights organisation, in a report entitled *Guinea: A Virtual Democracy with an Uncertain Future*. President Conte has ruled the country for 20 years since coming in power in a military coup.



“To gain our independence and our freedom, we have to suffer for a while. We will not on the altar of money mortgage our conscience, mortgage our faith, mortgage our salvation.” – Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria, after African bishops said they would reject donations from Western congregations who support the ordinations of homosexuals.

“Some terrible things happened in Sierra Leone, but I was not responsible.” – Charles Taylor, ousted leader of Liberia, when asked about the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. Taylor is accused of backing a brutal rebellion in Sierra Leone.

“Without the international spotlight, the Sudanese government is unlikely to disarm and disband its Arab militia, re-establish security in the rural areas or guarantee the safety of displaced persons who wish to return home for planting season – crucial benchmarks for any improvement in the situation.”
– Human Rights Watch, on the ceasefire between the Sudanese government and the Darfur rebels.

“The continent’s crises and conflicts, as well as the brutal HIV/AIDS pandemic, breed instability, which opens new safe harbours for our enemies. In short, for these reasons and others, what happens in Africa impacts on the US and our policy needs to reflect this reality.”
– Charles Snyder, US acting assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

“The mass return of our compatriots caught us off guard.” – Theophile Mbemba, interior minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, on Angola’s expulsion of thousands of Congolese who have been accused of engaging in activities that were harmful to the Angolan economy.

“Is there any good governance in the so-called civilised world?” – Didymus Mutasa, Zanu-PF’s secretary for external affairs, at a conference of liberation movements hosted by Zimbabwe in April 2004. Mutasa was speaking about the rights of non-whites in the Western countries, citing the plight of Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand and Native Americans in the US and Canada.

Talks Give Nepad a Nudge

African and Western policymakers refine agenda for continent's development in Maputo

AT A time when Africa is struggling to redefine its place in the global village and battling against marginalisation in a world shaken by terrorism, the African Partnership Forum — a vehicle originally established for dialogue between Nepad and the Group of Eight industrialised countries — provides a key window on the continent's progress.

The second meeting of the Forum in Maputo on 16-17 April included discussions on peace and security, HIV/AIDS, food security, education and poverty alleviation. Expanded beyond the G-8 and Nepad, the Forum brought together high-level representatives from the African states, the G-8, the UN, the World Bank, seven African regional economic communities, the World Trade Organisation, 11 member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the African Union (AU) and the Nepad Secretariat.

The Forum is meant to bring about a new constructive dialogue between Africa and donor countries. Hespina Rukato, a member of the Nepad Secretariat, said 'the discussions were very positive, and will be continued in subsequent meetings.' The draft report of the two-day closed conference, obtained by *eAfrica*, characterises the Forum as 'not a pledging vehicle, but an action-oriented body' to help set priorities and assess progress. But beyond a pledge to reconvene the Forum in October 2004 in Washington, little evidence of decisiveness emerged from the meeting. A Western diplomat who attended the Maputo talks admitted that 'time was too short to move the issues forward in any meaningful way. A more focused agenda is necessary.'

Beyond dialogue, the Forum highlighted changing attitudes toward Nepad by developed countries. Donors expressed continued support for Nepad but also growing impatience to see concrete

results. "Something concrete really has to emerge [from Nepad] now," said another Western diplomat.

Several donor representatives told *eAfrica* they were concerned that the Nepad Secretariat was not operating with a sound business plan, the lack of which puts future funding at risk. Already some donors are preparing to reduce core funding for the Secretariat's day-to-day operations and move it toward funding of programmes.

Donors said they believed the successful implementation of the African Peer Review Mechanism was key to long-term donor support to Nepad. 'The APF should ensure a new dynamic,' one Western diplomat said.

Privately donors and diplomats also expressed concern over plans to move the Nepad Secretariat out of South Africa to the AU headquarters in Ethiopia in two years. "Integration of Nepad into non-existing structures might not benefit Nepad. We certainly do not need more bureaucracy," a diplomat noted.

Donor leverage seems crucial to Nepad's effectiveness. At the G-8 summit in Evian, France, in June 2003, the peer review process seemed in danger of stalling before it started. 'The G-8 forced the appointment of the panel,' said Chris Stals, a member of the APRM Panel of Eminent Persons. 'The APRM was the first item on the agenda in Evian. Luckily, the African heads of state had almost reached the final selection stage. I was called in the middle of the night and told I was on the panel.'

For the foreseeable future, there is little danger that Nepad will fall off the global radar screen. The G-8 Africa Action Plan ensures that the continent's challenges will stay on the agenda of the world's largest industrialised nations at

least through 2005.

The Africa Commission, set up by British prime minister Tony Blair to find answers to the continent's recurring development problems, was a topic of concern. British overseas development minister Hilary Benn attempted to allay fears that the establishment of the commission could be construed as a vote of no-confidence in Nepad.

Substantially, the Forum managed to make some progress on the Nepad agenda. It acknowledged 'the increasingly complicated nature of African conflicts' and 're-iterated the need for Africa's development partners to be more supportive of Africa's efforts' to establish early conflict warning and response systems and to carry out post-conflict reconstruction.

The Maputo talks also 'recognised the need for high-level leadership from Africa in addressing AIDS' and acknowledged that 'unless resources were scaled up, Africa would not meet [globally set] targets for reducing the HIV/AIDS burden and new infections.'

The draft report notes 'the need to focus efforts on the twin areas of trade and financing for development, particularly in the area of agriculture' and the need to develop a strategy to nurture public-private partnerships to enhance the private sector's contribution to the African economy.

With regard to food security, the Forum applauded efforts by African governments to increase their agriculture budgets and encouraged international research initiatives to improve crop yields in Africa.

In addition to peace and security and food security, the APF meeting in October will focus on institutional capacity building, debt negotiations and trade and market access. — **Michael van Winden**

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Never-Ending War Of Robert Gabriel Mugabe

24 years later, Zimbabwe's Big Man jousts with phantoms from a struggle few can remember

ON MARCH 21 the state-run *Herald Newspaper* ran a lengthy analysis explaining why Zimbabwe's ruling party beat its rival, the Movement for Democratic Change, in a by-election in Zengeza township, one of the opposition's urban strongholds in Harare.

With characteristic zeal, the newspaper stated: 'African liberation movements which freed people from the yoke of imperialism and colonialism would always get support from the people and that, in Zimbabwe's case, Zanu-PF has that solid track record.'

Political parties justify their claim to power in different ways. Some promote a vision, others recite accomplishments in office. African liberation movements often evoke the struggle they waged against foreign or minority oppression, especially when they have been in office too long to remember the ideals they once espoused or can no longer defend the record they have built.

But when evocation becomes exploitation, the present becomes captive to the past. The manipulation of waning collective memory — the re-asserting of the affirmative, inclusive aspirations of the struggle as exclusive nationalism for party political gain in societies where the majority were born after independence — poses one of the greatest threats to democratic governance and economic development in southern Africa and, consequently, the continent.

Although this conflict between the ideals of the struggle and their post-liberation interpretation influences

the political and economic dialogue in Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa, it is nowhere more extreme than in Zimbabwe, where the descent into violent political and economic disintegration provides a case study in what happens when a liberation movement goes from the struggle to the State House and fails to adapt from an essentially military-command paradigm to a democratic one.

In the lexicon of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, the struggle has become justification for every breach of the hopes of the fighters who gave or risked

... IN OUR LAND, BULLETS ARE BEGINNING TO FLOWER

their lives to free their people: Every threat to the party's power is external or externally imposed, and every rumble of popular discontent is justification for permanent mobilisation.

'Mugabe — and Zanu-PF *is* Mugabe — uses the rhetoric of the revolution to excuse repression,' said Wilfred Mhanda, second in command of Zanu-PF's military wing in the mid-1970s. 'We are told we are in a state of war. We are not in a state of war.'

In the Southern autumn of 2000, Zimbabwe's characteristic calm unraveled in a battle for land. Stung by his first defeat at the polls — the rejection of his draft constitution in a national referendum — Mugabe unleashed veterans of the liberation war to achieve

by violence what he attempted to codify in law, namely the acquisition of white-owned land without compensation.

The ensuing four years would witness the rapid unraveling of all democratic practice. White commercial farmers and the large community of black labourers they employed were brutalised and run off nearly 11 million hectares of productive land. Courts were purged of nearly all jurists found unsympathetic to the government. The foreign media was barred and the domestic media placed under unprecedented restrictions. Two national elections were disrupted by violence and extensive fraud. Food aid was manipulated for political gain. And militant cadres of conscripted and coerced youth were deployed to conduct a rolling campaign of intimidation.

Today, inflation chases 600%; eight of every 10 working-age Zimbabweans cannot find a job; agricultural production has fallen dramatically and nearly half the population faces persistent malnutrition and risk of starvation.

In justifying its political course, Zimbabwe's ruling class has made two key assertions with increasingly militancy: first, that the struggle against minority rule in the 1960s and 1970s was about taking back land expropriated by white settlers; and second, that Britain, as the former colonial power, has actively prevented the government's attempts to redistribute that land more equitably.

Both claims are true — up to a point. Land was indeed a motivating factor in the liberation struggle, and Britain has

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been reluctant to finance land reform (exemplified most notably during the 1979 independence negotiations at Lancaster House when London refused to make any specific monetary commitments).

But these claims are also highly selective. The language of the struggle, captured most eloquently in freedom songs, was inherently inclusive: universal education, free health care, and land for all. Zanu-PF's 1980 election manifesto enshrined national democratic rights, freedom of the press — in essence, the redistribution of opportunity.

The first few years of majority rule reflected these imperatives. Mugabe's aggressive education reforms created Africa's most literate society in one generation. Life expectancy rose and infant mortality fell as access to health care expanded. Reconciliation was a keynote of governance. Mugabe's first minister of agriculture was a white man — a deliberate gesture to reassure commercial farmers, the backbone of the economy, that their place was secure.

Those gains, while significant, also masked early signs of Zanu-PF's discomfort with democratic practice. Mugabe's preoccupation with consolidating power and eliminating enemies, which characterised Zanu-PF's internal dynamics during the struggle, continued after independence. The new elite's quest for personal gain undermined the pursuit of social change. Importantly, Zimbabwe's current 'permanent crisis,' as one Western diplomat described it, was precipitated by the emergence of the first real threat to Mugabe's monopoly on power.

'The struggles of the year 2000 — the farm occupation, the protests over the constitution, the violence before and after the election, to name but a few — are related to the current power elite's definition and understanding of the meaning of the struggle for independence,' concluded the

war historian Josephine Nhongo-Simbanegavi in her recent work on Zanu-PF's military wing entitled *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*.

Like 50,000 other young men and women from her generation, William Bango and Freedom Nyamubaya crossed the border into Mozambique to take up arms. She was 14 years old at the time; he was scarcely older. They were motivated — as they all were — by their deep anger at the injustices of minority rule and longed to help secure free education, health care, better living

standards and democratic freedoms.

Both paid prices for their sacrifices. Asked what it was like to be on the front, fighting against the better armed Rhodesian army, Nyamubaya replied, 'wonderful. At the back we got raped.' Bango, meanwhile, spent three years in a Rhodesian prison.

When the war was over, they both turned their energies toward building the society they imagined. Nyamubaya went into development work with non-governmental organisations and bought a small game farm. Bango, better educated than most of Mugabe's

They Once Called Mandela a Terrorist

WHAT'S the difference between a liberation movement and a band of terrorists? The simple answer — the one that most often influences policy decisions — is point of view. Consider the African National Congress (ANC). During the long struggle against apartheid, what the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) saw as a liberation movement, the racist minority government of South Africa labeled as terrorists. Ask one person in Washington and another in Riyadh today about Al Qaeda and you're bound to get the same diversity of opinion.

But political agendas and legal definitions are two different things, and the distinctions matter. As defined by the OAU, national liberation movements are the organisations that fought for freedom from colonialism or apartheid: Swapo in Namibia; the MPLA in Angola; Frelimo in Mozambique; Zanu and Zapu in Zimbabwe; Kanu in Kenya; and the ANC. Armed oppositions that fought against their own repressive regimes — such as Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front — do not meet this definition.

The 1960 UN Declaration on Decolonisation granted peoples the right to self-determination if they did not have their own state or were under colonial domination, alien occupation or racist rule. This right did not automatically legitimise violent means (or even secession), but subsequent UN General

Assembly resolutions and declarations did condone the waging of armed struggles by recognised liberation movements. The UN also granted observer status to a number of liberation movements in the General Assembly.

Defining terrorism is more problematic. Despite several international conventions against terrorism, there is, as yet, no agreement on what the term refers to. Scholars have found no less than 109 definitions used from 1936 to 1981. The one used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example, contains three elements: illegal use of force; intention to intimidate or coerce; and underlying political or social motives.

Apply this definition to the ANC or Zanu-PF and the difficulty of distinguishing between terrorist groups and liberation movements becomes apparent.

The Security Council has never legitimised the use of force by any liberation movement, but it does have the authority to decide when force is legal under international law. Even then, however, not all acts committed in the course of an internationally recognised armed struggle would automatically be acceptable. Freedom fighters waging just wars still commit atrocities. Does that make them terrorists?

Legally, no. But practically, the answer often depends on who holds the power to affix the label. — Michael van Winden

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combatants, went to work for the state-owned Herald newspaper.

In time, both became disillusioned. Although Mugabe expanded health care and opened the doors to education, the new signs of repression soon became impossible to dismiss. Immediately after independence, the so-called crisis of expectation strikes of teachers and nurses were brutally suppressed by the edgy new government and within three years the leadership of the Zimbabwe African People's Union — Zanu-PF's partner in the government of national unity — had been arrested. Its leader, Joshua Nkomo, was forced into exile. The national army was turned on civilians in a campaign of homicidal intimidation in Zapu's Matabeleland stronghold in the south. The reign of terror left up to 20,000 dead.

The death penalty, meanwhile, was reinstated and Rhodesian security legislation preserved. A state of emergency allowed for detention without trial. A few months of relative post-independence press freedom ended as editors were sacked one after another and journalists were deported.

By 1987, Mugabe had crushed and consumed all opposition and changed the constitution to make himself executive president with expanded and consolidated powers. Corruption had spread through the ranks of Zanu-PF, despite a Leadership Code forbidding wealth accumulation, and some of the best and brightest from the liberation struggle began leaving the country.

As the flames of democracy were snuffed out, the West, and particularly the former colonial power, Britain, watched silently. 'We had freedom, briefly, in 1980, at independence, but instead of expanding, it diminished, until today we have virtually no space at all,' said political analyst Brian Raftopoulos at a small public meeting in late April.

Frustrated by eroding press freedoms, Bango set off to help launch a feisty

independent newspaper in 1999. In its brief four-year life, the Daily News was bombed and banned and ultimately shut down by the state. Now Bango works as a personal assistant to opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

'Democracy can be difficult for people involved in a liberation struggle,' he said. 'Because of the way we lived at that time and the suspicions of the time, challenges to the leadership even long after the war ended are used to present our problems as an extension of the war. We still use all the slogans. The struggle continues. "A luta continua" doesn't allow us to recognise that peace is possible. We see enemies all over the place, and we are made to believe we are permanently under attack.'

Nyamubaya now lives in a small town 60 kms southeast of Harare. 'We never demobilised,' she lamented.

NO WEAPON CAN DEFEAT A PEOPLE DECIDED TO BE FREE

Unlike South Africa's African National Congress, which was a consensus-oriented movement that incorporated an armed component firmly under its central command structures as a means to force the enemy to the table, Zanu-PF was by nature a guerrilla movement that saw warfare as the primary means of achieving its objectives.

Consequently, while democratic nationalism was its stated ideal, democracy was never its culture. 'It was always going to be difficult to move from the commandist political culture of the time to one of consultation and accountability,' said Paul Themba-Nyathi, a member of Zapu's military wing who spent the last three years of the liberation war in prison.

Now spokesman for the opposition MDC, Themba-Nyathi worked in the early years of independence on the only serious project to rehabilitate and reintegrate former guerrillas into

a changing society where education — which few had — was the new requirement for survival.

'The guerrilla forces tended to be very secretive and any discourse was difficult,' he said. 'It was easier for us than for those in Zanu-PF [Zanu-PF's military wing] because we were not only a guerrilla force. We had a political leadership which encouraged space for discourse. In the case of the Zanu-PF leadership and its reliance almost totally on its guerrilla forces, a culture of tolerance and political pluralism did not develop.' After independence, 'when corruption began ... those that had power protected their gains at all costs, and the combination of corruption and a commandist culture is a lethal combination.'

Despite Mugabe's relentless pursuit in building a one-party state in the early years of independence, he did allow spectacular developments in the ministries of education and health. Renowned educationalist Heather Benoyi, now developing education strategies in Sudan and other troubled regions of Africa, remembers the first years of independence with affection.

'We were so motivated to redress the imbalances, we were caught up in the joy of liberation, and worked night and day,' she said. 'We developed the new curriculum and produced cost-effective books in what we believed was going to be an egalitarian society. Our minister, Dzingai Mutumbuka, and later Fay Chung, came directly from the liberation struggle, and at least in education, in the early years, we managed very well.'

But by as early as March 1981, the signs of internal rot were already apparent. Addressing a group of Jesuits on the 13th of that month, Chung lamented the continuation of war-time practices in government. Related in Norma Kriger's study *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, Chung said her colleagues often displayed an attitude

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of entitlement and impunity. 'If refugee children had no school,' for example, 'why couldn't the ministry of education just take a "white" school and give it to them?' The mentality of 'requisitioning without rendering any account' would emerge repeatedly in Mugabe's government.

Mutumbuka and Chung ultimately left, disillusioned, to work overseas.

Zanu-PF's past turned out to be Zimbabwe's prologue. Wilfred Mhanda is the most senior war veteran ever to turn his back on the movement he served. During the struggle, when it was based in Mozambique, he said, Zanla was unanswerable to any code of law. 'We were a state within a state,' he said. 'There was no democracy, especially in the latter stages when we absorbed a culture of intolerance. We had a special extra-legal status. The corruption started there. Drugs, money — anything that could be stolen, was stolen. There was never any internal democracy in Zanla.'

At one point during the war, a group of Zanla soldiers tried to incorporate democratic reforms into the movement. 'Their attempt to create a political forum held great potential to reduce indiscipline,' observed Nhongo-Simbanegavi. 'Yet the old leadership of Zanu descended heavily on these attempts and crushed them indiscriminately. Indoc-trination replaced free thinking

... and most efforts were devoted to weeding out those who had supported the (Marxist) workers.'

That commandist, top-down culture still pervades Zanu-PF. Within the Central Intelligence Organisation, the shadowy and intimidating government cell that monitors any and all potential threats to Mugabe's monopoly on power, the odd member willing to speak secretly with journalists say that as much effort goes

into spying on Zanu-PF leaders as it does on civil society and the opposition.

'Out of the liberation struggle we had soldiers used to following commands and unable to manage within a democracy, so we had this culture of intolerance,' said Lovemore Matomba, president of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. 'They failed to accept that things do change and that a set of standards was necessary — that divergence of views and values needed to be accepted and tolerated.'

Mugabe's exploitation of the land issue during the past four years was clearly tactical. The MDC was only four months old when it handed Mugabe his first defeat, and its base of support was significant. Tsvangirai had been secretary-general of the congress of trade unions. The agricultural sector — importantly, blacks as well as whites — supported the new party. Mugabe understood the threat.

'A key concern for authoritarianism is where does the support of the peasants lie,' said Moeletsi Mbeki, a political observer in South Africa. 'Mugabe's primary purpose in land reform was to destroy the base of farm workers — to disenfranchise that bloc.'

'A key concern for authoritarianism is where does the support of the peasants lie?'

Mugabe roused the dormant liberation war structures, mobilising a small and disgruntled constituency — the bona fide war veterans he had neglected for the better part of two decades — around the emotionally volatile issue. Two decades after independence, how many could recall the true ideals of the struggle? Most of the population today is 'free born.' Even some of Mugabe's most trusted contemporary aides played little or no part in the fight against colonialism.

'Even some of Mugabe's most trusted aides played little or no part in the fight against colonialism'

Within days, some 2,000 war vets and a growing cadre of agitated 'free borns' — youths born after independence — began taking 11 million hectares of white-owned commercial farmland by force, motivated by Mugabe to 'finish' the revolution.

'The war veterans who responded to the call had been left out of the economy,' Bango said. 'You could see them selling razor blades at the railway station in Harare. They had little education before they went to war and little

opportunity to catch up afterwards. So when land was offered, they went.'

The third Chimurenga — the current land campaign, as it is called by the government in revolutionary terms — has been far more successful in driving the declared enemy, whites, off the land than were formal hostilities two decades earlier. In the effort, Zanu-PF marshaled the police, the army, the courts, parliament, and the state media to silence dissent, terrorise the population and stave off the emergence of the first post-liberation social democratic party in southern Africa.

Speaking with the Canadian Academic Richard Saunders in the 1990s, Reg Matchaba-Hove, the former chairman of ZimRights, a human rights organisation, said: 'In the early years of independence there was that euphoria, and I think we allowed the leadership to do as they pleased. We gave them the benefit of the doubt and we thought if they made mistakes they were minor mistakes; after all, we had peace, stability and independence.'

Today, the price of that complicity is clear. Ironically, there are now more Zimbabweans in exile — even taking into consideration population growth — than at independence, when the UN High Commissioner for Refugees repatriated a triumphant, joyful 1.2 million home. — Peta Thornycroft

SPECIAL FEATURE

No Comment – But Please, That's Off the Record

Poor communications strategies undermine the credibility of African governments

AFRICAN states pour billions of dollars into information and communications technology on the assumption that being fit for globalisation requires a high-fibre-optic diet. But among the blizzard of e-governance and e-development initiatives, African leaders seem to have overlooked a critical part of putting out the message: A fistful of giga-bytes still isn't worth a well-timed sound bite.

'In Africa, in general, government media liaison officers just don't understand the media,' said Tawana Kupe, director of the Media Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. 'They are not contactable and have no authority to speak. They miss news deadlines and don't understand how news cycles work. They see the press as enemies and don't realise how much journalists depend on their sources and that access can yield more positive coverage. We still largely follow the propaganda-mongering ministry of information system.'

Across Africa, communication and public relations departments at both the national and regional levels are under-resourced and staffed with people who often display little media savvy or an appreciation for the stakes involved.

Many public officials ignore what the media need most: accountable, accessible spokespersons with a sound communication strategy. Suspicion of journalists runs high among African politicians, and communicators are often restrained from doing their jobs by the officials they represent.

'I was impressed with the South African set-up when I arrived here five years ago,' said Michael Dynes of the *Times of London*. 'I registered with

the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), got all the contact lists and was promised access to ministers and appointments. But slowly the bitter reality dawns. It is virtually impossible to get a reply from a government spokesman within one or two hours. It's extremely frustrating. Stories break and you can never get the facts checked or a contrary viewpoint.'

Among the most reticent governing parties are those that emerged from freedom struggles. Formerly underground organisations that operated amid tremendous repression and infiltration by government agents, few adapt well to the new imperatives of openness and transparency once they become ruling

VICTORY TO THE PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA!

parties of aspiring democracies.

'Liberation movements were very suspicious of open communication,' Kupe said. 'There was the constant threat and fear of infiltration. Speaking off the cuff was discouraged and renegades were forced to publicly recant statements. Communication was a way of applying cohesion to a common agenda. Also remember that in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, governments came to power with huge mandates and political capital – this creates a certain arrogance.'

Some governments have tried to loosen their tongues. In 2001, incoming Ghanaian President John Kufuor appointed seasoned journalist Elizabeth Ohene as his chief spokesperson. In her

prestigious 30-year career, she worked as editor of Ghana's national *Daily Graphic* newspaper before spending 14 years in exile with the BBC in London.

But many journalists found her to be abrasive, and she was reportedly frustrated by her department's meagre resources. After five months, Ohene was redeployed as minister of state for tertiary education.

More often, however, governments see the media as threats. In South Africa, the GCIS *Government Communicators' Handbook*, indicatively states: 'While, generally, the media agenda has been in some respects consistent with the positive national mood, it has tended to be more narrowly negative and heavily weighted towards an oppositional perspective. To a greater extent, this has been a manifestation of a mindset rather than judgment based on concrete issues.'

All too often, journalists based in South Africa say, government 'media liaison officers' are evasive and irritable, responding to calls as if convinced that the media cannot transmit undistorted messages.

'I pick up elements of paranoia about the media from government,' Dynes said. 'They feel the foreign media especially is out to get them and we only report the negative. But the main players are simply never available. They're shooting themselves in the foot with this approach.'

The same problems occur at the regional level. In calls to the secretariats of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) and the African Union, none of the official spokespersons were available. E-mails went unanswered, calls were seldom

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returned. One press secretary refused to divulge her surname for fear of being quoted. If websites exist, they are often frustrating labyrinths or empty vessels. The internet home of the Southern African Development Community, for example, provides neither phone numbers nor an e-mail address for the organisation's public relations officer. When that person, Esther Kanaimba, was finally reached, she simply replied that 'we are working on a communications strategy.'

It took the Belgian government years of offering before SADC officials finally sat down to discuss the \$3 million proposal to develop a communications strategy. 'Communication was just never a priority,' said Guy Rayee, first secretary at the Belgian Embassy in Pretoria. 'It's all very nice to have common objectives and the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan, but this needs publicity and communication.'

The Nepad website sends visitors wandering through haphazardly arranged information, out-of-date contact details and uninformative progress reports on Nepad projects. Sponsors' logos dominate the screen. The African Union website, meanwhile, was shut down for several months preceding the organisation's second summit last year in Maputo because the maintenance contract on the site was allowed to lapse.

Typically, outside forces were blamed. 'My frustration here is that as soon as we are ready to take off with a concrete communication plan for Africa, a saboteur comes in from an unknown location and destroys our foundation,' said Desmond Orjiako, the AU communication officer. 'I am now begging the almighty God to intervene to save Africa from unnecessary embarrassment, particularly with regard to the AU website.'

When later pressed to elaborate, Orjiako could not explain his own statement.
— Steven Gruz

How to Return A Phone Call

Journalists can't present government's side of the story without asking questions. Too often though governments interpret inquiry as opposition and act to block rather than assist the journalists who are necessary adjuncts to democracy.

No responsible journalist will surrender his scepticism, but every responsible journalist tries to get all sides of a story. When public officials refuse to answer media questions, they deny the media one of the critical elements they need to produce balanced coverage. The result is often lopsided or inaccurate reporting or — on the government's side — embarrassment and cover ups.

Smart press secretaries don't tell state secrets, but they do provide enough information to convey the positions and policies of the officials they represent. The following recommendations are drawn from interviews with professional communicators and a booklet from the US Department of State entitled *A Responsible Press Office: An insider's guide*.

■ **Craft a communication plan.** Methodically identify key messages, target recipients and the most appropriate media to transmit them. Prioritise what government is going to say on any given day and prevent major announcements by ministers from clashing during any one day's news cycle. Dull, formulaic communiqués fail to capture or inspire audiences. Be proactive and anticipate events; don't be continually reactive and defensive. Every message to the public should answer the Five Ws: who, what, when, where and why.

■ **Make peace with the media.** In democratic societies, the people have the right to information and journalists and politicians have a duty to deliver it. Both sides must learn to coexist within an inherently adversarial relationship. They need to develop professional but personal relationships and respect each others' needs and mandates. Interaction between public officials and the media should be symbiotic — government needs the media to transmit messages and the media needs the government to explain their actions and objectives. Access enhances accuracy.

■ **Trust and train the talkers.** Communicators should have the confidence of the people they represent. They must be intimately involved in the decision-making process. Politicians need to empower their spokespersons. Press officers deserve rigorous training and thorough daily briefings. Essential attributes for effective communicators include affability, approachability and availability.

■ **Follow the golden rules.** Communicators must always be honest and accurate to maintain their credibility. Always try to return journalists' phone calls and respect their deadlines. Communicators should never lie or speculate. Consider everything as 'on the record'. Correct any mistakes instantly. Admit not knowing an answer and commit to finding the information.

■ **Be ready for crises.** Every organisation must have a plan for when the worst happens. If there is bad news, don't cover it up, lie or go silent. Remember Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky: It's going to get out eventually. Engage the press early. Acknowledge the problem and outline measures being taken to address it. Leaders should deliver bad news first, fast and in person. Provide regular updates.

■ **Improve internet interaction.** Websites should provide usable current information, updated contact details and well-organised documentation. Regular maintenance is crucial.

■ **Put some money where the mouth-piece is.** Effective communication requires sufficient investment to retain professional, articulate staff as well as to develop first-class promotional material. Governments and institutions can no longer afford to treat their PR and communications departments as peripheral.

■ **Mix in a little marketing.** Much of communication entails selling something, including ideas, policies and opportunities. The purchasers need to be persuaded to buy — and sufficiently satisfied with the product to buy it again. Nepad, for example, is in essence the brand name for the 'New, Improved Africa.' If political actions contradict the message, the buyer is likely to walk. — Steven Gruz

Who Owns the Fruits Of the Struggle to be Free?

'Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic and the nation is demobilised through a rapid movement of decolonisation, the people have the time to see that the liberation has been the business of each and that the leader has no special merit.... They [are] jealous of the results of their action and take good care not to place their future, their destiny or the fate of their country in the hands of a living god.... From now on the demagogues, the opportunists and the magicians have a difficult task. The action which has thrown them into hand-to-hand struggle confers upon the masses a voracious taste for the concrete. The attempt at mystification becomes ... practically impossible.'—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

At the time Fanon wrote his seminal work on the African struggle for freedom, in 1961, African liberation from European colonialism was just becoming a reality.

In Africa, countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Guinea, Cameroon, Somalia, Burkina Faso (then still known as Upper Volta) and Senegal had, through their own political emancipations, ushered into being the independence era by 1960. Others were to follow in the ensuing years.

South Africa, of course, was heading in the opposite direction. Its apartheid rulers were determined to block off any possibility of native self-determination. As Kenya was emerging from colonial rule, South Africa was spiralling into deeper repression, with its key liberation leaders being incarcerated, exiled, banned or killed off for the better part of the next three decades.

Liberation movements in Asia and Latin America gave continuous inspiration to Africa's nascent freedom movements. The Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and others gave a sense of hope that self-determination was a practical possibility.

Even the images of failure and setback, such as the imprisonment of the Rivonia trialists in South Africa, inspired liberation movements elsewhere on the continent and across the world. The face of Nelson Mandela became a rallying point for freedom fighters in Zimbabwe, Angola, Vietnam, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and as far away as East Timor and Chile.

The agenda of worldwide revolution was clearly defined. Or was it? I came

If you were there you know what I am talking about. Colonialism faded, but imperialism never let its hands off Africa. To this day it is questionable whether it has done so.

And how do we now explain the seeming transformation of anti-colonial fighters in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Algeria, Tanzania, Ethiopia – and possibly now even South Africa – into appeasers of imperialism and globalisation? How do we, the people of Africa, respond when our liberation leaders become oppressors in the old, colonially inspired mould?

How can we now justify Frantz Fanon's assertion that the ordinary people of Africa, having selflessly followed their leaders in the freedom struggle, would be 'jealous of the results of their action and take good care not to place their future, their destiny or the fate of their country in the hands of a living god'?

What rights and freedoms do Africans actually enjoy 40 years down the line? How many 'living gods' have been imposed on them in the course of those liberation struggles – 'living gods' they are now faced with the formidable task of dislodging? To what extent is freedom still a chimera for the ordinary African?

The conundrum of transforming liberation theology into meaningful, secular, democratic practice is probably as old as human history. Both the French and American revolutions, for example, struggled with this problem. In the case of France, the revolutionary

**OUR HISTORY DID NOT BEGIN IN CHAINS
AND IT WILL NOT END IN CHAINS**

of age during that period. As a student in southern Africa in the 1960s and '70s, I could not help being close to the unfolding drama of world revolution.

Africa was rapidly changing, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The US pursued its imperialist interests in Africa through its coddling of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire and Jonas Savimbi in Angola. Britain waffled sordidly as Ian Smith launched his Unilateral Declaration of Independence. French President Giscard d'Estaing, more concerned about his hunting privileges than the condition of France's former colonies, was Jean-Bedel Bokassa's chief sponsor in turning the Central African Republic into the farcical Central African Empire.

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ideals of *liberté, égalité et fraternité* clashed with the country's colonial enterprise, particularly in the face of the successful slave revolts in Haiti and elsewhere. The founding fathers of the United States of America, declaring with revolutionary zeal that 'all men are created equal', carried on denying the humanity of slaves of African origin.

Post-colonial Africa has been no less plagued by these contradictions. Forty years may be too short a period in which to resolve the conundrum of liberation in a landscape defined by the arbitrary lines of nationality imposed by foreign oppressors. But we should still explore the questions implied by liberation.

What happens when the guerrillas trade their fatigues and AK-47s for woollen suits and government suites?

Haiti rapidly degenerated into anarchy and chaos after the first heady days of a hard won, bloody victory against the colonising power. Today, two centuries later, no amount of pageantry can obscure the successive failures of Haiti's leaders to deliver on the revolution's promises of common wealth and equal opportunity. Likewise, the noble principles of liberation, so fiercely espoused from the African bush, have rapidly evaporated in the post-colonial corridors of power.

Kenya's Mau Mau movement brought to power a kleptocracy whose ravages are only now, and with painful slowness, beginning to

be reversed through the gradual arrival of a kind of democracy. Ordinary Namibians threw themselves into what was to become one of the most brutal of anti-imperialist wars, only to find themselves subjugated under a narrow dictatorship when it was all over.

And then there is Zimbabwe, where



Robert Mugabe led his country to independence and Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison and then led South Africa as the first democratically elected president.

ethnic cleansing began almost as soon as the ink was dry on the declaration of independence. A successful economy was systematically dismantled after a promising start. Rape camps, in service of a corrupt ruling party, have replaced the classrooms that once embodied the liberation aspiration of universal education.

Who owns the liberation movement? It is a question that begs to be answered in South Africa as much as anywhere else.

'What happens when guerillas trade their fatigues and AK-47s for woollen suits and government suites?'

South Africa is perhaps exceptional in that there have not been cases of open abuse of power by the ruling party. There have been no Matabeleland massacres. While we continue to be plagued

by corruption scandals and all sorts of inscrutable political intrigues, the blatant pocketing of national resources by leading figures and their families cannot be said to be happening on the scale of Angola or Kenya.

Not yet, anyway. South Africa is the dream all of Africa wants to be able

to look up to. True, we have had, and continue to have, the personification of Fanon's 'living god' in the person of Nelson Mandela. Although some of his political rivals (even within the African National Congress) might be scandalised by this, it is not an issue for the ordinary South African. On the wider continent, and in the world at large, this 'living god' is considered to be one of our greatest assets. 'Living gods' are not necessarily such a bad thing — as long as they behave.

On the surface, it might appear that the South African liberation movement has successfully turned itself into a political party that represents the aspirations of the majority. But with the ANC now embarking on a third five-year term in power with its largest majority yet, the question of ownership still remains. The party's list of leading members is strikingly predictable. New faces and new voices are howled down if they do not toe the party line. Allegations of corruption in high places are all too often sidestepped in sideshows of political theatre called commissions of inquiry.

Is this democracy? The imperatives of the struggle for liberation imposed a certain kind of forced discipline, where difficult questions went unanswered. Although the paradigm has now changed, the internal *modus operandi* of the party manifestly has not.

Look at what democracy is taken to mean in relatively advanced societies like the US where, at least since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, fear has eroded tolerance and respect for open debate and those who ask questions are denounced as unpatriotic.

Can Africa be expected to do much better? For our own sakes, we had better persevere toward a condition of governance where the higher principles of liberation prevail irrespective of the identity of those in power. — **John Matshikiza, columnist for South Africa's *Mail & Guardian***

Psst... Mind the Sell-by Date

ON THE euphoric eve of their independence, Zimbabweans queued enthusiastically to cast their ballots for change. Sixteen years later, turnout at the polls had plummeted from 95% to just 32%, according to the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa. Then, in 2000, the trend reversed. Participation at the polls rose progressively, starting with a referendum on a draft constitution and culminating two years later in mile-long lines outside ballot stations in the 2002 presidential elections.

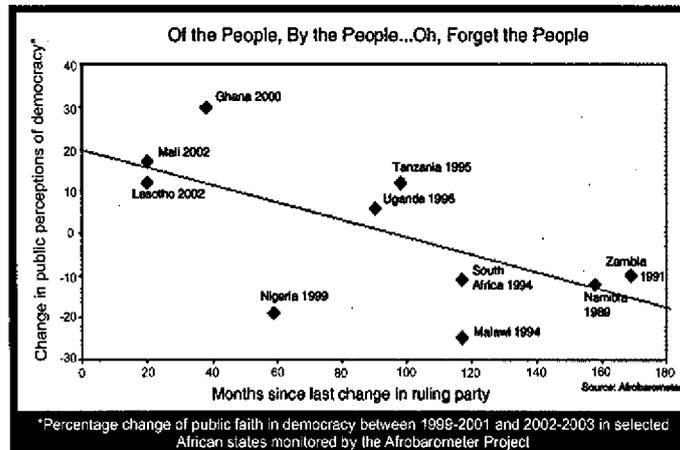
What caused the shift? The emergence of a viable opposition, offering weary voters a prospect for change after 22 years of rule by the same party.

Voting patterns in Zimbabwe illustrate the bad news and the good news about democracy in Africa. The longer a party governs, the more disillusioned the polity becomes. But a change in the ruling party or the emergence of a viable opposition restores public trust in democracy.

This is the key conclusion of *Democracy and Electoral Alternation: Evolving African Attitudes*, a study released by the Afrobarometer Project in April 2004. 'The perceived extent of democracy declines with the passage of time since an electoral alternation (or, failing that, a multiparty transition),' it found. 'The more recent a turnover ... the more positive people feel about democracy.'

The Afrobarometer, a project of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, Ghana's Centre for Democratic Development and Michigan State University in the US, compared public opinion data about the demand for and supply of democracy in Africa over two periods of time: Round 1, involving 12 countries, from 1999-2001; and Round 2, involving 15 countries, from 2002-03.

Support for democracy as a political system rose by more than 10% in countries that had seen a change in ruling



party — Mali and Lesotho, for example — between the two rounds of study. But support declined in eight countries — including Tanzania, South Africa and Botswana — where no change occurred.

The largest increase in perception took place in Ghana, where satisfaction with democracy rose 18%. Transparent elections in 2000 ushered in a new ruling party, increasing popular support and patience for economic reforms.

Nigeria, meanwhile, marked the other extreme. Satisfaction with democracy fell from 84% in January 2000, shortly after civilian rule was reinstated, to 35% in October 2003. The report suggested that Nigerians were dismayed by President Olusegun Obasanjo's re-election.

The study found that African citizens are becoming more realistic about what democracies can accomplish: 'Perhaps they are recognising, in the aftermath of transition euphoria, that real world democracies will always have imperfections.' In Round 2, 37% of respondents characterised their system as 'a democracy, but with minor problems', whereas 27% of those surveyed in Round 1 thought they had 'full democracy.'

Countries with a recent smooth electoral change of government viewed problems with democracy as 'minor'. Conversely, in Malawi, President Bakili Muluzi's failed attempts at an unconstitutional third term, corruption charges and food

insecurity eroded the perceived extent of democracy by 24% from 1999 to 2003.

The study found that faith in democracy was a function of time lapsed since the most recent transition in government. It also concluded that political opinion in new African democracies evolves in a cycle. Introducing multiparty systems (even when transitions don't happen) tends to boost faith in democratic commitments. Support for democracy erodes, however,

as ruling parties become entrenched. The public trust in democracy can be revitalised when governments either improve or are replaced by the ballot, the study found.

'For a long-incumbent political party to be replaced at the polls, there are two essential elements,' said Prof. Robert Mattes, co-director of the Afrobarometer. 'You need deep dissatisfaction with government performance and a viable, electable alternative party. In Kenya, KANU's governance record was terrible, and NARC eventually emerged as a better option,' he said, referring to the Kenya African National Union, which ruled from 1963 to 2002, and the opposition party that eventually toppled it.

'In Zimbabwe, on the other hand, Zanu-PF was performing badly, but until the early 2000s, the MDC had not yet emerged as a viable alternative,' Mattes said, referring to Zimbabwe's ruling party and opposition. 'In Zimbabwe, the regime is clearly finished and only rigged results have saved them.'

After a decade in power, South Africa's African National Congress increased its majority in April 2004 elections. But voter turnout decreased 11% from the 1999 ballot — an indication of waning public enthusiasm for the democratic process. 'Many dissatisfied black voters just could not find another winning horse to back,' Mattes said. — Steven Gruzd