



## Dynamic Positioning for Survival in Political Marketing Warfare

### Mugabe's Manoeuvrings out of Crises in Zimbabwe

Ernest Kadembo

Department of Marketing, Huddersfield University Business School

University of Huddersfield, University Centre Oldham

Cromwell Street, OL1 1BB, Oldham, England, UK

Tel: 44 0161 213 5049 E-mail: e.m.kadembo@hud.ac.uk

#### Abstract

Zimbabwe became independent in 1980 after nearly a century of British colonial settler rule but soon deteriorated into chaos, repression and economic dilapidation under the leadership of Robert Mugabe.

Mugabe engineered a major constitutional amendment that saw him amass absolute power by creating an executive presidency as head of state in 1987. The opposition was tortured and stifled through outwitting and outmanoeuvring them and the ordinary people were intimidated and lived in fear. Despite the many crises faced, Robert Mugabe and Zanu PF continue to extend life in government and maintain a reasonable control of the country.

This paper concludes that topmost on the reasons for survival through crises is Mugabe's ingenuity in political marketing warfare and dynamic positioning of the party in accordance with the appealing themes and its systematic destruction of the opposition through a variety of tools, among them torture, blackmailing, propaganda and through instilling fear into the voters, creation of pseudo political parties, repressive constitutional amendments to ensure supreme power and dominance.

**Keywords:** Managing Crises, Marketing Warfare, Positioning, Political Cultures

#### 1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is a country of 390 580 square kilometres, about one-and-half times bigger than the UK with a population of about 12.3 million and located in Southern Africa. The country became independent from British rule in 1980 after being a colony for nearly one hundred years. The black majority of Zimbabwe had for a long time been subjected to systematic torture, repression and above all were a bunch of citizens without rights and were at the mercy of the ruling whites since colonisation in 1890 at the hands of the pioneer column. When freedom beamed upon Zimbabwe in 1980 and the promise for a bright future created a boost in the economy, education, infrastructures, international investment and the country was soon in the top league of fast developing countries.

Independence for Zimbabwe came through a negotiated settlement that was prompted by a ravaging war that had protracted over years. The government of then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe leader of Zanu (PF) the chief protagonist in the liberation struggle proclaimed Reconciliation of the former enemies and that created harmony in the country. But unfortunately another key player PF Zapu by design or by default came under heavy intimidation and systematic elimination from the political map of Zimbabwe. A dissident war ensued particularly around the Matebeleland to the West of the country where PF Zapu's support base was. As a result of the warring the government of Robert Mugabe sent the Korean trained fifth Brigade on a massacre mission and they killed an estimated 20 000 people. Ultimately the leadership of PF Zapu would buckle and join Zanu PF to form what today is the United Zanu PF in 1987 by signing what has come to be called the Unity Accord on 22 December 1987.

Zimbabwe pursued the Marxist Leninist brand of socialism that failed and had to embark on the IMF driven Structural Adjustment programmes that failed in the 1990s. Politically very little happened to counter the power and influence of Zanu PF until the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) sponsored the formation of the Movement of Democratic Change in September 1999.

In the main the political, economic and social landscape of Zimbabwe has faced an upheaval at some point over the last two decades but the staying power of Zanu PF albeit enduring a number of crises has been supreme even against the wishes of the majority of the people of Zimbabwe, internal resistance, international isolation and condemnation. The

use of the war rhetoric, torture of the opposition, manipulation of the laws and some hastily implemented empowerment programmes have anchored what in the main has been central to their survival strategy.

This paper seeks to firstly capture the various crises that have afflicted Zimbabwe and their impact on the government and the people. The paper will go on to evaluate the actions of the government and Zanu PF to avert the crises under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. Ultimately the paper would seek to identify the key to the dynamic positioning for survival over the years. Literature on the notion of positioning will be reviewed. The paper would seek to draw conclusions on the approaches and suggest whether or not such approaches could be generalised.

The study traces a number of key developments about Zimbabwe from materials already published, state publications, academic research, material on the web pages of the government, Zanu PF, MDC, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and any other politically inclined sources.

The paper would seek to demonstrate the observation by Butler and Collins (1996: p27) as stated:

*As marketing is increasingly adopted in politics, it will move beyond influencing only tactical matters of communication and presentation, and play a significant role in policy formulation and long-term direction. Ultimately, the "strategic marketing era" will take over from "selling" eras.*

The notion of the international product life cycle holds in political development as practices are passing from the developed world to the developing world. The fact that a number of the top brains from the developing world are obtaining their education in the west is having a big effect on both the style and expectations of the populace.

## **2. The Essence of Political Marketing and Positioning**

Yeshin (2004: p21) points out that "Positioning is the creation of an image for the product in order that consumers can clearly understand what the company provides relative to its competitors. ... but the single-minded requirement is to identify a long-term proposition which positions the brand in the minds of consumers." The war credentials that Zanu PF has are strategically manipulated to differentiate the party from other political parties be it with the aid of force and abuse of the state machinery. Any opposition to the order of Zanu PF is labelled as disrespect for the sacrifices those who perished made that Zimbabwe could be free. In the main Zanu PF symbolises freedom through force and that has been made to sink in the minds of the citizens. Upshaw (1995) cited in Yeshin (2004) suggests eight prompts for positioning as; feature driven positioning, problem-solution positioning, target-driven positioning, competitive-driven positioning, emotional or psychological positioning, benefit-driven positioning, aspirational positioning and value positioning. It is clear from the different approaches to positioning that there is a variety of options for positioning a good, service or a political party and it is clear Zanu PF in Zimbabwe has done its part in consolidating its hold on power. It would appear there is an emotional or psychological positioning strategy at play in instilling fear in the minds of voters and competitive-driven positioning like suggesting voting other political parties would be allowing or sanctioning the re-colonisation of Zimbabwe.

Belk(2000: p343 ) puts a chilling view across which applies to the political landscape of Zimbabwe in stating "As with slavery of old, a few Africans get rich at the expense of their brothers and sisters."

Politics is the business of manoeuvring for strategic national positions which win votes at national or local level of governance. Ultimately the thrust of the argument is that political parties sell ideas or solutions to national or local issues and require to position such ideas or solutions in a manner that appeals to the voters. In the same way as businesses position so that they can win in a competitive situation so should political parties. Political parties are brands and the positioning of the brand must be right in order to win.

Butler and Collins (1996: p 25) state that "Among political scientists, it seems to have been accepted that marketing is an activity which politicians may indulge in at their discretion and which is largely confined to that formal and stylized period called "the campaign". There appears to be little appreciation of marketing theory, especially at the strategic level. ....If the marketing paradigm is to influence another discipline, it must first be tendered in broad, generic terms, and address matters at the strategic level: progress is limited by picking partial and incomplete concepts from the marketing theory." They further argue that in most western democracies political markets are well developed and manifest characteristics of a mature market in commercial marketing where patterns of behaviour are more stable with little change from the norm. The contrast between the western and developing country political practices is interest as often there are serious counter accusations about veiled neocolonial machinations guised in lessons on democracy and aid. The paradox of the relationships between the West and the developing world is the readiness with which the developing world is prepared to take aid from the West but would not take any criticism on democracy. There is a clear philosophy of unity and solidarity in fighting western dogma on the part of the developing world, some of it very subjective. The case of Zimbabwe is typical in that despite the despicable acts of Robert Mugabe in extending his hegemony the African leadership's criticism has been lukewarm if not less than candid. In terms of the space for political marketing the colonial masters had a monopoly and Zanu PF replaced it with a pseudo free enterprise.

Butler and Collins (1996: p27) point that "In politics, the periodic nature of elections produces surges of strategic and tactical activity. ... Terms such as campaign, battle, attack and defence are common in business; such rhetoric is continually employed in politics also." Traditionally marketing has been a preserve of the commercial world and was not practiced in the non-profit sector. But with the increasing complexity of society and the increasing desire for better service in most spheres of service provision marketing has crept into almost every human exchange process. In the main it is no surprise that military terms are employed in marketing as the competitive agenda is confrontation minus the military carnage but commercial annihilation. However, the case for Mugabe's Zimbabwe embraces elements of the military carnage and the charm of marketing. Zanu PF's war credentials are employed to position that party as a revolutionary party but when losing ground torture is employed to eliminate or silence the opposition leaving a trail of property or human carnage. Butler and Collins (1996) employ the competitive positioning tool used by Kotler in marketing for political marketing. The four categories of competitors put forward by Kotler are leader, challenger, follower and nicher. These categories apply to the political scenario of Zimbabwe with Zanu PF being the leader and has maintained that position since independence in 1980 and continues to hold it.

### 2.1 Creating a brand

Political marketing necessitates the development of a strong brand that can win a share of the mind. In that respect Davis (1994: p43) states that

*A key- brand insurance strategy is a defensive strategy that should be as strong as a company's brand growth strategy growth strategy. It allows a brand team to go forward with its focus on building a brand market share....share of mind, while at the same time , while, at the same time preventing it from being caught short in internal or external forces threaten their brand's position*

While there is no systematic brand management within Zanu PF it is clear that the standing of the party is jealously guarded against attacks by other political parties and often the response is in the form of violence to stifle the growth of such influence. Any descending voices within Zanu PF are silenced through demotion from senior ranks or are simply paid to keep quiet. Even party primary elections are stage-managed to maintain a semblance of unity in the party and whip the membership into line. Factionalism has reared its ugly and strongly fought by the top leadership of the party to give an impression that Zanu PF is a united party.

### 3. Background to Zimbabwe's political crises

The state of Zimbabwe is cause for concern to the progressive communities the world over. The country is a worsening human carnage by the day and is in a state of paralysis with everything deteriorating and putting the whole population into desperation. The situation is better captured in the statement quoted from the website (<http://english.ohmynews.com/ArticleView/article>, accessed 11.04.07):

*International Monetary Fund (IMF) Deputy Director Siddharth Tiwari described the state of the economy in Zimbabwe as "tragic" and "grim." "It has faced three, four, five, six years of continuous output decline, a rise [in] prices at these rates over several years, increase in poverty, a decrease in public services, increasing HIV/AIDS rates. It is a tragic situation, frankly, and prospects are grim; they are not bright," he said* Wood (1997: p184) refers to the veteran Zimbabwean nationalist, Ndabaningi Sithole arguing that:

*Black capitalists, he asserts, are just as White capitalists. He sees it as a kind cannibalism or "dog eat dog" to which many of the independent states in Africa have been exposed and who now wish to harness the cooperative resources of their own people.* This is the big challenge for leadership in Africa, their concern is the control of resources more than creating wealth. In the main the whole political process is geared towards gaining influence and thereby accessing resources and ultimately give way to corrupt practices which have wrecked most economies in Africa not least Zimbabwe. At this point Zimbabwe is grappling with record inflation standing at more than 7 500% in peace time and an exchange rate of 1£UK: ZWD 3,5 million (1USD: ZWD 1,8 million) as of July 2007 on the black market. The official figures are meaningless as no one would use them for transacting.

Turner and Pedgeon (1997) cited in Shalif, Ahmadun and Said (2003: p29) state that "A crisis is an abnormal situation which presents some extraordinary, high risk..... The original meaning of the word "crisis" as a situation in which important decisions have to be made in a short time, rather than a disaster where management problems coped with under conditions of major technical emergency involving threats of injury and loss of life were discussed." Zimbabwe has experienced many situations where the end for the Zanu PF hegemony under Robert Gabriel Mugabe seemed inevitable but all the time they turned it around by coming up with a popular theme for rallying the nation. It would seem that the position taken by Davies and Waters (1998) and also by Darling (1994) as cited in Shalif, Ahmadun and Said (2003: p 29) that a crisis is "a turning point for better or worse", that is a situation that has reached a critical phase is consistent with the experience of Zimbabwe under the leadership of Robert Mugabe and his party, Zanu PF. The most fascinating issue is the ability to turn bad situations for good and survive, that has been typical of Zanu PF and what more is Mugabe's age of eighty-four and still ready to stand an election when he turns eighty-five in 2008. A lot of

analysts would argue that this is a ploy to die in office so that he will not stand trial in case he is ousted from power. The manipulations of the party and the state machinery for survival have been well orchestrated under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. Whether people agree or disagree with him is another issue but he has mastered the art of political positioning for survival from one crisis to another.

A lot of the crises that have afflicted Zimbabwe under Mugabe's rule have called into question not only his integrity but also his judgement but he has seen through it all albeit using some cruel and dirty tactics. Mugabe has won elections by announcing results against all predictions and shocked people, left them angry and then threatened them with all kinds of consequences. The international community has been left mesmerised by the bold declarations of statesmanship. The state machinery has been abused and the party structures have been denied democratic space in order to secure continued leadership. Many have been sidelined in the fight for dominance and Mugabe has always had a docile vice president or vice presidents at national level and in the party so that when they act they have no other thought other than serving the master. It is clear Mugabe is the master of brainwashing and a shrewd tactician.

A number of crises are going to be raised and evaluated in respect of how Zanu PF engineered its way out of the crisis and how it repositioned itself politically. When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 it positioned itself as a socialist state where the doctrine of scientific Leninist socialism would take root. This meant that the state would have a domineering hand in the creation and distribution of wealth. This was abandoned in 1990 after what turned out to be a failed experiment. A number of the subsequent problems the country faced were largely centred around the modelling of the governance of the country along a Marxist approach.

In this discussion a number of developments that plunged the country into disaster will be looked at and they will consider ideological blundering, Genocide of the Ndebeles, droughts, SAPs, land invasion, constitutional manipulation, election rigging, the trial of opposition leaders for treason, international isolation, destruction of the squatter structures in cities and the fall of the economy.

### *3.1 Genocide of the Ndebele people*

Zimbabwe's black population is dominated by the Shona and Ndebele tribes with the Shona being in the majority of about one to four. Prior to 1987 there were two dominant political parties split on tribal lines. Zanu PF then was a Shona party with PF Zapu the Ndebele. At the dawn of independence in 1980 Zanu PF on the election of a majority of 57 parliament seats and PF ZAPU 20 and the remaining three seats for elected members of parliament went to UANC led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa. The then prime minister Robert Mugabe brought in the main opposition PF Zapu led by Joshua Nkomo to join the government and form a government of national unity but this lasted only two years.

What followed after the first two years of independence was despicable. A guerrilla warfare ensued after the government claimed they had discovered arms at PF Zapu farms which resulted in PF Zapu walking out of government. PF Zapu were then booted out of the government, but a few of its top officials remained in the government and crossed the line. Zanu PF had managed to divide the party and it is debatable if arms were ever found on the farms.

Some former combatants from PF Zapu in the war of liberation picked up arms in 1982 and started a guerrilla war in the west of the country, and this prompted the government to send a marauding army, namely the fifth brigade trained by Koreans went on a mission to wipe out the dissident movement and its supporters. A dissident movement purportedly backed by PF Zapu prevailed largely in rural areas in the Matebeleland area to the west of Zimbabwe. The government then sent the "dogs of war", ie the fifth brigade a specially trained ruthless army on a mission to kill the dissidents and their supporters. This turned out to be an act of ethnic cleansing veiled as a military operation. The target of the massacre codenamed "*Gukurahundi*" (*clear out the chuff*) were the Ndebele people from where the leader of the main opposition one, Joshua Nkomo hailed from. It is estimated that about 20 000 people perished. Ultimately Joshua Nkomo had to escape disguised as a woman in order to serve his life. That practically weakened the party and provided Zanu PF with a strong ammunition for destroying the party and its leader, the propaganda machinery had a field day with Joshua Nkomo in exile and his party went into disarray.

### *3.2 ESAP*

In 1990 Zimbabwe embarked on the economic structural adjustment programme with disastrous effects (ESAP). The programme demanded that the government adjust to the World Bank and IMF conditionalities which meant that government had to cut subsidies to ailing companies, reduce social service, induce a more capitalist approach where people had to fork out money to access services. This was a painful process and Belk (2000: p341) could not have put it more emphatically in stating:

"The reforms mandated by World Bank imposed SAPs are extremely hard on Africans, but are regarded as a "penance" that must be paid for former "sins" of economic inefficiency and mismanagement if the "salvation" of a debt-free economy with higher growth rates is to be attained. While this "paradise" may seem distant or doubtful, "sinners" suffering from their "moral failings" must have "faith" and rely upon then World Bank and IMF to "forgive them (or at least reschedule) their debts." These monetary "missionaries" seek to "convert" "sinful" Africans to individualism,

industriousness, and the virtues of the free market system so that they might achieve their “redemption.” In order to “expiate” their “sins,” they must “sacrifice” prior affordable prices before the “altar” of the global market if they are to escape the “Hell” of the Southern Hemisphere and achieve a state more like the “Heaven” of the North.”

Chossudovsky (1997) cited in Belk (2000: p341) argued “Structural adjustment is conducive to a form of “economic genocide” which is carried out through the conscious and deliberate manipulation of market forces. When compared to the genocide at various periods of colonial history (e.g. forced labour and slavery), its social impact is devastating”. The pain of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe in the early 1990’s made the government so unpopular that it triggered labour unrest.

The government of Zimbabwe abandoned ESAP in 1995. The misery people suffered and their hatred of the Zanu PF government culminated in the formation of the labour backed political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. At that point despite the Zanu PF government’s unpopularity they still remained a strong force well entrenched in the systems of governance. At the same time the government had perfected the art of intimidation and manipulation of the poor, less educated rural population suffering from the remnants of the scars of the ravages of the war of liberation. Any who dared to ask would be told that Zanu PF can kill and any loss for Zanu PF meant the return of combat which the poor rural people understand to mean death by torture.

### *3.3 Institutionalised State Robbery*

With Robert Mugabe and his party so unpopular and the labour movement dictating the industry activities and calling mass actions that halted economic activity the government’s powerlessness gave way to a new force. The neglected veterans of the war of liberation who had joined the army of the poor found renewed significance in the political space of Zimbabwe. The war veterans put demands before the government and because the government was desperate for support they gave in to those demands. In 1998 Zimbabwe awarded hefty payments to the war veterans who bargained for those huge payments in return for their support to the party and the government. The government forked ZWD 3.5 billion (USD 0.7billion) of unbudgeted money to the war veterans almost a bribe in return for support. This uncalculated move to win the political ground sparked an economic downturn which has seen the rate of exchange fall from a high of USD1: ZWD 5 in 1998 to a dismal USD1: ZWD 180 000 as of June 2007. Besides the economic downturn the country also suffered in other spheres of social and political life. The biggest devastation which has stretched over nearly a decade is the land invasion to displace white farmers.

### *3.4 The Rule of the mob and Land Invasion*

The failed economic programmes, lack of popular support and a restless nation reeling from one crisis to another brought a familiar reaction. There was increasing frustration with the state and the party in the mid 1990’s. Despite the threats people faced from a regime that would claim they earned the right to rule because of the role they played in the war for liberation. The time was up for the regime to go. The state and Zanu PF braced themselves against people power in the mid 1990’s.

The late 1990’s witnessed an unprecedented political collapse of a nation in peace time. The arrival of a labour backed political power in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change and the chaotic disruption of what was once the envy of all Africa saw the economy plummet, the rule of law was replaced by the rule of the mob. The veterans of the war of liberation took over the running of the state with the politicians sidelined as they could not reign in the marauding veterans whom they needed to keep afloat their political mission in Zimbabwe.

The cost of living was rising, the leadership was corrupt and unpopular. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions led by Morgan Tsvangirai successfully organized disruptive mass actions that for the first time sent clear signals to the state that people were no longer happy with their rule. This prompted Zanu PF to shift their approach to dealing with the people. They first decided to test their popularity by holding a referendum to change the constitution. The government was trounced by the opposition and the National Constitutional Assembly who successfully campaigned for the rejection of the state proposed constitution. This rattled and angered the government into a combative mood. They accused the progressive forces of working for the west. In retrospect this turns out to be the declaration of war by the state on the people. What followed immediately thereafter was an act of vengeance in the most ruthless and ruinous manner.

A well thought out strategy was embarked on to weaken the popular support for the labour movement. Veterans of the war of liberation and supporters from across the country were bused into cities to show support for the government. White farmers whose employees had voted against the government found themselves targeted for displacement from farms and killed. Zimbabwe was certain and solidly in war since 1999. To this day more than 4000 farmers were pushed off farms and Zimbabwe’s agricultural productivity nose dived to less than 20 % of what it was before 1998. Mugabe simply exploited what Anderson J A (1999: p554) pointed out in stating “Land is, of course, significant for rural survival, but land conflicts do not necessarily focus on the productive value of land for land has not only an economic

meaning, but combines multiple meanings. ...land disputes are predominantly political struggles.” Sachikonye (2003: p227) arguing the same notion of land being used as a political weapon argues that:

*...while the Zimbabwe Government claims that it has now settled the ‘land question’ once and for all, the country is in the grip of its worst food shortage crisis in decades. Up to half of the country’s population of 13 million is presently vulnerable to hunger, and there has been a notably cynical use of food as a political weapon against the opposition. While the 2001-2002 drought was a contributory factor to famine, so was the disruptive character of the land reform programme. The programme was characterised by considerable violence leading to loss of life by black farm workers and white farmers, and accompanied by chaos in the resettlement process itself.*

The war veterans have gone around killing, confiscating property without fear of prosecution or arrest because the government sanctioned those acts as means of silencing the people. The government simply would not tolerate any dissent at all. Despite this unpopularity and inhumane acts against humanity Zanu PF remains in power albeit weakened for a long period and fighting the people it would seem their hegemony still holds what is most perplexing is that the eighty-five year old Mugabe remains the leader of both the party and the government. The irony is that the government is bent on destroying the core of the struggle for independence, there is no freedom and preservation of the nation’s heritage has been superseded by the desire to remain in power at any cost and moreover the protection nations crave for from the state has since been replaced by the wanton rule of the untouchable mobs epitomized in the veterans of the war of liberation.

### 3.5 Constitutional manipulation and Election rigging

Zimbabwe’s constitution was agreed by the belligerents of the war of liberation at the Lancaster House in England. That constitution meant to safeguard the interests of various groups. The whites had twenty seats reserved for them and other interest groups had seats as well. This constitution was supposed to hold for ten years. To this day that constitution has been amended several times to strengthen the power of only one person, the executive president of the Republic of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe. The role of prime minister was abolished to create a strong executive president with overarching powers and can enact decrees into law. This has been the staying power of the government. Any election pitting Zanu PF and other political parties could have new laws decreed on the day of the election, say on access to materials, counting of votes and announcements. While people have voted in large numbers since the year 2000 in what has always been a resounding protest to rid themselves of this evil it turns out that voting is irrelevant to the outcome of the elections as the Mugabe appointees announce what they are directed to announce and not what the people say.

It should not be surprising that elections are rigged at national level given that even within Zanu PF there is rigging of elections when they hold primary elections for candidates to stand national elections. In a sense it would appear that the whole idea for elections is for propaganda purposes rather than asking power from the people to govern.

Kruger (2005: p13) clearly states the case of constitutional manipulation and violence for dominating the political terrain of Zimbabwe in pointing out that:

*The violence against ZAPU/ZIPRA and all Ndebele civilians ended in a Unity Accord in December 1987, merging Zapu and Zanu PF. The merger gave the new united party, still named Zanu (PF) but officially written as Zanu PF won 99 out of 100 parliamentary seats. Days later, having earlier approved a constitutional amendment to create an executive president with unusually wide powers, parliament voted for Mugabe to become president.*

While Zimbabwe’s economy was melting Mugabe opted to further entrench himself in power by further constitutional amendment “The proposed composition and functions of the Senate in the Constitutional Amendment (No18) Bill are aimed at extending and further buttressing the government’s power of patronage, legal experts have said.” ([http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com/viewinfo.cfm?linkid=11&](http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com/viewinfo.cfm?linkid=11&id=10965&siteid=1)

[id=10965&siteid=1](http://www.thezimbabweindependent.com/viewinfo.cfm?linkid=11&id=10965&siteid=1), 13.07.07). The change would amend the composition of the House of Assembly and Senate by increasing MPs to 210 and 84 from 150 and 66 respectively and this Senate will comprise 18 chiefs, 10 provincial governors, six presidential appointees and 50 elected members hence the direct influence he would enjoy.

Mugabe engineered the change of powers of the head of state from a ceremonial president to an executive president in 1987 which saw him amass absolute power as he abolished the post of prime minister. The president can issue decrees which become law over night and often the voting law has changed on the election day. From the foregoing it is clear that the constitution is always manipulated to entrench power and stifle voices of dissent through the law. In another bizarre move the government surprised itself by reintroducing the senate where 60 members sit at a time when the economy was performing extremely bad. It would appear the desire of Mugabe and his Zanu PF is absolute power at all costs.

### 3.6 The trial of opposition leaders for treason

Opposition leadership is an unwelcome curse to the Zanu PF establishment, the late Ndabaningi Sithole former leader of ZANU dethroned by Robert Mugabe’s manipulations and abandoned the liberation struggle in Mozambique. After

independence he was arrested and charged with treason for attempting to assassinate Robert Mugabe. Ndabaningi's crime was that he was the leader of ZANU (Ndonga). By charging Zanu PF weakened him and damaged his political standing by creating fear in his followers and tarnishing his political standing.

Joshua Nkomo Nkomo of PF Zapu was tortured and humiliated despite being the founding father for resistance to white rule. Joshua Nkomo found himself and his PF ZAPU leadership accused of harbouring ambitions to takeover the country by an armed resistance by using arms planted in the many farms owned by his party. Both the arms found and the properties were confiscated by the state.

Morgan Tsvangirai the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was beaten initially as the secretary general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions in order to silence him. Unfortunately the beating strengthened his resolve to fight injustice. Just like with the earlier political leaders Morgan Tsvangirai was charged and prosecuted for treason charges this time involving a Canadian political consulted for party and government. But with the courts failing to nail him the government opted to physically lambasted him.

Edgar Tekere one of the founding fathers of Zanu Pf and a former secretary general was expelled from the part and formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (Zum). While the pundits argued that this was pseudo opposition but the big achievement of Zum was not its ability to woo voters but its stance against Zanu PF's desire to establish a one party state. Despite all the chaos the country is experiencing it could be worse if there was a one party state. Even though elections are rigged there is nobody who can consolidate themselves without having to go to the country.

Archbishop Pius Ncube of the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has haunted Mugabe for many years and seemed untouchable but as this paper is being written his whole standing is as clergy, a man of celibacy and a true patriot came down tumbling like a ton of bricks in highly damaging revelations in a story splashed in the government daily newspapers. The reports suggest that "Zimbabwe's state-run media has published what it said were photos of Roman Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube in bed with a woman, a day after the outspoken critic of President Robert Mugabe was sued for adultery" (<http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/roma35.16688.html>, 20.07.07)

The revelations have put him in the same position as the top politicians who fate was sealed in trumped up charges that often are found to be baseless. Mugabe and Zanu PF's interest is never conviction but political slaughter.

It is clear from the methods used by Mugabe and his Zanu PF party that elimination of the opposition is an art that needs skimming and systematic destruction leaving very little scope to recover reputations. However, there is a very clear signal in all these machinations. There is always scope to repent and join Zanu PF and thereby rise above the law. The party always welcomes what they "term prodigal sons" coming back from the wilderness.

### 3.7 International isolation

Zimbabwe is now isolated internationally for its democratic failing. Mugabe pulled Zimbabwe out of the Commonwealth and is shunned by the progressive communities the world over. The bullish argument by the Zanu PF regime is that the west is making an effort to re-colonise Zimbabwe and install a puppet government. There are gullible elements within the country who subscribe to this argument and help in giving a semblance of popularity and often as borrowed audiences who are forced or paid to join marauding mobs to show support for the government.

The majority of the government leadership of Zimbabwe have a travel ban to the western world and that has curtailed their diplomatic initiatives and international relations in general. This impasse has contributed to the economic collapse that has devastated the corporate and social lives in the country. To counter the western offensive the country has faced east with Zimbabwe turning into a Chinese province flooded with cheap, unreliable products often imitations. Resources are increasing falling into the hands of the Chinese and their influence seems to minimise local participation in the economic activities of the country.

### 3.8 Destruction of the squatter structures in cities

In a bid to weaken the opposition whose stronghold is in the towns the government implemented a displacement programme codenamed "*Operation Murambatsvina*" (Operation Remove Trash). This programme threw out more than 700 000 dwellers of shanty towns and illegal structures in and around the major cities into the wilderness. People were not given time to remove their little belongings from their makeshift structures which the state had tacitly sanctioned by virtue of having tolerated them for long periods. Some people were crushed to death in their dwellings as they were not aware that their homes were being destroyed by the state.

This act sounds cruel but has turned out to be one of the best strategic moves Zanu PF has ever taken to entrench itself in power. In the short-term this move instilled fear across the whole country and by forcing a huge population out of the cities it meant that in the process of delimitation of constituencies more seats would go to the rural areas where Zanu PF enjoys unrivalled support. The support is created by fear and the opposition will still remain in the minority. The urban population had already been reduced by migration of the middle class and some of the rich in search of green pastures across the globe.

### 3.9 The Collapse of the economy

Zimbabwe's economy is but no more. Several obituaries have been inscribed in the annals of history about an economy that was but is no more. The current state of affairs is symptomatic of a jungle, put simply it is a dog eat dog affair. The invaded farms are lying derelict, the most productive of the nation's labour have sought refuge in the diaspora and the governor is busy printing money facing 80% unemployment. This is a disaster. The defiant Robert Mugabe retains the audacity to point a finger at western sabotage and is not prepared to accept his ruinous policies and the breakdown in the rule of law that has seen massive investment outflows and isolation politically and economically by the international community.

Kirshner (2003: p1) pointed out the critical importance of money in politics in stating:

*Money is everything. Money is nothing. Money is what you think it is. Money is power. Money is politics. ... these statements underscore why monetary phenomena have a formative influence on the nature of contemporary politics. ... monetary phenomena are always and everywhere political.*

Mugabe's control of the economy and the security is at the core of his hegemony. Money arbitrarily allocated to the security leadership has been used to protect him from any potential uprising. Money and other resources has been extended to chiefs and the former fighters in the war of liberation referred to as the war veterans for support.

It would appear that the overall performance of the economy is not important as long as he remains in power. In what is described in the site of Shortwave Radio Africa as economic theft reference is made to the order to surrender bearer checks at short notice which saw people lose money in August 2006 and the state security directed instant 50%v price reduction by retail operators which has been wantonly abused for the benefit of Mugabe's supporters and further wreck an already faltering economy. <http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/theft170707.htm>, 19.07.07

The exchange rate on the black market which is more effective and functional reached an unimaginable whooping 1£UK: ZWD 5 500 000 (November 2007) with inflation estimated at 15 000%.

### 3.10 Violence as a Political tool

Reeler (1998) makes a revealing statement about the horror of violence in Zimbabwe in stating that,

*And there is no better place to witness this hell than in the field of working with torture survivors, for it is torture that allows us to see the real purposes behind military spending: the use of naked power to maintain position, the impunity to oppress all opponents, the creation of sustained fear to maintain compliance, and the perpetuation of endemic poverty.*

The use of violence and subsequent torture of the opposition has been used consistently in Zimbabwe with desired effects since the dawn of independence. People have suffered quietly under Mugabe's rule for fear of torture and subsequent death if their dared to stand up against his rule. Elections are marred by state sanctioned violence. Kriger (2005: p 2) puts across the notion of violence in an emphatic way by arguing that:

*Zanu PF continues to engage in political violence against its opponents and in polarizing discourse in which it depicts itself as the democratic and revolutionary force and the MDC as a British-sponsored, anti-democratic, subversive and reactionary. .... Organised violence and intimidation of the opposition, albeit of varying intensity, has been recurrent strategy for the ruling party before, during and often after elections to punish constituents that dared oppose it. Youth has been an important element of ruling party violence. The perpetrators of election violence have enjoyed impunity, often buttressed by presidential pardons and amnesties.*

In virtually all elections held under Robert Mugabe's rule the defacto law has always been the torture, murder and denial of political space for the opposition irrespective of how popular the opposition was. Besides violence Zanu PF would determine the winner irrespective of the voting intentions. It is not surprising that for much of the 1980s Zanu PF sought to establish a one-party to no avail. This was an attempt to monopolise the political space until Robert Mugabe was out of power. A number of high profile people were used and ditched in pursuit of this failed agenda including the creation of the executive presidency that saw the abandonment of the position of prime minister.

## 4. The positive moves in the positioning of the brand

The founding father of independent Zimbabwe Robert Gabriel Mugabe is a re-knowned orator, demagogue and charismatic personality. In the beginning he epitomised a revolutionary people driven agenda for a progressive Zimbabwe. In a short space of time Zimbabwe had become an envy of the progressive communities the world over. Zimbabwe raised its literacy levels substantially, became the "bread basket" of Africa and had a highly skilled workforce sought after in the developed world. In this regard Zimbabwe emerged as a progressive nation led by a dynamic leader. These developments in the early eighties endeared Robert Mugabe as the godfather of a happy nation.

After independence the government of then prime minister Robert Mugabe proclaimed Reconciliation with the old enemy suggesting that his government was bent on healing the wounds and creating a harmonious nation. He was



showered with accolades for excellent statesmanship across the globe. The first government of the independent Zimbabwe included members of the opposition with Joshua Nkomo the leader of the main opposition assigned the Home Affairs portfolio, that is internal security. That sounded a good move by the then prime minister.

In 1980 the rural people were resettled in more fertile land which had traditionally been the preserve of the minority whites. The farms were purchased from the respective owners by resources availed by the British government. Certainly this was yielding the result that all and sundry had been hoping for at independence. There was limited interest in farming.

Over this early period of independence the agricultural sector of Zimbabwe was boosted by concerted efforts by the government and saw a lot of people fend for themselves with production rising substantially. The nation could feed struggling states in Africa hence Zimbabwe became the "bread basket for Africa". In 1986 Robert Mugabe received a Freedom from Hunger Campaign Award from the United Nations for boosting agricultural production.

Education was provided for free and so was health. It was a great feeling for the population, be it short lived as it were but it gave people a positive feel about the future of the country and the population felt very secure. However, gradually people started paying and the government would argue it was necessary as free service was unsustainable. The system for paying was selective as it looked at the person's ability to pay.

Zimbabwe's reputation as a democratic state remained intact and was a good example of good governance in Africa. Elections have been held every five years for parliament without fail and the international community endorsed. The propaganda machinery was working very well. Any repressive moves by the state were always referred to as skirmishes. Because of its seemingly stable, democratic position and what appeared to be a progressive economy and well educated population the international community continued to put Zimbabwe into very influential roles such as in SADC, the then OAU and now AU, the UN, IMF etc. Some of the people seconded to some of these institutions still remain in those positions to this day.

In 1990 the government of Zimbabwe sought to boost the economy by embarking on the International Monetary Fund prescription for economic growth, that is the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the result was a disaster which left the country reeling in abject poverty. This experience was not unique to Zimbabwe but many countries that had gone that route especially in the developing world had failed dismally. This left the country economically weak and the government was unpopular but still claimed the programme was meant for bringing prosperity. This programme was abandoned in the mid 1990's.

##### **5. Lessons for Positioning in Political Marketing Warfare**

The Zanu PF government led by one, Robert Gabriel Mugabe has remained in power since gaining independence in 1980 till now (2007). While the glaring blunders have been well documented there has never been a time Zanu PF has been out of power over the period nor has there been any other leader for the country other than Robert Gabriel Mugabe. What is most fascinating about Robert Mugabe's staying power is that he has managed to shift the political message, methods of repression and the propaganda mechanism by manipulating the state machinery to good effect for nearly three decades. While there is a lot of controversy surrounding the political terrain of Zimbabwe there is no doubt that Robert Mugabe and Zanu PF have mastered the art of positioning for political marketing warfare to consolidate their party brand and mode of governance.

The position taken by Robert Mugabe is consistent with the assertion made by Wu et al (2004: 396)

*When business managers take the principles of "The Art of War" into consideration in strategic decision-making, they will create numerous strategies and methods in solving countless problems.*

While Wu et al are looking at business in a commercial sense it is important to note that politics is like business and in that respect Mugabe is in the business of political manipulation for survival.

Wu et al (2004: 397) have laid down the principles of war as having the following categories:

- (1) Situation appraisal;
- (2) Formulation of goals and strategies;
- (3) Evaluation of strategies;
- (4) Implementation of strategies; and
- (5) Strategic controls.

The way Zanu PF under the leadership of Robert Gabriel Mugabe has mastered the art of political marketing warfare is symptomatic of the competition one would observe among rival brands or companies in search of market domination. In both cases the focus is on winning the human mind with an appealing brand. The approach fits in with Sun Tzu's principles of war as illustrated in Figure 1.

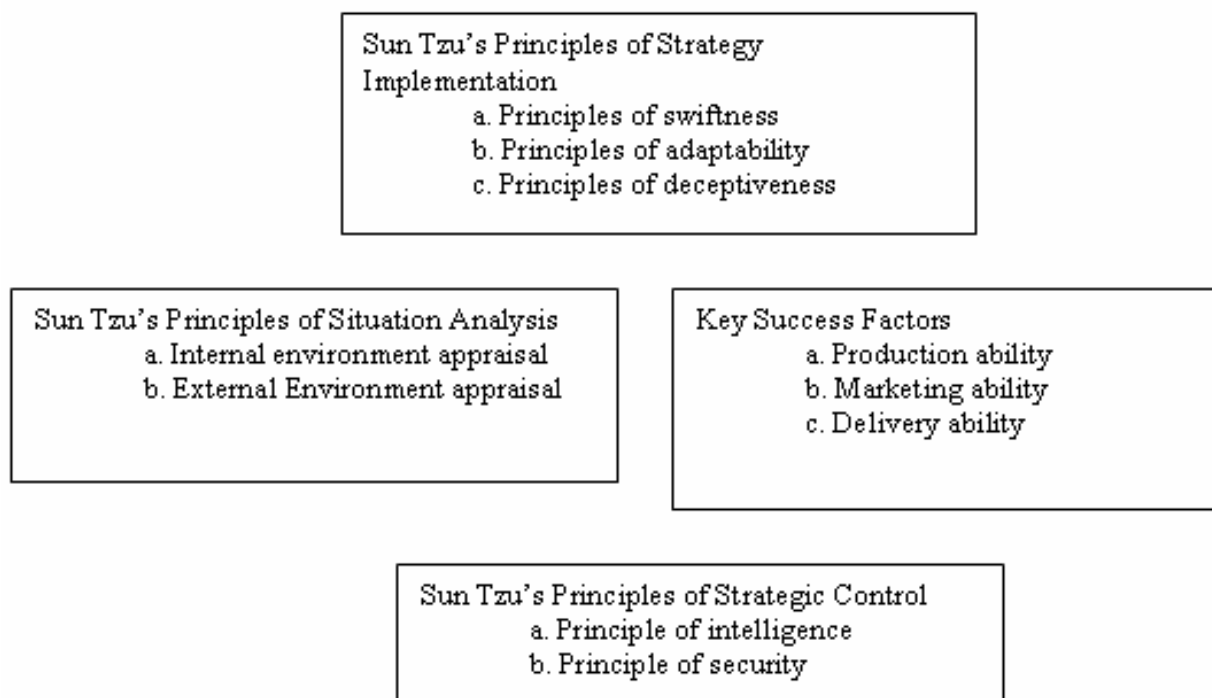


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the principles of war

(Wu et al, 2004: p 397)

The application of the principles of warfare by Zanu Pf are consistent with the model suggested by Wu et al (2004):

a). On the principles of situation analysis Zanu is aware of their popularity on the rural side and hence they increase the number of parliamentary seats there at the expense of the urban where they are not popular and have little scope for manipulating voters. In 2000 they realised that they were losing the battle for farm worker support and invaded farms. Zimbabwe pulled out of the commonwealth as that could put her under heavy scrutiny. However, Zimbabwe remains on the heart of the African Union where Robert Mugabe enjoys a lot of influence. Within the party Robert Mugabe dictates policy and positions of influence and this has helped him consolidate power over the years. It is clear that the party, the government and Robert Mugabe are fully aware of the environment and are well placed to manipulate it.

b). On the principle of strategy implementation Zanu PF quickly moved to consolidate power in 1980 and turned their unpopularity in the 1990 into a struggle for land. All the time they have always projected a fair institution while systematically crippling the opposition. In all this it is clear that they moved swiftly, always adapt to a changing situation and continually deceive the voters through multitudes of empty promises and rigging elections. In most cases they will not shy away from doing the unthinkable such as spilling blood in a violent land revolution, printing money under conditions of galloping inflation and using the army to force price reduction in July 2007.

c). In respect of key success factors Zanu PF as the ruling party in Zimbabwe since gaining independence in 1980 are credited with the empowerment of the black majority population, improving the agricultural capacity to the point of winning the award for "Freedom from Hunger" in 1986. Zanu PF has consolidated its credentials as the liberation people's party and branded all opposition as sell-outs. It is that ability albeit aided by the use of force has epitomised the hegemony of Zanu PF in Zimbabwe. It is clear that Zanu PF has shown production abilities in agriculture in the 1980s, its hegemony bears testimony to marketing abilities and the infrastructure which has since started disintegrating clearly demonstrate delivery ability.

d). As far as the principle of strategic control is concerned there is no mistaking as to the sophistication of the regime. The opposition parties have always been infiltrated and weakened in a relatively short period. Prominent opposition leaders are incriminated to tarnish their images and render them to the political dustbin. Supporters of the opposition have been systematically tortured, killed or simply disappeared and never to be seen on the hands of the intelligence force, the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). People fear Mugabe's Zanu PF.

### 5.1 Liberation credentials and the Threat of War

The tag of a liberator that Robert Mugabe carries and the indelible mark left by the scars of the ravaging war of liberation is a stark reminder of the cost of gaining independence that no one can take away from Robert Mugabe and

Zanu PF. The brand Zanu PF epitomised in the courage and mental strength of Robert Mugabe is symptomatic of Zimbabwe's heritage. Therefore the party Zanu PF like a brand has its unique selling proposition (USP) that nobody can copy. Subsequent to this view is the contrary argument that is, whosoever tries to oppose Zanu PF is neo-colonialist who seek to bring back white rule and this has been consistently used by Zanu PF to good effect.

### *5.2 Popular Socialist policies*

The government of Robert Gabriel Mugabe embarked on appealing policies at independence which included years of The People's Power, Consolidating the People's Power. Later on the government promulgated reconciliation for the former enemies publicly but on the contrary the opposition supporters were tortured and had properties destroyed. The Leadership Code to deal with corruption appealed to the population and as a result people respected the party as principled but it is at the same time that those in leadership were lining their pockets.

There are a number of moves that endeared the government with the voters to a point that they were persuaded they could introduce a one-party state which only failed because Edgar Tekere a former Zanu PF cadre campaigned against it. In the main the following are moves that made the government popular with the voters:

- a). Free education
- b). Agricultural support
- c). Creation of growth points as rural centres for development
- d). Improved roadwork
- e). Strong economy
- f). Black advancement

These moves saw the party sweep to electoral victories almost unopposed for the years 1985, 1990, 1995 but not in 2000. The glaring shortfalls of Zanu PF came unstuck and power was almost wrestled by the labour backed Movement for Democratic Change. However, Zanu PF would not lose because of violence, voting laws and above all rigging.

### *5.3 Propaganda and incriminating the opposition leadership*

At independence Zanu PF would claim in its campaign message that it was an authentic and most revolutionary party that suffered with the toiling masses of Zimbabwe. That created a feeling of togetherness among the people and a veiled feeling among the Shona people that the country was theirs and that no other party of tribe would get space to dominate politics in the country. This points to the need to communicate and consolidate the unique selling proposition.

While brandishing the opposition as unpatriotic in its propaganda allowed it to create the impression that they were the guards of the country's sovereignty and used this as a pretext to torture the supporters of the opposition. The leadership of the opposition have all been brought before the courts for trial on trumped up charges. Practically this has decimated the prospects of the opposition and allowed Zanu PF to extend its hegemony perpetually since independence in 1980. Leaders of the parties, PF Zapu, Zanu (Ndonga) and the Movement for Democratic Change have been harassed and humiliated by the justice system and saw them lose their political appeal. Essentially this is ruthless treatment of the opposition.

### *5.4 Land Invasion*

Land invasion was a systematic reaction to counter the rising popularity of the young labour backed Movement for Democratic Change. The white farmers were going to tilt votes in favour of the opposition. This is consistent with what happens in commerce where if competition is rising one finds means to counter them. This worked very well as Zanu PF managed to remove the influence of the white farmers from the farm labour by creating chaos and fear thus win back the vote of the farm worker.

### *5.5 Manipulation of the Law*

On 22 December 1987 the state gave the nation a special Christmas present codenamed the "Unity Accord". This development put the last nail on the coffin of then PF Zapu the then main opposition which succumbed to systematic torture of its leadership and an unrelenting genocide of its supporters and turned around and took on bode the old adage "if you can't beat them join them". Immediately after that Joshua Nkomo found himself catapulted to the position of second vice president of the United Zanu PF as a reward for surrendering. Meanwhile Mugabe promoted himself through a ground breaking constitutional amendment that created the position of executive president moving him from the position of prime minister which was only executive to the all powerful executive and ceremonial position. While as prime minister he could not decree laws overnight as president he had the overarching powers to dissolve or enact statutes at will an instrument he would use to haunt, not only the opposition but also his descending members of the party.

Despite losing a referendum to change the constitution in 1999, the government through a very docile parliament has simply changed the constitution seventeen times with the eighteenth amendment meant to create a bigger senate and parliament to consolidate power while disregarding the economic haemorrhage the country is experiencing because of the ruinous policies the regime has pursued over the years.

### 5.6 Institutionalised Media Repression

Realising their unpopularity the government enacted laws that have made it illegal for people to criticise the glaring failures of the Mugabe regime. What is most disturbing about the Zimbabwean scenario is that the president representing Zanu PF is both player and referee in the political game, practically rendering Zanu PF to the author of the rules, the protagonist in the arena and referee, no wonder rumours are rife that election results are determined before elections. When the independent press created a wave of expectation through exposing the dirty on the hands of the government it came as no surprise the only credible independent newspaper the *Daily News* bombed and to this day nobody has been prosecuted in court nor condemned by the government.

Subsequent to the killer blow of the independent press in Zimbabwe the government moved swiftly to enact laws that have made it practically illegal to criticise the failings of the government.

### 5.7 Mugabeism

Shaw (1986) in Kriger (2005: p1) quotes Mugabe declaring in the Herald newspaper, the government's mouthpiece saying,

*... as clear as day follows night... Zanu PF will rule in Zimbabwe forever. There is no other party besides ours that will rule this country (Prime minister Mugabe, January 1982).*

Robert Mugabe's standing in the history of Zimbabwe is paradoxical, a hero who liberated the country and wrecked its once vibrant economy, social structures and governance because he would not want to relinquish power. Zimbabweans worshiped him for a long time till he went astray in pursuit of absolute power, no wonder the pundits have argued that Mugabe's destruction of Zimbabwe is unequalled in history in peace time.

The Mugabe school of politics is epitomised in ruthlessness in dealing with political enemies, never to accept any failure, arresting the leadership of the opposition to weaken them, equating the party to the state, carefully crafting populist themes to keep people focused and surrounding oneself with docile people who have no desire to takeover and relatives wherever possible. Political entrepreneurship as argued by Francois (2003:p154) typifies the spirit of innovation for survival that Mugabe has used effectively who points out that:

*Because things change with time, because individual beliefs are necessarily subjective and because decisions are always made with uncertainty, the major problem of the actors is achieving their individual plans. And the major problem facing any social organisation is the coordination of these plans. The existence of stabilising institutions, of discovery processes, of people communicating preferences and of individual expectations all make this coordination possible.*

A key feature of Mugabeism is the heavy handed control of party and state machinery to extend Zanu PF's hegemony in government. Mugabe has been dynamic in his approach to the unfolding situation in Zimbabwe. Through time he has changed the political theme, ie position himself and the party as acceptable leadership successfully. The effective control of the state machinery and stability within the echelons of power has meant that often there is no opposition to his leadership within the party and the government.

In the main Mugabe is an elected dictator who determines the outcome of elections in his favour using absolute power and a well orchestrated rigging machinery.

## 6. Conclusions

Politics carries the same competitive intensity as found in business. Just like with business the desire in politics is to overrun the competition and dominate the market. Political marketing warfare uses similar tools as in business such as branding, positioning and promotion in order to win the political customers, ie, voters with their policies. Political parties have to make promises to the electorate just as businesses advertise and make promises to the customers.

Robert Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe an eye of a political entrepreneur who projects the qualities of:

*"a person who seeks to initiate a political dynamic of change,...via an attempt to gain support for politically new ideas. This includes identifying problems, creating a network for diffusion in political circles, giving form to the terms of the political debate and the building of coalitions"* (Mintrom 1997: p 739).

Zimbabwe's political landscape is skewed in favour of Zanu PF the ruling party founded in the 1960s. The party's image connotes a revolution for freedom and is renowned for a fighting spirit that defeated the colonial regime. The party successfully abused its war credentials to stay in power by employing threats, torture, rigging elections and above all demonising the opposition into submission to good effect. In its leader Robert Mugabe, the party has a tried and

tested cadre who has led the country from independence in 1980 to today (July 2007). Robert Mugabe can be credited with political entrepreneurship and charisma and is the main reason for Zanu PF's staying power.

Mugabe and Zanu PF practices are consistent with what Belk (2000: p343) says "As with slavery of old, a few Africans get rich at the expense of their brothers and sisters". The 1980s "Willowgate scandal" was about the political leadership enriching themselves against the promise of a leadership code. The same leadership bathed in the spilling blood of white farmers as they scrambled for land and property in violent land seizures.

Zanu PF has survived many crises and continues to appeal to voters albeit forcing the voters to tow the line using all kinds of threats especially violence and death and has mastered the art of staying in power against adversity.

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