CHAPTER 7

Popular protests and the limits of civil society in the struggle for democracy in Zimbabwe, 2013 to 2016

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Introduction

Using the cases of Itai Dzamara of the Occupy Africa Unity Square movement, *#Thisflag* by Pastor Evan Mawarire of the Baptist Church and *Tajamuka* (We have rebelled), this chapter discusses the impacts of the growth of popular protests on governance and struggles for democracy in Zimbabwe during the period 2013–2016. Earlier postcolonial protests were organised by and around formal civil society (CS) movements and organisations (CSOs). What sets the protests that took place between 2013 and 2016 apart is that they were centred around particular individuals and issues such as the dislodging of President Mugabe from power, the annulment of Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 (SI 64/2016), which restricted imports and other issues of concern without necessarily containing the vision for long-term politics. Furthermore, compared to traditional CSOs, protesters did not use rule-bound methods of negotiating with the state but used tactical and informal methods such as violent and unsanctioned demonstrations as well as undiplomatic language.

This chapter utilises the work of the Indian scholar Partha Chatterjee on political society to analyse the characteristics of these popular politics. As opposed to the CS that Chatterjee considers as bourgeoisie, restricted and elitist, ‘political society’ is an arena where ‘politics emerg[es] out of the developmental policies of government aimed at specific population groups. Many of these groups, organised into associations, transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work ... [As such, state] agencies ... deal with these associations not as bodies of citizens but as convenient instruments for administration of welfare to marginal and underprivileged population groups’ (Chatterjee 2004: 41). Chatterjee’s formulation contrasts sharply with the traditional liberal understanding of the CS that is conceptualised in the work of

other scholars who value CS as a 'progressive [transformational] social force', which 'struggles against [the undemocratic and often authoritarian] modern state ... and against a pre-modern communitarian sociality ... often lodged in rural areas [in the third world]' (Helliker 2012: 42).

Drawing on this distinction, the central question for this chapter is: What was the role of popular politics in the democratisation of Zimbabwe in the period between 2013 and 2016? In order to tackle this profound question the chapter further asks as a sub-question: To what extent were the shortcomings of traditional CSOs and methods connected to the rise of the violent popular protests in Zimbabwe?

The use of tactical and informal methods and politics by protestors was not so much because they belonged to a population group that did not have access to bourgeois legality associated with CSOs. In fact, some leaders of organisations with international connections, such as Pastor Mawarire and Itai Dzamara, theoretically belonged to the CS. Instead, their *modus operandi* essentially emanated from the repressive state that stifled room for formal CS operations. Consequently, protestors ended up using measures and membership from the unemployed ranks, informal traders and cross-border traders that belong to Chatterjee's political society. In doing this, the chapter analyses the significance and limits of the mobilisational strategies of the Zimbabwean popular protests.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first historicises the development of violent protests by the CS against the government in the 1990s and highlights connections with the recent popular protests. The second part discusses some of the leading popular protesters, including Itai Dzamara, arguably the pioneer of the post 2013 anti-Mugabe protests from Africa Unity Square (AUS). The third part traces the impacts of the popular protests on the democratisation struggle in Zimbabwe.

Civil society and the antecedents to the 2013–2016 popular protests

This section reflects on the development of militant protests by the CS in Zimbabwe, which offer a precursor to the 2013–2016 popular protests, especially in their deployment of non-rule bound styles of engagement. CS is considered in this chapter as 'a plurality of social enclaves which exist in contradistinction to the dominance of a particular monopolistic social system within the same social realm or territorial unity', like the state, church, market economy and political parties (Moyo 1993: 2), including non-governmental organisations, gender-based organisations, charities, trade unions, work associations, social movements, business associations and advocacy groups (Ncube 2010). However, the earlier CS postcolonial protests differed from the 2013–2016 popular protests in the sense that these were organised around more formal movements, and occurred before the large-scale informalisation of the country's economy that took root during Zimbabwe's crisis (Bond & Manyanya 2003). The development of CS in postcolonial Zimbabwe occurred in phases. In the first decade of independence in the 1980s, the CS sought to be on the side of the state for reasons such as continued economic prosperity which enabled the state to roll out massive social service programmes, and the continued domination of the mainstream economy by the minority whites which presented the state with the

opportunity to present itself as the midwife for economic democratisation (Ncube 2010). Additionally, the ZANU-PF government, like its predecessor, the colonial state, and also in pursuance of its 'democratic centralism' under its targeted one-party state (Moyo 1993: 2), actively discouraged the growth of an independent CS in favour of one that it created, controlled and bank rolled (Helliker 2013).

However, from the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s the CS-state relations soured as the CS radicalised and asserted its independence and became more militant (Moyo 1993). This was based on the decline of economic prosperity and as the negative effects of the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) worsened the livelihoods of the majority (Moyo 1993; Ncube 2010). The CS also openly challenged the ZANU-PF state's preferred one-party state (Helliker 2013). As a result, there emerged a plethora of CS organisations including clubs in urban areas, political parties, burial societies, trade unions, industrial confederations, commercial organisations, student groups and fundamentalist religious cults in addition to 'white-dominated' CS such as the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU), Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC) and the Employers' Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ) (Moyo 1993: 4). Out of this constellation emerged assertive CSOs such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, in addition to various other NGOs such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) that also nagged the government for democratisation and societal transformation (Helliker 2013). Additionally, there also emerged protests from the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), militant academics and women lobby organisations. Eventually and critically, the ZCTU and the NCA protests gave birth to, and provided most of the national leadership of, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 (Marongwe & Makaye 2016).

Below, the chapter turns to the discussion of the 2013–2016 popular protests with a view to evaluating their impact on the democratisation of post-Government of National Unity (GNU) Zimbabwe, as well as to exhibit how they were different from the CS demonstrations discussed above. As shall be demonstrated, these various individuals and groups were made up of marginalised and disgruntled citizens, including the unemployed youth, clergy, cross-border traders, civil servants, despondent ZANU-PF and MDC supporters and those in underpaying employment. What is important to note is that whilst these demonstrators articulated the need for economic and political reforms as well as the need for former President Mugabe to leave power, they were not led in the protests by opposition leaders nor were they openly supported by these leaders.

Itai Dzamara and the Occupy Africa Unity Square movement

Itai Dzamara, the forerunner of popular protests from AUS became famous following his abduction from a Harare township barbershop by five unidentified men on 9 March 2015 (Musewe 2015). The abduction helped to focalise attention not only on Dzamara, but on the growing wave of popular protests in Zimbabwe. He was a father of two, a journalist and the editor of the *News Leader* newspaper which he founded in 2008 having previously worked for various publications including *The*

Zimbabwe Independent, *The Standard* and *The Zimbabwean*. Dzamara also operated a Facebook page also known as News Leader (*Ifex News* 2015). Between October 2014 and 2015 Dzamara led the pro-democracy group Occupy Africa Unity Square (OAUS) (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2015), in demonstrations primarily targeting President Mugabe to resign because of his advanced age and for mismanaging the economy of Zimbabwe. At some point Dzamara delivered a petition at President Mugabe's Munhumutapa Offices imploring him to quit (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2015). He also addressed an MDC-T rally at Harare Grounds in Highfields on 7 March 2015 calling for mass protest action against the declining economic conditions in Zimbabwe (Amnesty USA 2015).

Prior to his abduction, Dzamara had, on various occasions, either been arbitrarily arrested or severely beaten by both state security agents and ZANU-PF members for his activism (Amnesty USA 2015). For example, on 6 November 2014, he was brutalised by the police and left for dead (Amnesty USA 2015). Also, on 26 November 2014, Dzamara together with four other members of the OAUS, was arrested after presenting a petition to the Speaker of Parliament and after staging a peaceful protest in Parliament's Speaker's Gallery (Amnesty USA 2015). Upon their arrest they were allegedly undressed, severely beaten and ordered to beat each other before being released (Amnesty USA 2015). In addition, at times, Dzamara and the OAUS members were denied legal representation; had their lawyers also beaten; and yet at other times the lawyers would be denied access to Dzamara and other OAUS members (Amnesty USA 2015).

Pastor Evan Mawarire and #Thisflag campaign

Pastor Evan Mawarire of the Baptist Church started the #Thisflag campaign after he had failed to raise school fees for his children in 2016. #Thisflag campaign started on 19 April 2016 when Mawarire, wearing a Zimbabwean flag around his neck, recorded a video titled *Thisflag*. In the video, the Pastor lamented that: 'When I look at the flag, it's not a reminder of my pride and inspiration, it feels as if I want to belong to another country' (Allison 2016). The video went viral, generating up to 115 000 views within a few days from Zimbabweans who also vented their anger against Mugabe and the ZANU-PF government (Chidza 2016a).

Among its well-known campaigns, #Thisflag ran a campaign of 25 'days of digital activism using #ThisFlagday' from the 1st to the 25th of May 2016 (*The Zimbabwean* 2016). Broadly, this was a call for the citizens to post comments of their stolen hopes, dreams, anger and disillusionments under the banner of #Thisflag. Among the issues that the campaign targeted included rampant unemployment, deteriorating social services, Mugabe's continued reign, corruption, and diminishing hope among the citizens (*The Zimbabwean* 2016).

What made #Thisflag profound was the symbolism of the appropriation of the central symbol to Zimbabwe's sovereignty, the national flag. As a column by the *Daily Maverick* in *The Zimbabwean* (2016) highlighted:

#ThisFlag has appropriated the state's most potent symbol. They have seized the one icon that the state can't ban or suppress, and made it their own. The

flags that fly above government buildings, the flags that are pinned on the chests of government officials, the flags that fly on the bonnets of President Mugabe's motorcade, these are all now subversive acts that the regime cannot ignore – or does so at its peril.

***Tajamuka/Sesijikile* and a Zimbabwe 'shutdown' campaign**

Protests under the banner *#Tajamuka/Sesijikile* were witnessed across the country on Wednesday, 6 July 2016. The prelude to the nationwide protests were the Monday, 4 July 2016 demonstrations of commuter omnibus taxi operators in most of Harare's high density suburbs who protested against police clampdowns and blatant police corruption at roadblocks that resulted in the arrest of up to 113 people (*NewZimbabwe* 2016b). The Wednesday, 6 July 2016 protests targeted the removal of former President Mugabe through a 'total shutdown of business and official administration countrywide' by staying away from work (Raath 2016). Indeed, the protest message was overwhelmingly received as home industries, industrial sites, schools and hospitals were closed for business. Central business districts across the country were deserted with most businesses shut down, except for a few outlets such as OK, Bon Marche, TM, Pick 'n Pay, Spar and Choppies that remained open (*The Financial Gazette* 2016a).

Despite managing a nationwide stayaway, *Tajamuka/Sesijikile* did not have a recognised leadership. Rather, it had a faceless leadership and its activities were coordinated via social media platforms, primarily WhatsApp, and others like Facebook and Twitter (Raath 2016). This is notwithstanding the fact that some 'leaders' eventually emerged or began to be associated with *Tajamuka/Sesijikile*, including Pastor Evan Mawarire, Stern Zvorwadza and Promise Mkwanzani. Most of these 'leaders' were intermittently arrested and released. The advantage of using the social media platform, especially WhatsApp, was that it was largely beyond the control of the state. It also meant that the majority of Zimbabweans with cellphones were able to access the message of the stayaway. Critically, it also demonstrated how, in the absence of viable mobilisational capacity by the groups, social media could undercut the hegemonic power of a repressive state that strictly controlled state media.

It, however, has to be said that there were some threats of violence made against those who would not heed the call to stayaway. To this extent, there were some messages on WhatsApp that called for violence against those who would attempt to go to work or the kombis that ferried people to work. There were also some reported cases of violence against those who were against the stayaway. These included the skirmishes in Mufakose suburb of Harare where some protestors attacked some commuter omnibuses that were ferrying people and in Makokoba suburb of Bulawayo, tyres were burnt to blockade roads which invited the police to fire tear gas canisters resulting in some running battles between the protestors and the police (Raath 2016). In Harare's Epworth suburb, the police engaged in running battles with some protestors (Kanambura 2016). As well, there was an ongoing civil service strike over salaries that was in motion (Raath 2016). However, the fact that most businesses closed shop was illustrative of the success of the protest action.

A follow up attempt on 13 July 2016 was, however, a spectacular flop as most businesses remained open and most of the remaining workers, in formal and

informal employment, reported for work (Chidza et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the failure can also be attributed to the threats of state violence on protesters. The Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, State Security and Information, gave chilling threats at a press conference held on 12 July to this effect (Chidza et al. 2016). The threat seemed real coming from a government that had periodically unleashed violence against its citizens to great cowering effect. Indeed, some personalities who were blamed for the successful 6 July protests were arrested on the eve of the 13 July protests, including Promise Mkwanzu of #Tajamuka/Sesjikele and Pastor Mawarire of #ThisFlag. In total, between the 1 July Beitbridge protests and the 4 and 6 July protests and stayaways, some 200 people were arrested (*The Financial Gazette* 2016b). It also has to be mentioned that the call for a follow up stayaway within one week of the first one seemed too close for comfort to many potential protesters as they feared losing their jobs and livelihoods. The essence of this was neatly captured by an unidentified businessperson who pointed out that 'we need to work otherwise there would be no bread and butter on the table' (*The Financial Gazette* 2016b). In the end, the saving grace for the protesters was that there was a huge turnout at Pastor Mawarire's court hearing on the same day (*New Zimbabwe* 2016c).

From the foregoing, against the backdrop of heightened state intimidation and other coercive tactics aimed at thwarting the popular protests, including abductions, arrests, physical lynching of the protesters and media attacks, the protests continued. A host of measures were taken in sustaining the protests, incorporating shifting tactics, illegal demonstrations and increased resort to social media. Below we now turn to some of the central reasons behind the growth of the popular protests in the post-GNU period which indicate the failings of the CS.

Convulsions in ZANU-PF and the MDC-T and their failure to represent the people's interests

Between 2013 and 2016, the country's two main political movements, ZANU-PF and the MDC-T suffered tumultuous implosions and splits which not only weakened them, but which also divested from their political mandate of representing the interests of their supporters. To start off with, ZANU-PF was enfeebled by divisive, tumultuous and often violent Mugabe succession politics. This resulted in the purging of former Vice-President Joyce Mujuru and her alleged supporters from both ZANU-PF and government in 2014, including ministers (Magaisa 2017).

Added to the above, ZANU-PF failed to arrest the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the country that were undergirded by rising de-industrialisation, unemployment that was spurred by a Supreme Court ruling of 2015 that allowed employers to dismiss workers on three months' notice (*The Herald* 2015), the rampant informalisation of the economy, rampant corruption and failure to access lines of foreign credit by the Zimbabwean government (Choruma 2016). Furthermore, the conditions were exacerbated by the indigenisation policy that required foreign owned companies to surrender 51% equities to locals. As well, ZANU-PF leadership exhibited unmitigated financial indiscipline as evidenced by former Vice-President Phelekezela Mphoko's close to two-year residency at the expensive four-star Rainbow Towers (Manayiti 2016). What made ZANU-PF's position worse was a crisis of legitimacy

it suffered following its controversial victory in the 2013 elections. Notwithstanding the apparent peaceful nature of the 2013 harmonised elections, there were allegations that ZANU-PF had rigged the elections with the support of the Israeli-based Nikuv International Projects (Raftopoulos 2016). As a result, the election results were not widely accepted by the international community as representative of the wishes of Zimbabweans. In the end, based on the lack of sympathy from the international community, the ZANU-PF government perennially struggled for lines of credit to fund its operations (Raftopoulos 2016). On the whole, the deteriorating socio-economic conditions manufactured rampant poverty and widespread existential hardships.

On the other hand, the MDC-T also underwent major paroxysms. Troubled by incessant splits; reduced funding; waning support base; and the health woes of its leader, ideologue and face, Morgan Tsvangirai, the MDC-T increasingly struggled for continuity (Marongwe & Makaye 2016). Due to MDC-T's continued devolving into smaller factions, it lost the stamina to wrestle power from ZANU-PF as it was reduced from being a major movement into a pale shadow of its former self. Outside of the 2005 split of the parent MDC which resulted in the formation of MDC-T and the smaller MDC led by Arthur Mutambara, the MDC-T further split in 2014 into the main MDC-T that still remained under Morgan Tsvangirai and the smaller faction led by former Secretary General Tendai Biti known as the MDC-Renewal that went on to splinter further into the People's Democratic Party (PDP) led by Biti and the Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (RDZ) led by Elton Mangoma (Marongwe & Makaye 2016). The following is a pithy discussion of how the deteriorating economic crisis – one of the hallmarks of ZANU-PF's failures during the post-GNU era – facilitated the growth of popular demonstrations.

Deepening economic crisis

Following the end of the coalition government in 2013, Zimbabwe's economic situation took a turn for the worse. From the serious recovery path that the economy had witnessed since 2009, the period 2013 to 2016 saw significant economic downturns. To start with, the growth rates recorded since the GNU's foundation continued to decline significantly from 10.6, 4.5, 3.1, 2.7 to 1.7% in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016, respectively (Choruma 2016). This was largely due to many company closures. Additionally, many workers were laid off under the controversial Supreme Court ruling that allowed companies to lay off workers after giving them three months' notice without offering them retrenchment packages, which worsened levels of impoverishment. Following this ruling, up to 20 000 workers were retrenched in July 2015 alone (*The Chronicle* 2015). At another level, as already alluded to, the ZANU-PF government also failed to access lines of credit to ameliorate the situation based on legitimacy concerns, its failure to provide an acceptable repayment plan, lack of property security and the need for some reforms in governance (Raftopoulos 2016).

The government also worsened the economic difficulties by striving to curtail the growth of the informal sector, especially the cross-border trading business, by passing SI 64/2016, which imposed stringent import controls. Among others, SI 64/2016 precipitated the Beitbridge violent protests of 30 June 2016 that served as the harbinger of the 4 and 6 July 2016 demonstrations. The latter demonstrations saw the torching

of some commuter omnibuses and some buildings, including some Choppies shops owned by Vice-President Phelekezela Mphoko who had spent many months staying at the Rainbow Towers. As Stern Zvorwadza, the Vendors Association of Zimbabwe leader, posited, SI 64/2016 was an instrument designed to drive the informal sector out of business because the Zimbabwean government was 'responsible for the poverty and pushing people into being vendors, yet the same government [was] coming up with policies to stop people from earning an honest living at a time when they [had] killed the economy and failed to create jobs' (Raftopoulos 2016). What gave further credence to Zvorwadza's argument was that Zimbabwe had a low industrial capacity utilisation of between 25 and 30%, which meant that there was very little manufacturing in the country and the increased informalisation of the economy that saw up to 95% of Zimbabweans eking out livelihoods in the informal sector mostly through selling or reselling imported wares (Choruma 2016).

What worsened the economic situation were the cash shortages experienced from April 2016 which resulted in winding bank queues as people struggled to withdraw their savings or salaries. The government tried to reduce the cash shortages by introducing a surrogate currency called bond notes, which officially were to work alongside the basket of foreign denominations. However, the introduction of the bond notes resulted in panic withdrawals and a black market for cash trading (Choruma 2016).

Democratic struggles enhanced?

One major goal of the protests was to open up the closed democratic space in Zimbabwe by calling for the resignation of President Mugabe. The demonstrations were, according to Evan Mawarire, a means to push the national leadership to be responsive to people's needs and 'restore order and cast [a new] vision' for the nation (Chidza 2016b). Traditionally, it had been inconceivable for one to openly discuss the failings of the state, including corruption and Mugabe's shortcomings, in particular his advanced age and long stay in power. Such actions were construed as undermining the authority of the president and usually brought the full wrath of state-sanctioned violence on the culprits, including being sent to prison or being tortured (Phiri 2015).

One of the profound effects of the protests was in tackling head on and undercutting the Mugabe and ZANU-PF fear factor. The essence of debunking the mythical standing of President Mugabe by the protesters was encapsulated in the words of a social media commentator Tom Gumede who posited that the protests 'represented the courage and new momentum [that was] building in Zimbabwe' (*NewZimbabwe* 2016c). Citizens were literally 'girding their loins, raring to take the government' (*The Financial Gazette* 2016a).

The essence of the protests undercutting Mugabe's standing came, first, from the fact that most of the protesters openly challenged Mugabe to step down. Second, discourses also began to emerge around some of the leaders of the protests as potential presidents of Zimbabwe. Pastor Mawarire, among others, was presented as potentially 'the new face of Zimbabwe's struggle for democracy,' a 'national hero' and one who 'suited the profile of a national leader and enjoyed [massive] support' (*NewZimbabwe* 2016c). In the end, what also emerged is that the protests inadvertently refocused attention to

the succession issues both within and outside ZANU-PF, former President Mugabe's party. The common questions around which included: who could/would succeed Mugabe? And, what kind of a leader and politics would Zimbabwe desire in the post-Mugabe era? Regarding the former question on the possibility of change of leadership for Zimbabwe, the discussions occurred against the backdrop of the growing crisis to which the then current government seemed out of solutions to address and where the citizens were getting bolder and more fearless in their assertions for socio-economic reforms. The latter question emerged out of the need to move away from a generally suppressive authoritarianism that had dominated the last stages of colonialism and first four decades of postcolonial rule towards one that strengthened responsiveness from the state and entrenched strong pillars of participatory democracy. That desire sought to move the nation from its previous 50 years or so that had been dominated by two rulers, Ian Smith and Robert Mugabe, whose successive governments had, in Sachikonye's (2011) terminology, literally, turned against the citizens.

It is imperative to note, however, that the deepening economic crisis seemed to coalesce different sections into a galvanised opposition to Mugabe's continued reign. Among others, as the Zimbabwean political analyst Ricky Mukonza aptly noted: 'the youth cannot find employment, businesspeople cannot do business because of a disabling environment and civil servants cannot get paid at the end of the month (Chidza 2016b)'. To this the Zimbabwean academic Maxwell Saungweme added that 'the socio-economic problems Zimbabweans are going through are vast and people have naturally reached a level where they cannot take it anymore. People have been pushed to the wall and the only option is to question the system through action and words' (Chidza 2016b). In the end, as one western diplomat posited, 'Zimbabweans have never faced a future so devoid of hope, there is nothing this government can do to fix it. People know that and they want change' (Raath 2016).

Against the backdrop of a tightening and biting economic crunch, regarding which the Minister of Finance, Patrick Chinamasa, admitted that the state coffers were empty, leading to non-payment of salaries for state workers, President Mugabe had reportedly flown to eight countries between January and June 2016 and undertaken up to ten trips to Singapore. In addition, former Vice-President Mphoko had been staying in the expensive presidential suite at the Rainbow Towers for long periods even when the state had purchased a USD 3.5 million house for him (Raath 2016).

Because the protests were citizen driven, they were vital in bridging the political divide amongst Zimbabweans who had in the past been cast in the political polarity of ZANU-PF and MDC-T. In this fashion, the protests managed to draw support from across the ZANU-PF-MDC-T divide, especially from those who were disillusioned by the (already discussed) convulsions that had afflicted these two major political parties since 2013. By straddling the political polarity the protests grew in strength as they articulated, in non-partisan discourses, the everyday challenges that confronted many ordinary Zimbabweans such as the constitutional failure by the government to eradicate poverty, enduring corruption, unending and potentially fleeing police roadblocks, the desire to stop the government from printing bond notes, the annulment of SI 64/2016 and salary delays for civil servants (Raath 2016).

Following the protests, especially the nationwide 6 July 2016 stayaway, the

government rescinded some of its policies. Among others, the government realigned the civil servants, pay days to fall within the calendar month, reduced the number of roadblocks (Kanambara 2016), and it revised SI 64/2016, allowing individuals to bring import limited quantities of basic commodities per month without penalties (NewZimbabwe 2016a; NewZimbabwe 2016b).

Catching on the wave of regime change and personal aggrandisement?

The converse side of the argument that popular protests kept the democratic struggle alive in Zimbabwe is the narrative that some of the leaders of the protests sought personal gain, including fame and fortune. This view was largely articulated by the ZANU-PF government which even went to the extent of linking some of the leading protesters to western-led regime change efforts. Constructed in this modality, the popular protesters were regarded as stooges of imperialists whose machinations were designed to remove the ZANU-PF from power. Former Home Affairs Minister, Ignatious Chombo, amplified this discourse by directly accusing the United States of America (USA) and France ambassadors of helping to 'engineer [the] civil disturbances' and for 'working through dodgy groups and leveraging on social media to foment civil disobedience and ultimately destabilise Zimbabwe' (Bwititi 2016). Even more telling was the insinuation by the state that when Mawarire left the country following his release on Wednesday, 13 July 2016, he had gone to the United States of America to 'debrief on his activities and possibly to secure more funding for his campaign' (Chitemba 2016).

It was also insinuated that some of the protesters acted in order to get recognition and political asylum in economically better rewarding countries. In this context, appearing to lead the protests was taken to be a new form of career in a search for better livelihoods based on the economic gains accrued from the donor community, especially from the western countries that were considered to be against President Mugabe and ZANU-PF's continued reign. Walking the streets of many cities of Zimbabwe, it was not uncommon to hear whispers intimating that Mawarire had, for example, made a fortune for himself and had secured sanctuary for his family in the USA. This was after his family had been granted asylum in the USA.

Elsewhere, some of the leaders of the protests were regarded as attention seekers. Among the most vocal in this camp was former Minister of Higher Education, Professor Jonathan Moyo, who characterised Pastor Mawarire's *#ThisFlag* as simply a 'pastor's fart in the corridors of power' (*The Zimbabwean* 2016). In this fashion, the derision did not only dismiss *#ThisFlag* as a fluke, but also categorised it as an attention seeking gimmick, targeted to get Pastor Mawarire some publicity or to grow congregants of his church. A more damaging attack on Mawarire came through the state controlled *The Herald* newspaper, which ran a headline story on 23 July 2016 titled 'Mawarire is no saint,' which, among other things, alleged that *#ThisFlag* was Mawarire's 'money spinning venture' (*The Herald* 2016). In spite of such attempts at defamation, the demonstrators managed to influence the governance of the country by forcing the government into implementing some levels of reform and accountability

(as highlighted in previous section). As events unravelled, however, it became evident that, apart from providing temporary platforms for disillusioned Zimbabweans against the country's leadership, popular protests were unable to sustain as potent forces beyond 2016. This was primarily due to lack of coordinated and consistent leadership and heightened state repression that was directed against the leaderships of these movements.

Conclusions

On the whole, the chapter has demonstrated how popular protests visualised a subversion of the grand narratives of the Zimbabwean nation that were formulated around unquestioned loyalty to President Mugabe and ZANU-PF, which ratcheted pressure on the ZANU-PF government for important pro-people reforms. The protests utilised a gap that the crises in ZANU-PF and in MDC-T, as well as a worsening socio-economic decline, presented. Besides contributing to the worsening livelihood conditions for the majority of Zimbabweans, these crises also demonstrated the weakening of the formal CS that had in the 1990s provided a rallying point for channelling grievances against the state's shortcomings and excesses. The enfeebling of the CS was based on the entrenched authoritarian rule and growing socio-economic hardships that generated massive unemployment and the informalisation of the economy. Notwithstanding the above, popular protests could not take full advantage in their attempts to democratise the country because they faced challenges related to state repression, long-term sustainability rooted in the absence of constant leadership, a lack of mobilisational capacity, inadequate management skills and also legal protection.

As such, the chapter has showcased the limits of the transgressional tactics of engagement of what Chatterjee has termed political society in the struggles for greater representation in postcolonial Zimbabwe. What became apparent was that the popular protests lacked the strengths of the older CS movements in postcolonial Zimbabwe that had been derived from the combination of trade union structures and mobilisational capacity interlinked with the leadership skills of middle-class intellectuals and professionals. The lack of such structures and the circa early 2000s weakening of a middle class not linked to the state in Zimbabwe greatly affected the sustainability of the popular protests. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the above weaknesses, and the abuses by the state that the demonstrators suffered including physical harassment, torture, media condemnation and disappearances, popular politics kept the democratic struggles active besides nagging the state into implementing some levels of accountability. What needs to be noted, however, is that while the popular protests failed to dislodge Mugabe from power, this desire remained popular amongst Zimbabweans who supported a military-underwritten removal of Mugabe as state president in November 2017 through participating in urban demonstrations that, together with a parliamentary impeachment process, sanitised the controversial ascendancy to power of President Emmerson Mnangagwa.

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