

## Introduction: Special Issue on Zimbabwe 2

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Our last Special Issue on the Zimbabwe Elections came out two weeks before the June 27<sup>th</sup> run-off presidential election. This was before opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC announced his decision not to contest the run-off election because of the extreme violence used against the MDC candidates, supporters, and alleged supporters. This issue of the ACAS bulletin is concerned with the aftermath of the elections of 2008, offering analysis of the outcome of the parliamentary election results of the March elections, the ways in which the political violence during May and June have fundamentally altered the possibility of a non-violent political dispensation in Zimbabwe, and, perhaps of most current interest for readers, the unfolding of “power sharing” negotiations that began with the September 11, 2008 signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Mugabe’s ZANU(PF), Tsvangirai’s MDC-T, and a smaller splinter group led by Arthur Mutambara, (the MDC-M).

Our first article, written by Oxford University scholars **Jocelyn Alexander and Blessing-Miles Tendi** offers a very insightful narrative of the events surrounding this year’s elections and the ways political alliances and interests began to unravel as the ZANU(PF) insiders came to grips with the reality that they had suffered a stunning electoral defeat in March. Alexander and Tendi provide the specific details so often lacking in the polemical characterization of the events of the summer in the mainstream media.

**Norma Kriger**, one of the foremost analysts of Zimbabwean political violence, militarism, and the state, who also wrote a detailed summary of the March elections in our last Special Issue (ACAS Bulletin 79), follows up in this issue with a brief

analysis of what the Memorandum of Understanding represents. As her informed analysis of the limits of electoral politics showed last time, her understanding of power politics in Zimbabwe once again raises doubts about whether “power sharing” can achieve anything close to what some claim possible.

Our last issue was full of the immediacy of asking for intervention of some sort to stop the violence against the MDC and its supporters. The level of that violence is still being documented, and the excellent collection of reports on the Sokwanele-Zvakwana (“Enough is Enough”) website suggests over 2,000 separate incidents of violence during the election, and these have not completely stopped. Our sharpest criticisms in the last issue were for the South African government of Thabo Mbeki. We asked for South Africa to take a more direct approach, as it is the only regional power with a direct influence over Mugabe. Once Mugabe made himself president after the flawed June elections and headed off for the African Union meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, it was clear he expected it to be “business as usual” assuming that regional and AU leaders welcomed him back into the “club of dictators”. The meeting did not turn out the way Mugabe expected: in fact, there were outspoken criticisms from some African leaders, notably from Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, Kenya, Botswana, and Zambia. Many other leaders remained quiet. In the weeks that followed, Mbeki did manage to push the negotiations toward a “power sharing” solution to the impasse. It would appear Mbeki hoped Mugabe would accept negotiations toward power sharing as the best way to “normalize” the situation and allow Mugabe and his associates to continue in power as before. On the MDC’s side, Tsvangirai had to convince his supporters that power sharing would be transitional, leading to fresh elections in no less than two years. Once again, Mugabe let Mbeki down by at first ignoring Tsvangirai and naming his own government. After all Mbeki, as the leader of the SADC negotiating team on Zimbabwe for the past six years, has consistently claimed to have had the situation under control. But every time he left

Harare with “Mugabe’s word”, Mugabe would do as he pleased. It was no wonder that Tsvangirai grew tired of Mbeki as mediator, and that Mbeki himself seemed hesitant to return to Harare once he had been stripped of the presidency of the ANC and South Africa at the end of September.

All of these diplomatic efforts, while better than accepting Mugabe’s war against his own people as legitimate, has done nothing to bring the economic, health, and social crises in Zimbabwe under control and the most telling evidence of this has been the displacement of Zimbabweans into the greater southern African region. As each day passes and the economic and political situation inside Zimbabwe continue to worsen, these migrations have become an act of survival.

**Amanda Hammar**, program coordinator at the Nordic Africa Institut in Uppsala, Sweden, provides an important overview of these displacements beginning with the farm invasions and evictions in 2000, the urban removals under Operation *Murambatsvina* in 2005-6, and electoral ‘cleansing’ and punishment in 2008. Hammar’s article provides a way for scholars and students to gain access to the important research currently underway by international scholars on the impact of these displacements for Zimbabweans and for the region.

**Blair Rutherford**, a professor of anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, provides a look into his ongoing research project in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, a province bordering Zimbabwe where many migrant workers have come over the past 8 years, and in increasing numbers over the past 3 years. The status of Zimbabweans in Limpopo province, their precarious position as illegal farm workers, and their vulnerability to criminals and the state, gives an insight into the difficulties Zimbabweans confront in South Africa, even those who were not victims of last summer’s violent attacks in South Africa.

Professor **Clapperton Mavhunga** of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston addresses to a key issue in Zimbabwe--press and Internet censorship. As ZANU(PF) has tried to keep a tight control on the press, ever since passage of the media laws banning most foreign press and closing media critical of ZANU(PF), the proliferation of high quality Internet news sources have flourished. Much like the battle over the radio waves in the Rhodesian days, new technologies allow for new ways to get information in and out of the country. The Zimbabwean government, however, has also turned to new technologies of Internet censorship and spying, and, as Mavhunga argues, opponents of the Mugabe regime have retaliated with their own cyber-guerilla tactics.

The next three articles in this issue reflect in their own way the great frustration among activists and scholars over the contradictory messages and political categories these “power sharing” talks have brought to the fore. A common theme among all three is the way rhetoric and action have reached new heights of hypocrisy in Southern African politics, and the need for scholars to understand and respect the history of progressive movements in the region. Such progressive traditions need to be reaffirmed and reconstituted in order to support those on the front lines in such difficult times.

The first, by **Tamuka Chirimambowa**, is a denunciation of the ZANU (PF) regime under Robert Mugabe, exposing the disjuncture between the ruling party’s anti-western, anti-imperial rhetoric and two factors which undermine the legitimacy of this rhetorical strategy. First, historically, Chirimambowa itemizes a variety of instances over the past 20-odd years when Mugabe or the ruling party were in fact eager seekers of the funding and markers of respectability offered by western institutions, from the World Bank to universities granting honorary degrees. Second, with an eye to the present, Chirimambowa foregrounds the crushing poverty of the majority of Zimbabweans and the desperate out-migration of millions of Zimbabweans, leading him bitterly to

note that no food is left for people to serve their hungry families for dinner. All that remains to put on the average Zimbabwean's dinner plate is the cold comfort of the regime's anti-imperialist rhetoric, which originally had borne so much promise for better days ahead for the black majority at the dawn of Zimbabwe's independence. Chirimambowa, who is currently a graduate student in South Africa, and who was a former student leader at the University of Zimbabwe, has lived much of the hardship of which he writes.

The next article, by **Horace Campbell**, Professor of African American Studies and Political Science at Syracuse University in New York, and a scholar who has previously written numerous polemics against ZANU(PF) in the past, now also shares his frustrations with the MDC and its various internal divisions. Campbell argues that the divided MDC has moved away from their more progressive origins in a trade union movement that genuinely battled for the rights of Zimbabwean workers. While trade unionists still support Tsvangirai, Campbell presents a bleak picture for Zimbabwean workers moving forward (between a political rock and an economic hard place) and calls for progressive trade unionists and activists in South Africa and the region to redouble their efforts to assist Zimbabwean workers.

**David Moore**, professor of anthropology and development studies at the University of Johannesburg, and also, as he explained so well in the last ACAS Bulletin, an academic who struggles with the challenges of being a concerned scholar and a journalist, writes critically of the power-sharing talks and the political alliances and personalities involved. His understanding of the intricacies of MDC factionalism provides insights into the problems faced by the MDC as they seek out ways to both protect their supporters and at the same time hold onto the legitimacy afforded them by their electoral victories in 2008.

This ACAS Bulletin ends with a review and a concluding editorial. The review is written by **Sean**

**Jacobs**, a professor of communications at the University of Michigan and Co-Chair of the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars. Jacobs reviews Heidi Holland's *Dinner with Mugabe*, a best-selling book that has received a lot of attention for her portrayal of Mugabe. Jacobs' review offers insights into Mugabe's personality, while also arguing that there is more to the Zimbabwean crisis beyond what is often attributed to one man's psychosis.

The concluding editorial suggests the need to look seriously at the parallels between tactics used during the political violence of the past summer (and still ongoing) with the tactics used by a ZANU-controlled Zimbabwean state and military during the *Gukurahundi* in the early 1980s. The shadow of the *Gukurahundi* is yet another key reason to challenge ZANU(PF)'s legitimacy to govern after stealing another election and using political violence to terrorize those who bravely voted against them.

Although the majority of articles in this issue deal with politics, it is important to remember the extremely precarious situation faced by so many Zimbabweans today. Drawing from anecdotes told to the editors by friends living in Zimbabwe, it is clear that life for most Zimbabweans is a daily struggle for survival, hour-by-hour, meal-by-meal. One example is the absurdly low limits set by the government for individual daily bank ATM withdrawals. This amount is not sufficient to accomplish many, if any, of the daily expenditures that sustain life. It is not always possible even to withdraw the limited amount permitted. It is not unheard of for a resident of one of Harare's high-density suburbs to arrive at the bank in the city centre at 5 AM and find that one is already number 1,000 in the queue. If that day's allotment is what one needed in order to get transport home, where there might –if one were fortunate – be a meager meal of sadza and greens, and then the bank runs out of cash before you can withdraw, then one must wait and try again the next day, with workers sleeping at their place of employment. By the next

day, with no calories ingested in the intervening hours, some workers have been known to faint with hunger. This occurs in a city where the big “chefs” drive around in their Mercedes and have their food brought in from South Africa or Botswana. This crisis has turned just about everyone without access to a real currency into an informal trader. Where even basic commodities produced in Zimbabwe are first smuggled into neighboring countries where they can be sold in a real currency, and then are resold to Zimbabwean traders who bring them back into Zimbabwe.

The health care system has become a nightmare for those who do not have access to forex and drugs from neighboring countries. There are thousands and thousands of people with every manner of medical need. A woman with returning breast cancer and no foreign exchange can get an X-ray but cannot get surgery, cannot get chemotherapy, cannot even get opiates to ease the pain as she waits for death. Children who fall ill with a violent case of diarrhea due to impure water from the Bulawayo water system – which totters on the edge of functional due to lack of water supply and insufficient chemicals to treat what water is there – will die of their ailment unless they are one of the lucky families that has a relative in South Africa who sends home remittances. In Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, clean water has become a problem, particularly in those areas where raw sewage now pours into the streets and has in some places entered into the makeshift wells people use for their water. Cases of cholera are on the increase.

Pay for state employees is not sufficient to support even basic costs – not transport, not food, not rent, not school fees. It is therefore no surprise that nurses, doctors, and teachers have left the country in massive proportions. Many schools are left with ill-trained teachers or simply have large numbers of vacancies. Since teachers have often been the first targeted for politically motivated persecution, this has further undermined the educational institutions. Children whose families actually scrape together the funds for school fees therefore find themselves not

always experiencing adequate instruction, and right now are left facing their O-levels unready to write passing exams.

We hope that this issue and the last issue (ACAS Bulletin 79) will prove helpful to scholars and students. The editors would like to thank our contributors for taking the time to write such thought provoking and informative articles and **Jesse Benjamin, Sean Jacobs** and **Jacob Mundy** for their hard work in publishing and disseminating the ACAS Bulletin. There is a great deal of information available on the Internet about Zimbabwe, but we hope having a more focused collection of informative articles and opinion pieces may help to start students and scholars on their way to better understanding, teaching, and hopefully advocacy. Zimbabweans bravely continue to oppose tyranny, censorship, and dictatorship. Those of us who enjoy the freedom of speech need to find ways to do more in solidarity with the many brave Zimbabweans who continue to endure tortures, beatings, imprisonments, and exile in their struggle for a better future.

If you are going to be at the African Studies Association Meeting in Chicago, we will be holding the second annual meeting of the Zimbabwe Scholars Group at 7:30 pm on Saturday November 15<sup>th</sup>, in the Missouri Room. We are fortunate to have **Professor Horace Campbell** as our speaker and the title of his talk is “**When Voting is not enough for a Democratic Transition: lessons from Zimbabwe, Kenya and the Pan African World**”. There will also be an ACAS sponsored roundtable on the Zimbabwean elections and their aftermath at the ASA meeting on Friday November 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:15 am in the Arkansas Room.

If you are not able to attend this year’s ASA meeting, please spread the word about these Zimbabwe-related events. Also, please contact the editors by email if you would like to learn more about the Zimbabwe Scholars Group and perhaps contribute to future publications, or simply to comment on any of the articles in this issue.