

# PARTY FOOT-SOLDIERS, QUASI-MILITIAS, VIGILANTES, AND THE SPECTRE OF VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE'S OPPOSITION POLITICS

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**Abstract:** Scholarship tends to neglect the phenomenon of political violence in opposition parties in Zimbabwe. The prevailing narrative is that political violence is largely a monopoly of the state and the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).<sup>1</sup> However, an emerging trend implicates opposition political parties, particularly the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).<sup>2</sup> The MDC's party's foot-soldiers, especially the "Vanguard," often exhibit violent tendencies.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the present article explores the scourge of intra-party violence in the opposition party MDC between 2005 and 2019. The article conceptualises and contextualises MDC's violence through the lenses of Zimbabwe's political culture and socialisation in the context of the country's pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial historical trajectories.

**Keywords:** *party foot-soldiers, intra-party violence, MDC, Zimbabwe, Vanguard*

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1 The Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) is the ruling party in Zimbabwe. The party has been in power since the country's independence in 1980.

2 In this article the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) refers to the main MDC faction led by Nelson Chamisa, which is currently the leading party in the MDC-Alliance. The MDC-Alliance is a coalition of political parties which consists of MDC, MDC-N, People's Democratic Party (PDP), Transform Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe People First (Zim PF), ZANU Ndonga, and Multi-Racial Democrats. After the 2018 Harmonized Elections, the MDC-Alliance was transformed from a coalition into a single political party. It should be noted that after the MDC's major split in 2005, the main faction of the MDC became known as MDC-T until the name was legally retained by Thokozani Khupe's MDC faction in the run up to the 2018 Harmonized Elections. The two MDC factions are currently in a fierce legal wrangle over the control of the party assets and representation in the Senate, Lower House and council. A recent Supreme Court judgement underlined that Thokozani Khupe is the legitimate leader of the party and not Nelson Chamisa.

3 The "Vanguard," on the other hand, is a radical vigilante and paramilitary group largely consisting of members of the MDC Youth Assembly.

## Introduction

Scholars such as Hartwell (2018), Mandaza (2014), and Bratton and Masunungure (2011) concur with the narrative that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed to provide a democratic alternative to the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)’s violent and kleptocratic rule. Ironically, recent history shows that the opposition party has also slid into the abyss of political violence. Besides conflicting with the party’s founding values, MDC’s violence runs contrary to the dominant narrative which views political violence as largely a monopoly of the state and the ruling party ZANU-PF.

Except for scholars such as LeBas (2006), Hartwell (2018), the media, and a few civic society organisations such as Heal Zimbabwe Trust (2018), Zimbabwe Peace Project (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2018) which have sometimes highlighted the issue of political violence within the MDC, scholarship on this phenomenon remains scant and marginal. Instead, the dominant account in the debate on political violence in Zimbabwe is that politically motivated violence is largely a colophon of the state and the ZANU-PF. Even prominent scholars such as Makumbe (2000, 2002, 2006), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004, 2009), Masunungure (2009), Bratton and Masunungure (2011) and Sachikonye (2011), among others, tend to advance what can be termed a “single narrative” by mainly focusing on intra- and inter-party violence perpetrated by ZANU-PF and its proxies in Zimbabwe. Such a tendency runs contrary to Adichie’s (2009) clear warning about “the danger of a single story.” In one of his critically acclaimed works, Achebe (2000: 128) underscores the need for “a balance of stories” particularly in relation to Africa, yet the story of political violence in Zimbabwe’s body politic remains “unbalanced.” By neglecting to examine political violence within the opposition movement, the literature on political violence in Zimbabwe is deprived of a crucial viewpoint. Therefore, the present article is motivated by the fact that, despite conclusive evidence of intra-party violence in the opposition party MDC, the issue remains an under-researched and peripheral phenomenon. The present study therefore seeks to bridge such a scholarship lacuna by exploring the causes, organisation, funding, beneficiaries and ramifications of MDC’s intra-party violence.

Also, the present article is motivated by the recent emergence of a violent paramilitary and vigilante group called the “Vanguard” which largely consists of party foot-soldiers mainly from the MDC Youth Assembly. The principal aim is to expose some of the most violent tendencies within the opposition MDC. The girding thesis is that, since the party’s first split in 2005, the MDC has been morphing into an intolerant, violent and democratically deficient polity, relatively analogous to ZANU-PF’s narrative of violence. Additionally, the article’s thesis largely runs contrary to the viewpoint that political violence in the MDC can be harnessed as a catalyst for galvanisation and mass mobilisation. To the contrary, MDC’s violence can be seen as a leviathan and an agent of disunity and demobilisation in the party.

In terms of its contribution, the article is one of the first to tackle the phenomenon of political violence within the opposition movement in Zimbabwe, which could make it a target of interest by political parties, academics, diplomats, think tanks and civil society in Zimbabwe and beyond. Unlike LeBas’ (2006) seminal work, which focuses on how the MDC and ZANU-PF influence each other (external drivers) even in the context of violence, this article deploys an inward-looking but multi-layered and multi-pronged approach which concentrates on internal drivers of violence within the MDC, hence, its “unique” contribution in that respect. Moreover, the article underscores the viewpoint that the MDC’s violence could be understood in the context of Zimbabwe’s violent political culture and socialisation in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

It is also worth underlining that the present article principally focuses on intra-party violence in the MDC faction, which was previously led by Morgan Tsvangirai and is currently under Nelson Chamisa’s leadership. This article is not a comparative study of violence between the MDC and ZANU-PF due to the fact that the latter is largely associated with what Bob-Milliar (2014: 125) calls “high intensity” political violence, which is large scale and usually state sponsored, whereas the former is associated with “low intensity” political violence. Therefore, the variation between the two makes drawing parallels problematic.

## **Methodological Considerations**

The research largely followed a qualitative methodological trajectory. In terms of data collection instruments, the study relied on observation and informal personal communications, respectively. Political and social gatherings (rallies, meetings, funerals, etc.), mainstream and social media (Facebook, YouTube and Twitter), were crucial sites for the purposes of observation. Informal personal communications were held with MDC's general membership and members of the party's National Executive, National Council, Youth Assembly and the "Vanguard." In the same vein, conversations were held with 25 individuals who were chosen through judgemental sampling. The anonymity of the 25 informants was respected. The individuals in question were chosen due to their knowledge vis-à-vis the topic under discussion. E-mails, face to face conversations and social media (Skype, Facebook and WhatsApp) were key in the context of informal conversations.

Since the study also utilised secondary sources of information; journal articles, media and civil society reports, books and internet sources, played an important role. The period of study is between 2005 and 2019. The study period begins in 2005 because it is when the MDC witnessed its first major split which was characterized by infighting and intra-party violence. This study does not explore political violence within the broader opposition movement and only focuses on the MDC (previously led by Morgan Tsvangirai) currently led by Nelson Chamisa.

The fact that the author of the present article once worked for the MDC as a Policy Analyst could raise the question of bias. However, it should be underlined that the Policy Analyst position is purely a "technocratic" or consultancy portfolio which, in turn, insulated the author from the party's partisan politics and internal power dynamics. Therefore, the author's work with the MDC largely followed a neutral and professional trajectory. For the purposes of professionalism all "technocrats" (including the author) were forbidden from wearing the MDC regalia, from campaigning for politicians or chanting the party's slogans. The author also voluntarily left the party to further his studies. This implies that there is no bad blood between him and the MDC, which minimises chances of bias. Moreover, the author is bound by ethical principles and international academic best practices that encourage neutrality and respect for evidence in research.

## **Conceptualisation and Contextualisation of MDC Violence**

Political violence in the MDC and in Zimbabwe in general can be understood in the context of the country's political socialisation and culture in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. Before delving into the subject matter, it is crucial to revisit the definition of political socialisation and political culture. Political socialisation is a process whereby society develops attitudes and feelings towards politics in each of its members (Munroe 1985). On the other hand, political culture refers to the attitudes, feelings, ideas and values that people have about politics, government, their own role, and more generally about authority in all its various forms (Munroe 1985). Political socialisation and political culture operate in conjunction; since political socialisation is a process through which political culture is nurtured and sustained. Whilst political culture is society oriented, political socialisation is individually oriented. In terms of political socialisation, the media, observation and social interactions play a pivotal role in the cultivation of political culture. Oftentimes, political culture is not homogeneous and can vary within the same society.

The culture of political violence in Zimbabwe predates colonial times. For instance, Beach (1974) cites violence that was perpetrated by the Ndebele kingdom on the Shona communities around 1873. In the same vein, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1144) alerts us to the fact that the pre-colonial era in Zimbabwe was underpinned by despotic kingdoms which thrived on force and violence. Congruently, in his presentation at SAPES Trust, Malunga (2017) underscores the prevalence of political violence in Zimbabwe before, during and after the colonial era. The culture of political violence in Zimbabwe continued unabated during British colonial rule, which began in 1890.

The violence that was perpetrated on the blacks by the colonial government in Zimbabwe before the country's independence in 1980 is well documented by scholars such as Banana (1989). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1144) observes that: "Colonialism was never a terrain of democracy, human rights and freedom; rather it was a terrain of conquest, violence, police rule, militarism and authoritarianism." Zimbabwe's current crop of leadership were politically socialised and cultured under such an undemocratic environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that even during the liberation struggle for independence,

Zimbabwe's nationalist movements, especially ZANLA, were undemocratic in practice and orientation. Sithole (1979) catalogues what he terms "struggles within the struggles" in the ZANLA nationalist and liberation movement. A distillation of Sithole's (1979) work reveals that such struggles were violent, tribalist, sexist, conspiratorial and undemocratic by nature. Moreover, Sithole's (1979) account is supported by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1145): "But African nationalism was also not a school for democracy and human rights, having been deeply interpellated by the colonial culture of politics of intolerance, militarism, tribalism and violence." It is therefore not surprising that the nationalists who took over the reins of power in 1980, used violence as an instrument of achieving their parochial interests. Therefore, some of the undemocratic tendencies by the post-colonial state in Zimbabwe are deeply rooted in colonialism's political socialisation and its culture of violence, militarism and police rule.

In independent Zimbabwe, the darkest era in terms of political violence falls between 1982 and 1987. During this period, the Robert Mugabe regime initiated a genocidal policy known as the "Gukurahundi" which, according to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (1997), claimed the lives of more than 20,000 civilians in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe.<sup>4</sup> The army (mainly the North-Korean trained Fifth brigade unit), police, ZANU youths (party foot-soldiers) and the intelligence services, were responsible for the "Gukurahundi" atrocities according to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (1997). The "Gukurahundi" policy, which was allegedly implemented to deal with the opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union's (ZAPU) "dissidents," who wanted to "destabilise" the country, ended in 1987 with the signing of the Unity Accord by PF ZAPU and ZANU to form the current ruling party in Zimbabwe, the ZANU-PF. The late Robert Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangangwa, Perence Shiri, Enos Nkala and Constantino Chiwenga are some of the "godfathers" of Gukurahundi.

In the early 1990s, the state sponsored violence during Zimbabwe's 1990 elections was trenchantly analysed by Moyo (1992). The 1990 electoral violence, which witnessed the shooting of the opposition Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) candidate, Patrick Kombayi, was also perpetrated by state security agents and members of the ruling party, ZANU-PF, including its party youths. Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) chronicle the massive

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4 "Gukurahundi" is a Shona word which refers to the early rains that wash away the dirt.

violence perpetrated by the ruling party's (ZANU-PF) supporters and state security agents during the 1995 General Election in Zimbabwe. The violence of the 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008 elections was richly analysed by scholars such as Makumbe (2002; 2006; 2009a; 2009b), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004) and Masunungure (2009), among a host of others. Apart from lamenting the violence by ruling parties in post-colonial Africa, Frantz Fanon (1963b) foresaw African nationalism taking a particular trajectory: "from nationalism we have passed to ultra-nationalism, to chauvinism, and finally to racism."

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that since the pre-colonial dispensation, Zimbabwe has always been subjected to the political culture and socialisation of violence. The colonial political order deeply cultivated a culture of violence, which in turn had a tragic bearing on the liberation movement and on independent Zimbabwe. Accordingly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1144) cites Stefan Mair and Masipula Sithole who note that "colonialism never promoted any democratic norms and practices and it merely consolidated an incipient authoritarian psyche in the nationalist leadership... The authoritarianism of the colonial era reproduced itself within the nationalist political movements. The war of liberation, too, reinforced rather than undermined this authoritarian culture." Thus, the historically violent and undemocratic culture of violence was later inscribed in the DNA of the post-colonial state in Africa which led Crawford Young to conclude that: "A genetic code for the new states of Africa was already imprinted on its embryo within the womb of African colonial state" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 1144). This could help explain the violent tendencies of the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe.

Also, from the above discussion, a clear pattern of political violence, which can be traced back to the pre-colonial era, can be decoded. The MDC exists in an environment that is historically and presently saturated with political violence, which makes it cumbersome for the party to escape the trap of the scourge of violence. In line with LeBas' (2006) thesis that ZANU-PF and the MDC influence each other in the context of violence, it can be argued that ZANU-PF's violent tendencies have become "contagious" to the MDC, hence the party's violent tendencies in recent years. All put together, it is worth underlining that the violent political culture and socialisation, which predates colonial times, can help explain the MDC's violent behaviour in recent years. Also, the party has been exposed to ZANU-PF's influence.

Since most of the MDC violence is perpetrated by the party's foot-soldiers, the concept is worth discussing.

### ***Party Foot-Soldiers***

Bob-Milliar (2014: 132) observes that the term “party foot-soldier(s)” is of recent origin and gained political significance in Ghana when a group of middle-class supporters of Andrews Kwame Pianim, an NPP presidential aspirant in the party's 1996 presidential primary, described themselves as the candidate's “foot soldiers.” Since then, the term has gained traction in public and academic circles. But what exactly are party foot-soldiers? Democracy Watch (2007: 4–5) tackles this question by highlighting that a party foot-soldier is:

A person who devotes exceptional amounts of his or her time and energies to canvassing support and votes for a party and its candidates as well as countering similar activities by rival parties. These party activists often expect, and literally demand, direct and personal reward for their efforts, even when they are not official employees of the party. In other more established electoral democracies, the party foot-soldiers would be called party workers or party volunteers.

Accordingly, party foot-soldiers are those passionate party members who sacrifice their time and energy to canvass support for their political parties. Jackson (2012) describes party foot-soldiers as “die hard supporters ... who put their life on the line for the sake of their parties and its leadership.” Like other parties in Africa, the MDC has its own party foot-soldiers who are key in countering the ruling party's activities and shaping internal power matrixes in the party. What are the essential characteristics of party foot-soldiers?

### ***Key Features of Party Foot-Soldiers***

One of the characteristics of party foot-soldiers, both in the Global South and the Global North, is their position in the hierarchy of their political parties. Therefore, Bob-Milliar (2014: 132) alerts us to the viewpoint that party foot-soldiers are at the bottom of the party hierarchy and are classified as the “lumpenproletariat” according to the Marxian view. Marx and Engels (1848: 20) describe the lumpenproletariat as a class occupying “the lowest layers of



the old society,” which consists of beggars, street urchins, petty criminals, etc. History shows that members of the lumpenproletariat are notorious for anti-social behaviour, including violence. Congruently, violence is also a hallmark of party foot-soldiers, particularly in the Global South. For instance, Democracy Watch (2010: 7) laments acts of violence and hooliganism by party foot-soldiers in Ghana and argues that: “[P]arty foot soldiering is indeed a soft underbelly of democratic politics in Ghana that must be reigned in.” By the same token, Bob-Milliar (2014: 132–133) underscores the fact that party foot-soldiers are contentious, violent, aggressive, informal and their brand of political activism is characterised by lawlessness. As this study shall later reveal, the violent MDC’s party foot-soldiers, and some members of the Vanguard, fit neatly into the lumpenproletariat and party foot-soldier narrative.

However, it should also be underlined that unlike in the Global South (especially in Africa), party foot-soldiers in the Global North (or Western liberal democracies) are not usually “social misfits”/lumpenproletariat and are largely tolerant, peaceful and law abiding. Observation in Germany, UK, Canada, and US indicates peaceful party foot-soldiering during election periods. In the Global North, university students are essential in the context of party foot-soldiering. Another trademark in relation to party foot-soldiers is their widespread reliance on walking as a means of transportation during their party activities. In Africa, and the Global South in general, party foot-soldiers are known for traveling on foot whilst they do their door-to-door campaigns, hence, the label “foot soldiers.” In Zimbabwe, party foot-soldiers from both the ruling party (ZANU-PF) and the opposition parties mainly rely on walking as a means of traveling.

Voluntarism is another essential feature of party foot-soldiers. Democracy Watch (2007: 4–5) highlights that party foot-soldiers are not employed by the parties which they campaign or canvass support for. Correspondingly, Jackson (2012) notes that party foot-soldiers’ campaign and work for the party “essentially for free.” Therefore, party foot-soldiers are not on the payroll of the political parties they support and serve. In addition, poverty is another essential hallmark, particularly in the Global South. For instance, Jackson (2012) alerts us to the view that the bulk of party foot-soldiers in Africa are poor and unemployed. Due to acute poverty and low levels of literacy, party foot-soldiers are prone to manipulation by the party leadership for political

expediency, especially in the Global South. MDC's party foot-soldiers are no exception.

### **The MDC: Genesis, Purpose and Metamorphosis**

The MDC was formed as an alternative to the deteriorating political and socio-economic conditions in Zimbabwe. Therefore, before delving into the main discussion about the MDC, it is important to give a brief background which precipitated the formation of the party. As early as 1990, Zimbabwe was in the economic doldrums. Hence, Bratton and Masunungure (2011: 18) note that by 1990, Zimbabwe was facing economic challenges: the government's fiscal deficit was over 10%, there was lack of foreign investment, over 100,000 graduates were leaving secondary school each year and the economy generated little employment. Such economic predicaments forced the government to abandon its Marxist-Leninist-Maoist style of economic management in favour of the International Monetary Fund's austerity programme known as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991. As acknowledged by scholars such as Mandaza (2014), Kawewe and Dibie (2000), and Bratton and Masunungure (2011), ESAP was detrimental to Zimbabwe's economic progress. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) add that government corruption during the ESAP period worsened the economic situation in the country.

In addition to implementing the ESAP, the government of Zimbabwe made two policy blunders: (1) the war veterans' pay-outs in 1997, and (2) the participation in and funding of Zimbabwe's intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo civil war in 1998-99. Makumbe (2009: 11) notes that in 1997 war veterans of the liberation struggle successfully coerced the Mugabe regime to grant them monthly pensions and a Zw\$50,000 compensation for each of them. The pay-outs to the war veterans were not budgeted for. "At \$Z50,000 each, and outside the budget, the payments were a huge burden on an already struggling economy. The heavy crash of the Zimbabwe dollar, on 14 November 1997, when it lost 71,5% of its value against the US dollar, is said to have been triggered partly by these huge pay-outs" (Magaisa 2015). Therefore, the war veterans' pay-outs took a heavy toll on Zimbabwe's economy.

In relation to the DRC War, Bratton and Masunungure (2011: 26) note that: “In 1998, the President deployed the Zimbabwe National Army to prop up the fragile regime of Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of Congo, an ill-advised move partly motivated by a search for new sources of national income.” The results of Zimbabwe’s intervention were devastating to the Zimbabwean economy. Bratton and Masunungure (2011: 26) observe: “Instead, the Congo adventure ended up squandering vast sums of public money and led mainly to the personal enrichment of a handful of senior military commanders and strategically placed politicians who won lucrative mining concessions and transport contracts.” Congruently, Magaisa (2015) adds that:

In the end, Zimbabwe became a key actor in the DRC war, which caused serious problems back home. The war was costly – in human and financial terms. In November 1999, the BBC quoted a report in the *Financial Gazette*, a Zimbabwean weekly, stating that equipment worth of \$200 million had been lost during the war. The *British Financial Times* had also reported a leaked Zimbabwe Government internal memo showing that \$166 million had been spent on the war over a 6-month period between January and June 1999, an average of \$25 million per month. These costs were not in the budget and seriously drained the fiscus.

A cocktail of policy mishaps such as ESAP (coupled with government corruption), war veterans’ pay-outs and the DRC War strained Zimbabwe’s economy. Consequently, the urban population became agitated and restless and this resulted in mass unrests led by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), especially the December 1997 stay-away and the food riots of January 1998 (Mandaza 2014). In a bid to quell the unrests, the state unleashed massive violence against the protestors (Bratton and Masunungure 2011). Against a backdrop of economic turmoil and political violence, the time was ripe for the formation of a new political and economic alternative to ZANU-PF’s tyrannical rule.

The idea of forming the MDC was endorsed on 26 February 1999 at the Women’s Bureau in Hillside (Harare). Seven months later, the party’s Working People’s Convention followed at the Rufaro Stadium in Harare. The MDC held its first inaugural congress on 26 January 2000 at the Chitungwiza Aquatic Complex where the late Morgan Tsvangirai ascended to the party’s helm. The

MDC was formed by Zimbabweans from diverse backgrounds: academics, students, labour, women's organisations, civic society, youth organisations, church and the business community. Structurally, the MDC consists of the Standing Committee, National Council, National Executive and Congress. The party also has Youth and Women's Assemblies.

Ideologically, the MDC identifies itself as a social democratic party. The MDC (2018) website states that the party was formed "on the basis of carrying out the struggle of the people; the struggle for food and jobs; peace; dignity, decency and democracy; equal distribution of resources; and justice, transparency and equality of all Zimbabweans." It is important to note that the MDC explicitly spells out that it was formed on the basis for the struggle for peace, among other purposes. Accordingly, the MDC was formed along Fanon's (1963) lines of an ideal African political party: "the energetic spokesman and the incorruptible defender of the masses." In short, the party was formed to restore democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

The MDC contested the 2000 (parliamentary), 2002 (presidential), 2005 (parliamentary and senatorial), 2008 (harmonised), 2013 (harmonised) and 2018 (harmonised) elections. In the 2000 parliamentary elections the ruling party (ZANU-PF) won 63 seats against MDC's 57. The MDC's performance in the election in question was remarkable, considering that it was "a new kid on the block." However, Makumbe (2006;2009) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (2001) note that the 2000 parliamentary elections were marred by massive violence, specifically farm invasions, assault, rape and public harassment to members and supporters of the MDC. The 2000 parliamentary elections were followed by the 2002 presidential elections in which ZANU-PF's Robert Mugabe won 56% of the vote against MDC Morgan Tsvangirai's 42%. Like the 2000 election, the 2002 election was marred by irregularities and massive violence; hence Vollan (2002: 2) notes that: "The Presidential Elections in Zimbabwe in March 2002 were conducted in an environment of strong polarisation, political violence and an election administration with severe shortcomings." The violence associated with the 2002 Presidential Elections and the oftentimes violent expropriation of land led to the sanctioning of Zimbabwe by the European Union in the same year.

In relation to the 2005 elections, ZANU-PF won 78 of the 150 seats in the House of Assembly against MDC's 41. In the Senate, ZANU-PF won 43 seats

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against MDC's 7. The 2005 parliamentary and senatorial elections were also characterised by manipulation, political violence and voter intimidation by the ruling party, ZANU-PF, as noted by Makumbe (2009b). In terms of violence and manipulation, the 2008 Harmonised Elections stand out. However, the first round of elections held on 29 March 2008 was peaceful. Consequently, Morgan Tsvangirai beat Robert Mugabe by 47.9% to 43.2% in terms of the presidential vote. However, Morgan Tsvangirai failed to reach the constitutionally required 50 plus one vote to clinch the presidency. This prompted another round of the presidential vote on 27 June 2008.

The run up to the second round of the presidential elections, also known as the "run-off," is arguably the most violent election period in the history of Zimbabwe. Hence, Makumbe (2009a: 2) notes that:

In the run-up to the run-off, ZANU-PF unleashed a wave of countrywide violence, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 100 MDC supporters, the displacement of more than 50,000 people from their rural homes, and the burning of many homes by the ZANU-PF militia working in cahoots with elements of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Zimbabwe Prison Service (ZPS), and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO).

Against a backdrop of violence and intimidation, especially by security forces, Masunungure (2009: 98) concludes that "the 27 June 2008 presidential run-off election was a militarized election without a choice." In fact, the election in question is popularly known in Zimbabwe as a "one-man-race" considering that Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC) withdrew his candidature. However, ZANU-PF went ahead with the election and Robert Mugabe won 85.5% of the vote against Tsvangirai's 9.3%. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) underline that the violence and manipulation of the presidential run-off election was condemned by the African Union, the USA, and the EU. Although the MDC controversially lost the presidential election in 2008, the party had a majority in the Lower House of parliament. The party's then National Chairperson, Lovemore Moyo, made history by becoming the first Speaker of the House of Assembly from the opposition.

Faced with the question of legitimacy, ZANU-PF conceded to the idea of a power-sharing agreement with the MDC in the mould of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009. The GNU deal, which was brokered by South

Africa, saw Morgan Tsvangirai becoming the Prime Minister and Mugabe retaining the presidency. Ministerial and diplomatic portfolios were also shared. Zimbabwe's economy and social service delivery improved during the GNU period. The GNU ended with the 2013 Harmonised Elections, which were won by ZANU-PF amid reports of vote manipulation. For instance, ZESN (2013) notes that security forces, especially the army and intelligence units were deployed to the countryside during the 2013 elections for the purpose of vigilance and intimidation. Moreover, Morgan Tsvangirai claimed in a press statement that ZANU-PF had rigged the election through an Israel shadowy company known as NIKUV (MDC Zimbabwe 2017).

Under the banner of a coalition called MDC-Alliance, the MDC participated in the 2018 Harmonised Elections against ZANU-PF and other small political formations. These elections were the first of their kind in the post-Mugabe era. The presidential contest boiled down to two candidates: Nelson Chamisa (MDC-A) and Emmerson Mnangagwa (ZANU-PF). In the end, Mnangagwa garnered 50.8% of the vote against Chamisa's 44.3%. The presidential outcome was hotly disputed by the opposition. However, the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe declared Mnangagwa the President of Zimbabwe in August 2018. The run up to the 2018 Harmonised Elections was generally peaceful. This peaceful environment was short-lived when protests broke out a day after the casting of the votes. Protestors demanded the immediate announcement of the results and destroyed property in Harare CBD. The army was then deployed to quell the protests and indiscriminately shot at civilians killing six and injuring 35 (see Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the 2018 Post-Election Violence). What is important to note is that, since 2000, the MDC has been subjected to state-sponsored violence and electoral manipulation. The party has been a victim of Zimbabwe's long history of a violent political culture and socialisation.

In terms of shaping the national discourse, the MDC has played an important watchdog role on the ZANU-PF government, especially in the context of monitoring government corruption, political violence and public policy in general. Since 2000, the party has been in charge of local government administration, especially in urban areas, where it enjoys popular support. The party has somehow been influencing legislative framework in parliament. Importantly, the MDC played a key role in the writing of the 2013 constitution. A perusal of the constitution in question shows that it is

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a democratic constitution, which only suffers from non-implementation by the status quo. The MDC also made a significant contribution in relation to the resuscitation of the economy and service delivery during the GNU period. Moreover, the party maintains warm relations with the civic society in Zimbabwe and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Regionally and internationally, the party enjoys cordial relations with some SADC countries, the African Union, the European Union, the UK, the USA and the broader Western world. The party is also on record for lobbying the above-mentioned regional and international actors to find a solution to the Zimbabwe Crisis.

Despite the party's significant contribution and visibility on the national, regional and international political scene, the MDC has suffered from a number of setbacks. Since its formation in 1999, the party has been hit by three major splits in 2005, 2013 and 2018. The first split of 2005 was fuelled by stark disagreements on whether to participate in the Senatorial Elections or not. The pro-Senate faction led by the then MDC Secretary General, Welshman Ncube, broke away from the anti-Senate camp led by the late MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, to form what became known as the MDC-N party. The main faction led by Morgan Tsvangirai became known as the MDC-T party. The second split in the party occurred after the elections of 31 July 2013. Citing undemocratic tendencies and the urgent need for leadership renewal, a faction opposed to Morgan Tsvangirai and led by Tendai Biti broke away from the MDC-T to form a political formation that became known as the MDC-Renewal. The latest split occurred after the death of MDC-T president, Morgan Tsvangirai in February 2018. Citing lack of constitutionalism in relation to leadership succession and political violence, a faction led by Thokozani Khupe broke away from the MDC and retained the name MDC-T.

In all three splits highlighted above bloody clashes between rival factions took place. In short, reasons for the splits in the MDC revolved around ideological contradictions, structural incoherence, deficiency in internal democracy, and succession or leadership renewal questions. Unlike ZANU-PF which uses the liberation struggle and left nationalism as an ideological rallying point, the MDC's ideological platform is fragile. The party largely consists of various urban groups (students, labour, church, business, civic society, etc.), which makes ideological fusion cumbersome. On the other hand,

ZANU-PF largely consists of war veterans, rural population and peasantry. Fanon (1963a: 114) notes that the propaganda of nationalist parties is more appealing to the peasantry:

The memory of the anti-colonial period is very much alive in the villages, where women still croon in their children's ears songs to which the warriors marched when they went out to fight the conquerors. At twelve or thirteen years of age the village children know the names of the old men who were in the last rising, and the dreams they dream in the *douars* or in the villages are not those of money or of getting through their exams like the children of the towns, but dreams of identification with some rebel or another, the story of whose heroic death still today moves them to tears.

Fanon's analytical lenses may help us understand why the MDC is ideologically weak and susceptible to damaging splits compared to the ZANU-PF, which is characterised by a unity of purpose despite notable factionalism and internal contradictions in the revolutionary party. Since ZANU-PF has its majority in rural areas, where more than 60% of the population lives, spreading propaganda, mass mobilisation, vote buying and strengthening of party structures becomes easy and this somehow insulates the party from the vices of division. ZANU-PF also employs violence and intimidation as tools to "unite" its base. The reverse is true about the MDC. Ideological contradictions in the MDC on issues such as intra-party violence, leadership renewal, succession and respect for the party constitution has created a fertile ground for factionalism and consequently political violence.

### **MDC Political Violence: Trends and Tendencies**

The MDC, a party founded on a non-violence plane, has been exhibiting violent attitudes since as early as 2005. Therefore, this section dissects the scourge of violence within the MDC. In November 2019 rival factions (Chamisa vs Mwonozora factions) clashed at the party's headquarters and brutally attacked each other; Douglas Mwonozora's vehicle was destroyed in the process (*The Zimbabwe Mail* 2019). On 1 August 2018, alleged MDC-Alliance supporters took to the streets of Harare CBD to demonstrate against delay in the announcement of the 2018 election results and alleged electoral fraud. The protest turned violent, resulting in the destruction of property around the CBD. After the police failed to contain the situation, members



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of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) were deployed on the streets and indiscriminately opened live ammunition not only on the protestors but also on general civilians who were doing their private business. Consequently, as was stated above, six people were killed and 35 seriously injured. Although it has been disputed as a biased report in many political and social circles, the Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the 2018 Post-Election Violence (2018: vi) partly implicates the MDC by concluding that: “The demonstrations which became riotous and caused extensive damage to property and injury had been incited, pre-planned and well organised by the MDC Alliance.” Whether the demonstrations were pre-planned or not, the bottom line is that some supporters of the MDC-A, with some wearing the party’s regalia, participated in a violent demonstration in August 2018.

A few months earlier, writing on Facebook on 26 May 2018, in the context of intra-party violence in the MDC, the party’s Deputy Treasurer General and the then Kuwadzana East parliamentary aspirant, Charlton Hwende (2018) had lamented:

I would like you to know that our Primary Elections in Kuwadzana East was today stopped by the so-called Vanguard youths led by their leader who was my opponent in the election. I would like to thank those who turned up for remaining steadfast and vigilant and resisting provocation from a group of 30 or so youths bussed into the constituency to disrupt the party process. The same group disrupted our consensus process a week ago. MDC is a democratic party and has no room for violence or subversion of the people’s will. I hope the party will look into the matter seriously as my safety is now a matter of concern. I am a father of three kids and the safety of my family takes precedence over anything else.

In the same thread, Charlton Hwende (2018) alleges that his political opponent in the primary election, and leader of the Vanguard, Shakespeare Mukoyi, was moving around with a gun threatening to kill him. Evidence from newspaper reports, online footages and personal communication with some MDC party members corroborate Hwende’s narrative. However, what remains unclear is whether Mukoyi possessed a gun or not.

Other constituencies were not spared from the scourge of political violence during the MDC primary plebiscite. For instance, the Zimbabwe Peace Project (2018) reported acts of violence by MDC members during primary

elections in Glen View, Glen Norah, Budiriro, Chitungwiza and Kambuzuma. Violence also raised its ugly head in Epworth during the party's primary elections in the same period. On 3 June 2018, MDC's aspiring Member of Parliament for the Epworth constituency, Zivai Mhetu (2018), bemoaned acts of violence by MDC members in Epworth and wrote on Facebook: "I have been robbed of my past victory for Epworth MP through an unfair re-run and violence which dispersed all my supporters leading to a one-man race. I wish a speedy recovery to my innocent supporters who were butchered yesterday." The *Daily News* (2018) concurred with Mhetu by chronicling how property was destroyed and people injured during the "bloodbath" that characterised the MDC primary election especially in Ward 4 of the constituency. The Epworth infighting, which left scores injured, was mainly a standoff between supporters of the aspiring candidates, Zivai Mhetu and the Vanguard-aligned Zivai Kureva.

In the same month of June, *Newsday* (2018a) reported "bloody clashes" which occurred during the MDC's primaries in Chikanga/Dangumvura (Mutare) constituency, leaving the former Musikavanhu MP, Prosper Mutseyami, injured after being attacked by suspected MDC activists from a rival camp suspected to be connected to his rival, Lynette Karenyi. The month of June was "bloody" for the MDC, as the Zimbabwe Peace Project (2018) reported that during the month of June 2018, the MDC was involved in 16 cases of political violence compared to ZANU-PF's three. The organisation also added that out of 19 cases of intra-party violence, 16 of them were recorded as originating in the MDC and the remaining three in the ZANU-PF. These statistics debunk the narrative that ZANU-PF has a monopoly on the instruments of inter- and intra-party violence. Moreover, they also vindicate LeBas' (2006) thesis that ZANU-PF and MDC influence and imitate each other (external drivers) when it comes to the issue of violence.

Violence in the MDC sometimes manifests itself in non-physical but equally toxic forms. For instance, footage by New Zim TV (2018) shows MDC youths clad in party regalia outside the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe chanting the word: "Hure!" (whore) at their former Vice-President, Thokozani Khupe, who left the MDC citing violence and lack of constitutionalism, to form her own splinter party, the MDC-T breakaway faction. The act of labelling Khupe a "hure," due to her political affiliation, fits neatly into the patriarchal trajectory which promotes what can be described in Gatsheni's (2013: 12)

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decoloniality terminology as the “objectification”/“thingification” of women. Also, it is in sync with patriarchy’s penchant for the eroticisation of women.

In March 2018, *Times Live* (2018) reported a violent clash between rival MDC factions at the party’s Bulawayo offices. The violence left scores of people, including Khupe’s aide, Witness Dube, seriously injured. Footage of the injured victims circulated on social media platforms. The afore-mentioned political violence was reminiscent of the previous violence which occurred in August 2017 at the same premises. In August 2017, various newspapers in Zimbabwe, including *Chronicle* (2017), reported violence which broke out at the MDC’s provincial offices in Bulawayo. The then MDC’s National Chairperson, Lovemore Moyo, Organizing Secretary, Abednico Bhebhe, and Vice President, Thokozani Khupe, were victims of the violence involved.

Observation, personal communication and *Newsday* (2018a) show that in February 2018, Khupe together with the then MDC Secretary-General, Douglas Mwonzora, and former National Organizing Secretary, Abednico Bhebhe, were physically attacked and almost burnt inside a hut they had sought refuge in from a vicious mob of party youths and Vanguard paramilitary groups. The attack happened in Buhera during the burial of MDC’s leader, Morgan Tsvangirai. In her own words, Khupe said the youths yelled at her saying that she must go back to Matabeleland, she is a dissident and the MDC cannot be led by a woman. Khupe’s account, which is corroborated by a witness in the *Newsday* (2018b), mirrors the ugly twins of sexism and tribalism. The idea by the MDC youth that “the MDC cannot be led by a woman” jellies with patriarchally-motivated gendered roles, which confine women to cooking, cleaning, child bearing and rearing, etc. Yet, in her state-of-the-art work, Adichie (2017) launches a polemic against the idea of gendered roles by calling it “absolute nonsense.” In the spirit of gender equality and inclusive development the participation of women in politics should be promoted, not the opposite.

In 2017, some MDC youths allegedly assassinated a policeman named Talkmore Phiri in Harare’s CBD (*The Herald* 2018). The case was still pending in the courts in 2020. Political violence also rocked the party in 2014 as MDC youths aligned to the late MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, attacked individuals linked to a rival faction led by Tendai Biti. In the same breath, *Newsday* (2014) reported about physical attacks on the then

party’s Secretary-General, Tendai Biti; Youth Assembly Secretary-General, Promise Mkhwananzi; Youth Assembly Chairperson, Solomon Madzore; and Treasurer General, Elton Mangoma, by MDC youths aligned to then MDC President, Morgan Tsvangirai. In addition, three MDC officials (Last Maengahama, Tungamirai Madzokere, and Yvonne Musarurwa) were convicted in September 2016 in connection with the murder of Inspector Petros Mutedza, a policeman who was allegedly killed by MDC members in Glenview 3 Shopping Centre (Harare) in May 2011 (*The Herald* 2018). In April 2010, Toendepi Shonhe (then Director-General) and Chris Dhlamini (then Security Director) were assaulted by party youths outside Harvest House (*Pindula News* 2017). After the 2005 MDC split, the late Trudy Stevenson became a victim of the party youths’ violence when she was attacked together with her colleagues in Mabvuku in July 2006 (*The Guardian* 2006). Based on personal communications, observation, civic society and the media reports cited above, a timeline of some of the MDC violence can be created for the period between 2005 and 2019, as follows.

**MDC Timeline of Violence, 2005–2019**

Date	Place	Act of Violence	Perpetrator	Victims’ Names	Position
05/2005	Dzivarasekwa (Harare)	Physical and verbal attack	MDC Youth	Priscillah Misihairabwi-Mushonga	MP (MDC)
07/2006	Mabvuku (Harare)	Physical and verbal attack	MDC Youth	Trudy Stevenson & Others	Secretary for Policy and Research, MP (MDC)
04/2010	Harvest House (Harare)	Assault and verbal abuse	MDC Youth	Toendepi Shonhe; Chris Dlamini	Director-General; Director of Security (MDC)
05/2011	Glenview (Harare)	Murder	Alleged MDC Youth	Petros Mutedza	Policeman
02/2014	Harvest House (Harare)	Physical and verbal assault	MDC Youth	Elton Mangoma; Promise Mkhwananzi	Treasurer General; Youth Assembly Secretary-General (MDC)

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Date	Place	Act of Violence	Perpetrator	Victims' Names	Position
06/2017	Harare CBD	Murder	Alleged MDC Youth	Talkmore Phiri	Policeman
08/2017	Bulawayo (MDC Offices)	Physical assault and destruction of property	MDC Youth, "Vanguard"	Thokozani Khupe; Lovemore Moyo; Abednico Bhebhe	Vice President; National Chairperson; Organizing Secretary (MDC)
03/2018	Bulawayo (MDC Offices)	Physical attack and destruction of property	MDC Youth, "Vanguard"	Witness Dube	Vice-President Khupe's Aide (MDC)
02/2018	Buhera	Physical attack, verbal abuse and attempted arson	MDC Youth, "Vanguard"	Thokozani Khupe; Douglas Mwonzora; Abednico Bhebhe	Vice-President; Secretary-General; Organizing Secretary (MDC)
08/2018	Harare CBD	Arson, destruction of cars, buildings, road signs, etc.	Alleged MDC-A supporters	ZANU-PF property, motorists' cars and buildings destroyed	ZANU-PF, general public
11/2019	MDC headquarters (Harare)	Physical violence between rival factions, destruction of Douglas Mwonzora's car.	MDC youth/rival factions (Mwonzora versus Chamisa's faction)	Douglas Mwonzora's car destroyed, rival youth factions brutally assault each other.	Senator and Deputy-Secretary for International Relations (MDC); MDC Youth Assembly members.

**Sources:** Observation, personal communications, Heal Zimbabwe Trust (2018), Zimbabwe Peace Project (2018), Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the 2018 Post-Election Violence (2018), *Newsday* (2018a; b), *The Guardian* (2006), *The Herald* (2018), *The Chronicle* (2017), *Times Live* (2018), *Pindula News* (2016), and *The Zimbabwe Mail* (2019).

From the discussion in this section and the table above it becomes clear that the MDC is not immune from the spectre of political violence. However, it is important to highlight that as early as 2005 political violence in the MDC has always been perpetrated by the party's youths, who fit into the party foot-soldiers enclave. The Vanguard, a violent and radical vigilante and paramilitary group within the MDC, has footprints of party foot-soldiers on its character. Also, the trend in the above discussion reveals that significant acts of violence occurred especially after the party's splits of 2005, 2013 and 2018. The following section discusses the causes, organisation, funding and beneficiaries of MDC violence.

### ***MDC Violence: Drivers, Organisation, Bankrollers and Beneficiaries***

This section seeks to explore what fuels intra-party violence in the MDC, how the violence is structurally organised and funded, and who profits from such violence. Moreover, the section also dissects the party foot-soldier factor vis-à-vis intra-party violence patterns in the MDC. The largely overlapping causes of political violence in the MDC to be discussed include appetite for/ or struggle for political power, ideological contradictions, patron-clientelism and astronomical levels of poverty.

Partly due to the egoistic nature of man, classical realist thinkers such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Carr, and Morgenthau, view politics through the lens of power struggles. Similarly, a dissection of the intra-party violence in the MDC reveals that a quest and hunger for political power is the fuel that powers the engine of political violence in the party. The conflict between the then party's Deputy Treasurer General, Chalton Hwende, and the then Youth Assembly Deputy Chairperson, Shakespeare Mukoyi, reported by *Newsday* (2018b), in which Mukoyi was allegedly moving around with a gun threatening to kill Hwende, was a struggle for power for the Kuwadzana East parliamentary seat.

Similarly, as indicated in the previous section, the violence that characterised primary elections in Epworth, Glenview, and Chikanga/ Dangamvura were struggles for parliamentary seats and therefore struggles for power. Factionalism, which has plagued the party as far back as 2005, also reflects power struggles for the party's presidency. For instance, in 2006, youths aligned to the late MDC president (Morgan Tsvangirai), such as Tonderai Ndira, attacked members of a rival faction, such as Trudy Stevenson (*The*

*Independent* 2005; *The Guardian* 2006). Therefore, the pursuit of political power is pivotal in terms of fuelling violence within the MDC. Accordingly, violence can be viewed as a vehicle for the attainment of political power.

Ideological differences should not be overlooked as one of the factors driving intra-party violence in the MDC. As previously highlighted, in 2005 rival factions differed on whether to participate in senatorial elections or not. In 2003, there were stark differences about the leadership renewal debate. The 2018 ideological differences gravitated towards the succession question and lack of constitutionalism in the party. In all three cases, rival factions emerged, and factionalism cascaded to the grassroots leading to violent and bloody scenarios as listed in the table in the previous section. In short, ideological incoherence has led to the emergence of rival factions and consequently to political violence in the party. As previously argued, the MDC seems to be more susceptible to factionalism and splits due to the fact that the party lacks a solid ideological rallying point because of its loosely organised, urban-based and diverse constituency (students, business, church, civic society, teachers, etc.) which makes the polity's structures pervious to factionalism and splits. By contrary, ZANU-PF's constituency is largely rural, and the party's ideology, underpinned by liberation history and left nationalism, appeals to such a constituency. This also makes mass mobilisation and structural organisation more efficient. Apart from food hand-outs, ZANU-PF also uses state security agents and violence to keep its rural constituencies and members "in check."

Another fire warming the spirit of intra-party violence in the MDC is the patron-client relations architecture that characterises the party. Scott (1972: 92) describes patron-clientelism as "A special case of dyadic (two-person) ties involving an individual of higher socio-economic status (patron) who uses his own influence and resources to provide benefits for a person of lower status (client) who, for his part, reciprocates by offering support to the patron." Personal communication with some MDC youths revealed that their relationship with the party leadership is largely organised along political patronage lines. In the same vein, it was revealed that the party leadership (patrons) uses money in exchange for political support, grassroots mobilisation and "political protection" by the youths (clients). Such a relationship is a recipe for violence in many respects. Due to such unequal power relations between the party leaders (patrons) and the youths

(clients), the latter are prone to manipulation by the former for the purposes of political violence.

Poverty is a fertile ground for the germination and flourishing of political patronage and the consequent violence within the MDC. According to the World Bank (2018), Zimbabwe's poverty levels have stood at 72% since around 2008. Employment levels are astronomically high and above 80%. Under such harsh economic conditions senior party members in the MDC have been manipulating the youths by turning them into merchants of violence against perceived enemies within the party. As previously discussed, poverty is a central feature of party foot-soldiers.

Observation, personal communications and media reports from newspapers such as *The Guardian* (2006), among many others, expose MDC youths as the perpetrators of political violence since as early as 2001. The fundamental question to be answered is: how and who is involved in the organisation of such violence? Personal communication with some MDC members revealed that the organisation of violence within the party follows a binary trajectory, since it is organised (1) by the party's leadership and implemented by the party's youth, or (2) by the party's youth without the party leadership's knowledge. The latter scenario raises questions of whether or not the MDC leadership is in control of the party's levers of power. In relation to the view that intra-party violence in the MDC is directed from the top, Hartwell (2018: 15) observes that:

Sometimes, violence has allegedly been directed from the top by individuals close to Tsvangirai. A Commission of Inquiry conducted by Trust Maanda for example identified several MDC-T heavyweights who were behind the violence and intimidation that rocked the MDC-T's party Congress in 2011. There were also numerous other incidents during the GNU years, some even taking place at Harvest House, the party headquarters.

The fact that a Commission of Inquiry implicated some of the MDC's senior leaders as the engineers of intra-party violence is overwhelming evidence of their complicity in the organisation of violence in the opposition party. In August 2018, the then MDC-T President, Morgan Tsvangirai, suspended the then party's Deputy Spokesperson, Tabitha Khumalo, and the then Deputy Treasurer General, Chalton Hwende, for organising and making



“inflammatory” remarks, respectively, in relation to violence that rocked the party at its Bulawayo offices (*Newsday* 2018c). Although the two MDC senior officials were later reinstated after an internal investigation, their actions and inflammatory rhetoric leave a great deal to be desired. It should also be emphasised that the MDC youths or party foot-soldiers are both the planners and the implementers of such sordid acts of violence. Personal communication also revealed that the proliferation of smart phones, internet and social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have made it easier for political violence to be organised by the party leadership and the youth, from the national to the provincial and district levels.

In 2016, the MDC Youth Assembly formed a paramilitary and vigilante unit known as the Vanguard. Armah-Attoh (2017: 1) warns of the dangers of political party vigilantism and describes the practice as: “A growing fox worth killing before it mutates into a monster.” Armed with swords and clad in military attire, the Vanguard has been implicated in several incidents of political violence within the party. For instance, the quasi-militia unit was implicated in an attempted arson and physical attack on senior party leaders in Buhera in February 2018 and in orchestrating bloody violence at the party’s provincial offices in Bulawayo in August 2017 and March 2018 (*Newsday* 2018b; *Chronicle* 2017; *Times Live* 2018). After a series of violent incidents, the party said that the Vanguard had been “disbanded” (*New Zimbabwe* 2018). However, observation and personal communication with some party members revealed that the Vanguard militia is still intact but operates “underground.” However, experience from violent Neo-Nazi groups in Europe shows that such groups are more lethal when operating from beneath the surface. Also, the MDC has not yet officially condemned or vehemently disassociated itself from the Vanguard, which raises eyebrows. In fact, the party once denied the existence of the quasi-militia group. Considering the acts of violence associated with it, the fundamental questions therefore are: how is the Vanguard organised, why was it formed and what are its main activities?

The Vanguard is the brainchild of the MDC Youth Assembly. Shakespeare Mukoyi, who is the party’s former Deputy National Youth Chairperson, leads the paramilitary unit and is believed to be the brains behind its formation. In Vanguard circles Mukoyi is also known as the “Commander.” In an interview with *Bustop TV* (2018a), former MDC Youth Assembly Chairperson,

Happymore Chidziva, summarises the paramilitary group's role as follows: "The Vanguard is a disciplined force within the MDC Youth Assembly which is responsible for teaching party members about discipline, cadre development, protection, self-defence etc. It has nothing to do with violence." In the same vein, Mukoyi, the Vanguard ring leader, outlined the purpose and activities of the Vanguard in an interview with *The Standard* (2018):

Basically, all members of the youth assembly are the vanguards, but we sat as the Management Committee of the Youth Assembly and decided to advance it and a resolution was made that we should have a department within the Youth Assembly, which deals with political orientation, cadreship and development. We started to identify members of the Youth Assembly who matched what we wanted to create. The reason why this section of the Vanguard was created was to combat areas where our youths were involved in factional politics. You know in politics there are factions and certain groupings of different points of interests and we found it necessary as the youth assembly that we cannot afford to have members of the youth assembly who are members of a faction because it is detrimental to the good health of the party. We look for members who are loyal to principles and not principals.

Following Chidziva's and Mukoyi's explanations above, the Vanguard is a unit within the MDC Youth Assembly responsible for instilling discipline, ideological alignment, vigilance, the protection of party members and curbing factionalism within the MDC. However, evidence on the ground runs contrary to such statements. As previously mentioned, some members of the Vanguard were implicated in the MDC violence in Buhera, Bulawayo, Epworth, Kuwadzana East as well as in verbally abusing the party's former Deputy President, Thokozani Khupe, by calling her "hure" (whore). It is against such a background of ill-discipline, rowdiness and violence that *Newsday* columnist and political commentator, Conway Tutani, describes the Vanguard as a "foul-mouthed, thuggish, hysterical and maniacal lynch mob" (*Newsday* 2018c).

Moreover, the issue of violent militias and vigilantes is not alien to Zimbabwean politics. The ruling party ZANU-PF is intimately linked with the "Border Gezi/Green Bomber," Kwekwe-based "Al-shabaab" and Mbare's "Chipangano" violent youth militias. The atrocities that were committed by

these youth militias is well documented, especially by the private media and some civic society organisations. It is not the purpose of the present article to dwell on them in detail. However, research for the present article established that the Vanguard was formed as a defence mechanism, especially against the afore-mentioned ZANU-PF sponsored vigilantes and paramilitary groups; a scenario in sync with LeBas' (2006) viewpoint that the MDC and ZANU-PF influence each other in the context of violence (external drivers).

The Vanguard is pregnant with hallmarks of party foot-soldiers, especially when it is borne in mind that Democracy Watch (2007; 2010) alerts us to the fact that party foot-soldiers are often at the forefront of inciting violence, using both physical and open methods of confrontation such as death threats, mob attacks, arson, murder, molestation and sectarian violence for political expediency. Likewise, the Vanguard has been associated with death threats, mob attacks, arson and alleged murder; a trend common with party foot-soldiers. Also, the existence of the Vanguard is not constitutionally recognised by the MDC constitution, which makes its existence legally, constitutionally and even morally questionable. However, although the MDC senior leadership denied its links with the Vanguard, a video by *Bustop TV* (2018b) shows the paramilitary group saluting the MDC President, Nelson Chamisa, at a rally in Chinhoyi in 2018. Also, when the Vanguard attacked the party leadership in Bulawayo in August 2017, the then MDC Deputy Treasurer General, Chalton Hwende, seemed to have glorified and justified the paramilitary group's violence, prompting his suspension from the party. Such incidents could indicate that the Vanguard has the blessings of the party leadership.

In fact, members of the Vanguard were "kingmakers" since they played a key role in mobilising support for Nelson Chamisa's ascendancy to the apex of the MDC leadership in February 2018. In an interview, Mukoyi, the Vanguard "Commander," alleged that he had been promised the Kuwadzana East parliamentary seat as a "token of appreciation" by Nelson Chamisa (*Newsday* 2018b). Apart from fitting into the political patronage narrative, such a gesture is evidence that the Vanguard was created to safeguard the interests of one faction against the other in the MDC. This is both an irony and a contradiction, considering that the Vanguard leader, Mukoyi, mentioned that the quasi-militia was formed to stamp out factionalism and to have "members who are loyal to principles and not principals" (*The Standard*

2018). The fact that senior MDC leaders are associated with members of the Vanguard means that they could be involved in the organisation of its activities, especially in the context of issuing commands. When the MDC youths and the Vanguard were attacking some of the party leadership in Buhera, the Vanguard leader and “Commander,” Mukoyi, came to restrain his group and said that their “Commander,” Comrade “Wamba Dia Wamba” (moniker for the MDC President, Nelson Chamisa), had instructed them to stop the attack (*Bustop TV* 2018a). This incident could show Chamisa’s hidden support of the Vanguard. Therefore, a question worth asking is: who bankrolls the Vanguard?

This question is related to the question of the organisation of the violence perpetrated by the Vanguard and the MDC Youth Assembly in general. Personal communication with some party members revealed that the Vanguard is largely financed by contributions from its members and by the benevolence of the MDC senior party leadership. Therefore, it is most likely that MDC senior members who are supporters and beneficiaries of the Vanguard, also finance it. As mentioned earlier, the former MDC Deputy National Spokesperson, Tabitha Khumalo, was implicated in financing the journey and violence that took place at the party’s offices in Bulawayo in August 2017. According to observation and personal communication, Vanguard’s funds from its members and party leadership are usually channelled towards the paramilitary’s accommodation, uniforms, swords, food, cigarettes, liquor and transport. Like many party foot-soldiers and vigilante units in Africa, the Vanguard consists of youths from backgrounds associated with poverty, unemployment and, sometimes, low levels of literacy. Such a background exposes them to manipulation by their funders and “handlers” who remote-control them according to political expediency.

In chaotic situations, there are usually beneficiaries who benefit from what may be termed “the harvest of chaos.” In the context of the MDC violence, who are the beneficiaries? The beneficiaries of the intra-party violence in the MDC fall into three main categories: (1) the MDC leadership; (2) MDC youth and Vanguard; and (3) the ruling party, ZANU-PF. As mentioned earlier, the MDC youth, especially the Vanguard plays a crucial “kingmaker” role in the context of the party’s leadership dynamics. The late MDC President, Morgan Tsvangirai, benefited from youth violence that was meted out against his political opponents in the party, especially in 2005 and 2013. Similarly, the

Vanguard's physical and verbal attacks against Nelson Chamisa's rival faction, led by Thokozani Khupe, worked in his favour and were instrumental in the construction of his political scaffold that ultimately cemented his grip on the party's top position. The Vanguard was also instrumental in the party's primary elections, especially in areas such as Epworth, from where massive violence was reported. Therefore, intra-party violence in the MDC has paid dividends to the party's leadership.

In recent years, the MDC youth have benefited from what can be described as a "pay-back gesture" from the party leadership. As mentioned above, the Vanguard leader, Mukoyi, disclosed in an interview with *Newsday* (2018b) that he was promised a parliamentary seat by the party leadership in Kuwadzana East as a "token of appreciation," particularly for foot-soldiering for the MDC President, Nelson Chamisa. In the party's latest primary elections that were held countrywide, members of the Vanguard demanded and "grabbed" some parliamentary seats in areas like Epworth and Mabvuku. In Epworth, among other areas, massive violence was employed to "win" the primaries. Therefore, apart from relatively small financial benefits from the party leadership, the MDC youth's militancy has propelled some of its members to strategic leadership positions in the party. Another beneficiary of the MDC intra-party violence is the ruling party, ZANU-PF. The intra-party violence in the MDC dovetails with the ruling party's and the state's propaganda scheme of tainting and discrediting the opposition party as a violent political organisation bereft of the capacity to manage matters of statecraft. Personal communications also indicate that ZANU-PF, mainly through infiltration, has an invisible hand in the MDC political violence.

In Africa, inter-party violence is the most common form of violence. The Kenyan case of 2007 is a classic example of inter-party violence in Africa. However, intra-party violence also exists. Apart from the MDC, South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) has recorded internal assassination cases. For instance, Onishi and Gebrekidan (2018) observe that ANC officials are killing one another, hiring professional hit men to eliminate fellow party members in an all-or-nothing fight over money, turf and power and that about 90 politicians have been killed since the start of 2016. In September 2017, the ANC Youth League Leader, Sindiso Magaqa, became a notable victim. Onishi and Gebrekidan (2018) add that the killings in the ANC have tainted the party, South Africa's democracy and could have negative economic

consequences. The ANC case raises the question: what are the repercussions of political violence in the MDC?

### **Ramifications of MDC Intra-Party Violence**

As stated above, the MDC is a party that was founded on the ethos of non-violence and the quest to break the culture and cycle of ZANU-PF and state-sponsored political violence in Zimbabwe. The negation of the principle of non-violence by the MDC has multi-dimensional, multi-layered, multi-pronged and sometimes overlapping implications. Accordingly, this section seeks to discuss the ramifications of intra-party violence in the MDC.

As a “government-in-waiting,” the MDC should not follow the same trajectory of political violence synonymous with the ruling party, ZANU-PF. By engaging in acts of violence, the party naturally loses high moral ground to criticise ZANU-PF’s violent tendencies. Hence, Hartwell (2018: 15) argues that: “Violence within MDC-T is also a serious issue where the party has failed to demonstrate how it is different from ZANU-PF. It should be added that though the MDC-T violence has never reached the same scale as that of ZANU-PF, violence is nonetheless unacceptable.” Correspondingly, Chin’ono (2018) cites violence as one of the reasons why “The MDC movement has proved that very little separates them from ZANU-PF other than their lack of state power.” Therefore, political violence erodes the party’s credibility as a genuine alternative to ZANU-PF’s violent rule.

Evidence shows that the MDC is non-violent in words but violent in action. Such hypocrisy and double standards could fuel public scepticism since some citizens would shun the idea of supporting “a party that indicates left and turns right.” One discussant argued that: “The MDC does not practise what it preaches. It is like a two-headed viper. How do you explain such levels of violence in a party that fights for democratic principles?” The case of a violent MDC seeking to replace an extremely violent ZANU-PF is analogous to Orwell’s (1945) “Animal Farm” scenario. In this classical work, Orwell narrates how animals at Manor Farm rebelled and overthrew their brutal owner (Mr Jones), took over the farm, and established a supposedly egalitarian-modelled animal kingdom led by pigs. However, the new leaders (pigs), violated all sacrosanct rules of the farm, embraced exploitative human behaviour and adopted tyrannical rule; prompting Orwell (1945: 112) to

conclude his novel by saying: “The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.” If the MDC continues on a trajectory of violence, the line separating the party from ZANU-PF will be blurred. Also, the citizenry could be inclined to believe that, once in power, the MDC will rely on violence and coercion just like its rival, ZANU-PF.

In addition, violence in the MDC paints a gloomy image of the party, which is especially detrimental in the context of international solidarity, sympathy and support. Due to what it purports to stand for, the MDC gained notable regional and international sympathy over the years. *The Guardian* (2006) reported that the violence in the party risks jeopardising its relations with its international partners who prioritise non-violence values in political processes. With blood dripping from its hands, it will be difficult for the MDC to petition the SADC, the AU, the UN and the EU about state-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe.

Intra-party violence in the MDC also kills the debate and freedom of expression within the party, which in turn curtails constructive criticism and the free flow of ideas. Freedom of expression and debate are central hallmarks of any functioning democracy. Fanon (1963b: 182–183) is wary of African political parties’ quest to stifle debate and freedom of expression:

The political party in many parts of Africa which are today independent is puffed up in a most dangerous way. In the presence of a member of the party, the people are silent, behave like a flock of sheep and publish panegyrics in praise of...the leader. But in the street when evening comes, away from the village, in the cafes or by the river, the bitter disappointment of the people, their despair but also their unceasing anger makes itself heard. The party, instead of welcoming the expression of popular discontentment, instead of taking for its fundamental purpose the free flow of ideas from the people up to the government, forms a screen, and forbids such ideas. The party leaders behave like common sergeant-majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for ‘silence in the ranks.’ This party which used to call itself the servant of the people, which used to claim that it worked for the free expression of the people’s will... hastens to send the people back to their caves.

Contrary to Fanon's (1963b) warning, the MDC, through its oftentimes violent party foot-soldiers, has stifled freedom of expression by behaving like "sergeant majors" who frequently remind party members of the need for "silence in the ranks." Such violent behaviour inhibits constructive criticism, the free flow of ideas and slows the pace of the democratisation agenda in Zimbabwe. In a democratic polity, a critical spirit is essential (constructive criticism). What is undesirable is the spirit of criticism (destructive criticism).

Moreover, MDC intra-party violence, specifically against women, feeds into the patriarchal narrative. The physical and verbal attacks against former MDC female leaders like Thokozani Khupe, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga and Trudy Stevenson fit into the sexism and misogyny gallery. Wood (1994: 31) bemoans the normalisation of violence against women in a patriarchal order. In her classic speech, Adichie (2013) is of the view that: "We should all be feminists." Congruently, Fanon (1963b: 202) vehemently opposes the perpetuation of the feudal tradition, which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine element over the feminine and argues that gender equality should not only be in the clauses of the constitution but also in everyday life: in the factory, at school and in parliament. Violence against women in the MDC also destroys their careers. The case of Thokozani Khupe, previously mentioned, is a classic example. Also, violence against party members from marginalised regions like Matabeleland could accentuate regional and ethnic tensions, which are detrimental to national effort and cohesion.

Violence against Khupe and those sympathetic to her cause, such as Obert Gutu and Linda Masarira, accentuated factional cleavages and ultimately led to the split of the party. Consequently, Khupe and others formed their own political party and retained the name MDC-T. Evidence from the last election reveals that Khupe's MDC-T got sizeable votes in MDC strongholds such as Bulawayo, Matabeleland (North and South) and some parts of the Midlands. Overall, Khupe got 0.9% of the presidential vote. There is no doubt that Khupe "ate" into the MDC-A and Chamisa's support base; a situation which would have been prevented by a united front. However, it is worth noting that in the post 2018 elections, the MDC managed to further unify forces in the MDC-Alliance under the banner of the MDC. Also, the party held a successful congress in 2019, which alleviated the divisions, contradictions and violence that underpinned the party on the eve of the 2018 elections.



The MDC violent militia known as the Vanguard is not only a danger to the party but to the Zimbabwean citizenry at large. In his Facebook post of 26 May 2018, then MDC Deputy Treasurer General, Chalton Hwende, claimed that the leader of the Vanguard, Shakespeare Mukoyi, was moving around with a gun threatening to kill him (Hwende 2018). Observation indicates that members of the Vanguard carry long, sharp and shiny swords. The fact that the Vanguard militia is associated with militancy and weapons such as swords and guns demonstrates that the paramilitary group could be a threat to national peace and security. Militias and vigilante gangs such as the MDC's Vanguard and ZANU-PF's "Chipangano," "Al-shabaab" and "Border Gezi/Green Bomber" youths are an albatross around the neck of peace and security in Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the data presented above, it cannot be too strongly stressed that the MDC, a party known for its anti-violence mantra, has slipped into the abyss of political violence. The party's foot-soldiers, who are also members of the MDC Youth Assembly and its paramilitary unit, the Vanguard, are the chief perpetrators of political violence in the party. Intra-party violence in the MDC contradicts the widely held view that the ruling party, ZANU-PF, has a monopoly on the use of violence in Zimbabwe. Internal power struggles, factionalism, ideological contradictions, patron-clientelism and poverty are the locomotives that move political violence in the MDC. Some senior party leaders, who are also chief beneficiaries of the "harvest of chaos," are involved in the organisation and bankrolling of violent activities in the MDC. The MDC youth benefit in terms of portfolios and finances as a "reward" for their violent activities. ZANU-PF also benefits from the MDC intra-party violence since the ruling party prefers a weak MDC that is devoured by violence and internal contradictions.

The implications of political violence in the MDC are far reaching. Intra-party violence in the party paints a gloomy image which in turn could dampen international sympathy, solidarity and support, especially from regional and international bodies like the SADC, AU, UN and EU. Apart from smacking of hypocrisy and double standards, violence in the MDC erodes public confidence and support which could stall the struggle for democratic

change in Zimbabwe. In addition, violence against women, especially from marginalised regions in Zimbabwe, dovetails with the patriarchy and tribalism narratives, yet, sexism and tribalism are corrosive to the fabric of national cohesion of any nation. The party's violent tendencies have also left the democratisation process and struggle for democratic change on tenterhooks. To be the energetic spokesman and incorruptible defender of the masses, the MDC should shun violence lest it is devoured by its own internal contradictions. In the struggle for democracy, the means ought to justify the ends, not the reverse. However, the party's violence cannot be divorced from the country's political culture and socialisation which can be traced back as far as the pre-colonial era and extending to the colonial and post-colonial epochs. Zimbabwe gained independence via the barrel of a gun and continued on the same trajectory of violence after independence. A society born through bloodshed, such as Zimbabwe, is likely to be violent. Thus, the MDC exists against the backdrop of a contagious atmosphere saturated with violence, hence the party's violent tendencies.

Violence in the MDC should be stopped. The party leadership should preach unity, peace and tolerance to its supporters. The "underground" traces of the "Vanguard" should be dissolved. A Commission of Enquiry should be instituted to investigate violence by the "Vanguard" and the MDC Youth Assembly and recommendations should be made. Moreover, it is crucial to provide psychological assistance to both the perpetrators and the victims of the party's violence. In addition, an internal party programme of peace, truth, healing and reconciliation should be instituted to diffuse acrimony and promote unity of purpose in the MDC.

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