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‘Zimbabwe will never be a colony again’: changing celebratory styles and meanings of independence

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Abstract:

As part of a revival of cultural nationalism, state-led national day celebrations intensified in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s through the introduction of popular music events alongside the traditional official, militarised ceremony. Independence Day, in particular, provided ZANU-PF with an excellent opportunity to mediate a narrow version of the ‘party-nation’ that defined ‘Zimbabweanness’ in terms of everything that the growing opposition Movement for Democratic Change was not. The appropriation of national day celebrations for party-political purposes turned these events into highly controversial and contested ceremonies. In this article, I focus both on the changing aesthetics, modes and styles of Independence Day celebrations in Zimbabwe, and the way in which meanings of independence have been rewritten and contested in recent years. The malleability of national days made it possible for ZANU-PF to adjust both the style and meaning of Independence Day to suit a new context. In the early 1980s, ‘independence’ referred to the struggle to escape from the Rhodesian colonial yoke but in the early 2000s ZANU-PF began to interpret ‘independence’ primarily as economic freedom and as the continuing battle to remain free from the intervention of external actors such as the MDC — a party it considered to be driven by the interests of the United States, Europe and white farmers. While the protocol of the official Independence Day ceremony was tightly controlled, a number of spaces opened up in the early 2000s that enabled Zimbabweans to debate their history and heritage via alternative channels such as political party websites and in private newspapers, which underlines the crucial role of both old and new media in collective memory.

Keywords:

Africa; Zimbabwe; national days; cultural nationalism; independence; new media

Having gained independence in 1980, Zimbabwe could be treated as a relatively young nation-state as compared to other Francophone African states which all had reached independence by 1960. At independence, the new government introduced a range of national days, many of which commemorated important moments in the country’s struggle against colonialism. In the context of the 2000s in which the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was increasingly challenged by the growing popularity of a newly established opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), national days in Zimbabwe transformed from celebratory events into highly contested moments in which memories of the nation and meanings of independence were intensely debated. For almost two decades, ZANU-PF had enjoyed a virtual monopoly but the 2000 parliamentary elections resulted in MDC

winning 47 percent of seats in parliament while ZANU-PF retained a majority of 48.6 percent. Against the background of these important changes in Zimbabwe's political landscape, history emerged as a crucial battlefield through which ZANU-PF sought to justify its own rule and delegitimise the MDC as a social force (Ranger 2004; Tendi 2008; Willems and Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010). The emergence of a particular narrow brand of 'patriotic history' served to highlight key victorious moments in ZANU-PF's history as a liberation movement and silence the contribution of other movements, including the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and trade unions. MDC's recent entry onto the political scene made it relatively easy for ZANU-PF to brand it as a party without history, therefore undeserving of political leadership of the Zimbabwean nation.

As part of its efforts to present itself as the only party worthy of being in government, ZANU-PF forged a consciousness based on its narrow version of a 'party-nation' (Kriger 2006), hereby conflating state, nation and party. To qualify as an authentic and patriotic Zimbabwean, one was expected to vote for ZANU-PF. The fact that MDC's support base mainly comprised of urban residents ensured that in ZANU-PF's perspective 'true Zimbabweanness' was associated with living in rural areas or at least to be entitled to land in rural areas, hereby excluding those citizens of foreign ancestry such as those originating from Malawi or Mozambique. It is widely assumed that what became known as 'Operation Murambatsvina' ('Operation Drive Out Rubbish') — a state-led operation in 2005 which cleared 'illegally' built houses and banned informal vending in urban areas — was to a large extent aimed at victimising an urban MDC electorate (Bracking 2005; Bratton and Masunungure 2006; Potts 2006; Kamete 2006, 2009; Vambe 2008). Furthermore, ZANU-PF's official version of the nation was defined in racial terms and excluded white Zimbabweans who were presented as being at the forefront of the foundation of the MDC. The occupation of a range of white-owned commercial farms in 2000 by war veterans and largely supported by the state was not only aimed at redressing inequalities in land ownership but also served to communicate to white Zimbabweans that they were not part of the nation and therefore not entitled to land ownership.

Hence, in the 2000s, national identity and citizenship in Zimbabwe were defined in increasingly restrictive terms (Muzondidya 2004, 2007; Alexander and Muzondidya 2005). State nationalism excluded certain groups of Zimbabweans who were regarded as inauthentic and unpatriotic Zimbabweans and not considered to rightfully belong to the 'nation'. In order to impose this narrow brand of nationhood, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2001 which denied citizenship to anyone whose parents were born outside Zimbabwe unless he/she would renounce their claim to a second citizenship. However, apart from enforcing this narrow mode of civic or political nationalism through a range of legal measures, ZANU-PF also embarked on a state-led revival of cultural nationalism that sought to both remind older Zimbabweans and to conscientise younger Zimbabweans of the party's role in the history of the nation (Thram 2006a, 2006b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009; Muchemwa 2010; Mate 2012). Cultural nationalists perceive the nation as a product of history and culture. To cultural nationalists, 'nations are [...] not just political units but organic beings, living personalities, whose individuality must be cherished by their members in all their manifestations' (Hutchinson 1994: 124). Cultural nationalists seek to inspire 'love' of community, educating members of community on their common national heritage of splendour and suffering, engaging in naming rituals, celebrating cultural uniqueness, and rejecting foreign practices.

As part of this revival of cultural nationalism, national day celebrations gained more significance in Zimbabwe, given the platform they provided ZANU-PF to mediate their official version of the nation that defined ‘Zimbabweanness’ in terms of everything that the MDC was not — as a historically revolutionary, black, rural nation. National days are an essential part of a nation’s collective memory and could be seen as crucial moments in which ‘nationness’ is performed. As Strauss and O’Brien (2007: 248) have argued, ‘[n]ational days, memorial days, and festivals (as well as museums, monuments and historical sites) all look to the past – reminding citizens of the nation’s glorious history, honoured traditions and noble sacrifices’. National days, symbols and ceremonies are powerful ideological vehicles that help to legitimise and justify present governments, hereby often invoking a romanticised version of history as a series of victories while carefully editing out the darker episodes in a nation’s history (Elgenius 2011). National days do not only reflect on history but also look ahead into the future, hereby taking stock of progress made so far, sharing thoughts on unfulfilled dreams and debating plans for further national development (Lentz 2011: 13; N’Guessan 2013: 288). Collective memory can be materialised in monuments or statues, circulated through written texts and performed and practiced in a range of rituals and commemorative events. National days could be seen as events-based forms of commemoration which are performed and practiced as opposed to the more static nature of built memorials. Monuments and statues are of course in no way unalterable and can be transformed, damaged or removed but national days are arguably even more malleable. As McCrone and McPherson (2009: 5) have argued, ‘many national days undergo invention and reinvention, sometimes with alacrity. National days are subject to contestation and change according to the political, economic and cultural circumstances. One might even say that their significance lies in being markers of conflict and contestation’.

In the early 2000s, state-led national day celebrations intensified in Zimbabwe through the introduction of popular music events alongside the traditional official, militarised ceremony. The appropriation of national day celebrations for party-political purposes turned these events into highly controversial and contested ceremonies. In this article, I focus on the changing ways in which Independence Day was celebrated in Zimbabwe and the manner in which meanings of independence have been contested in recent years. As Werbner (1998: 1) has pointed out, the ‘[p]ostcolonial memory crisis, emerging widely across the African continent, is not merely over what is to be publicly remembered or forgotten. The challenge in everyday life, in major public occasions and in disruptive events of terror and civil unrest is to the very *means and modes of remembrance* [italics added]’. Hence, this article concerns itself primarily with the changing aesthetics and styles of independence celebrations in Zimbabwe since the early 2000s. My analysis is based on television recordings of both official Independence Day ceremonies as well as popular Independence Day music galas. Furthermore, I also draw on transcripts of the official Independence Day presidential speeches (which are normally reprinted in the state-controlled *The Herald* or *Sunday Mail* newspaper) as well as newspaper reports in both the state-controlled and privately-owned press on both events. An obvious limitation of this approach is that I have not witnessed or participated in any of the celebrations myself but my main interest was in making sense of these events as representations and texts in themselves, i.e. the styles and aesthetics of both official and popular celebrations, and the range of texts produced around and triggered by them in local print media.

The official Independence Day ceremony

During the 1970s struggle, liberation movements such as ZANU and ZAPU imagined the national primarily as an ‘anti-colonial nation’. After the country gained independence in 1980, Zimbabwe’s official national imaginary continued to be identified as a nation born out of its opposition to Rhodesia, defined through its numerous struggles and battles against colonialism (Klotz 1993; Reed 1993; Phimister and Raftopoulos 2004; Gandhi and Jambaya 2002; Willems 2011). As Werbner (1998: 75) has argued, ‘In Africa’s nation-states, virtually all of which are young, the political origin myths usually imagine the founding of the nation in decolonization’. Many African ex-settler colonies such as Zimbabwe emerged in opposition to colonial governments and as a result, memories of ‘heroic’ liberation struggles against the colonial ruler have defined the nation and can therefore be mobilised at any time by former liberation movements which now govern many ex-settler colonies in Africa. In Zimbabwe, memories of the liberation struggle offered a powerful foundation myth for the new nation and reinforced the legitimacy of the newly independent ZANU-PF government. These memories have always formed a central part of the country’s national day celebrations but became even more crucial in the early 2000s when ZANU-PF was faced with increasing political opposition from the MDC. Mbembe’s work points to the crucial role of performance and ritual in the relation of the rulers and ruled in the postcolony. For him, ‘[c]eremonies have become the privileged language through which power speaks, acts, coerces [...]. [I]t is the festivities and celebrations that are the vehicles, par excellence, for giving expression to the commandment and for staging its displays of magnificence and prodigality’ (Mbembe 1992: 21, 7). In Zimbabwe, national day celebrations have become crucial means through the ruling party ZANU-PF both remembers and glorifies its own role in the liberation struggle, hereby legitimising its continued rule of the country.

In 1980, the newly independent government introduced a number of national days celebrate the country’s independence (Independence Day on 18 April), to remember those who died during the liberation struggle (Heroes’ Day on Monday of the second week of August) and to reflect on the successes of Zimbabwe’s defence forces at home and abroad (Defence Forces Day on Tuesday of the second week of August).¹ A fourth national day (Unity Day on 22 December) was added after the signing of the Unity Accord between the two political parties Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) in 1987. Official commemorative ceremonies are part of both Independence Day and Heroes’ Day while Unity Day is merely a public holiday. The celebration of national days in Zimbabwe is ‘composed of bits of ceremonial commemoration which – if somewhat locally adapted, such as ululation or the singing of liberation war songs – seems globally standard for a modern nation-state’ (Werbner 1998: 86).

The Independence Day official ceremony is normally held at the National Sports Stadium in the capital Harare and is attended by government ministers, Members of Parliament, party officials, diplomats and members of the public. Typically, celebrations start at around 10am with a military parade in the stadium, usually comprising members of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Air Force of Zimbabwe (AFZ), the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS). After the dignitaries are seated, the President takes the salute. Subsequently, the country’s national anthem is sung while jets of the Airforce of Zimbabwe fly past the stadium. While, as Werbner pointed out, the ceremony draws on the global aesthetics of the state ceremony, it also ties in with specific local stylistics. For example, the militarised nature

¹ Until August 2002, Heroes and Defence Forces Day fell on 11 and 12 August but following an amendment made in August 2002, the holidays began to fall on the Monday and Tuesday of the second week of August every year.

of the ceremony does not only refer back to the armed struggle of the 1970s but also to the post-independent state which 'is militarized in form and content' and which is characterized by 'a solid alliance between the war veterans and the ruling party, between the Youth Militias and the ruling party, and between the ZNA and ZRP and the ruling party' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2006: 77). ZANU-PF as a political party clearly emerged out of a highly militarised liberation movement; the lines between party and army were fundamentally blurred during the struggle and the militarisation of politics continued post-independence (Mazarire 2011). While the military parade forms a crucial part of Zimbabwe's Independence Day ceremony, other African nation-states such as Burkina Faso (Haberecht 2012) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Pype 2012) organise civil parades as part of national day celebrations with civilians marching in the street. Instead, Zimbabwe's official Independence Day ceremony is heavily militarised and takes place within the confined space of the National Sports Stadium which arguably makes it easier to control and possibly discipline those attending the event.

Subsequent to the military parade, the President normally inspects the guard of honour, the Independence Flame is lit up and a religious representative offers a dedication speech comprising of a Bible reading and prayer. The President then delivers his keynote speech after he is introduced by the Chairman of the Independence Celebrations Co-ordinating Committee. The speech usually focuses on the theme of the day which changes annually. The keynote speech arguably constitutes the most important part of the ceremony which Zimbabweans in the past generally did not want to miss out on. The speech is of course available to those attending the ceremony in the stadium but can also be viewed or heard through the live broadcast on the state-controlled radio and television station, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), and a full transcript of the speech is normally printed in the state-controlled daily newspaper, *The Herald*. The speech provides Zimbabweans with an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the President's complex use of the English language (combined with some utterances made in the local language chiShona) or enabled Zimbabweans to get a sense of what government was planning in the area of development:

Before the merrymaking, there would be the presidential speech which everyone wanted to listen to because it normally ushered in a new policy direction, or contained an important statement 'Nyarara iwe, tinoda kunzwa kuti President vari kuti kudii [Keep quiet, we want to hear what the President is saying]' were words commonly spoken as President Robert Mugabe either read his speech or someone else high up in government or the ruling Zanu PF party echelons did so on his behalf, in areas outside Harare.²

In his speech, President Mugabe normally begins by revisiting the past and highlighting the sacrifices which Zimbabweans made during the liberation struggle. The speech then often takes quite detailed stock of the nation's progress and achievements in the area of development since independence, including the state of the country's industry, mining sector, tourism, land reform, education, health sector, housing, food security, water provision, rural and agricultural development, public sector, roads and infrastructure, telecommunications, women and youth empowerment, and international relations. The speech then ends by offering a glimpse of the plans government has for future development of the country.

After the presidential speech has been delivered, the official ceremony proceeds with the military parade leaving the stadium, followed by a range of performances, usually comprising some of the following: mass displays performed by school children; horse, bicycle, motorcycle

² Kariati, M., Little to cheer as impoverished Zim turns 23, *Zimbabwe Standard*, 13 April 2003.

dog and acrobatic displays by the Zimbabwe Republic Police; performances by the parachute regiment of the Zimbabwe National Army; mock drills by the Zimbabwe National Army; drum majorette performances and music performances by the Police Band. After these presentations, one or two popular musicians perform for the crowd and the day is ended with a soccer match between the winning teams of the semi-finals competing for the Independence Trophy, a soccer tournament which was introduced in 1983.³ Often, these tend to be the country's major soccer teams such as Harare's Dynamos or Bulawayo's Highlanders.

Apart from these national celebrations, each province also organises its own ceremony in a local stadium. These decentralised celebrations are characterised by similar performances by the military and police. The provincial governor or senior civil servant normally reads out the President's speech and occasionally food is served, often a few beasts are slaughtered and maize meal and vegetables are donated by the local business community. In addition to these official ceremonies on the 18th of April, separate celebrations are normally held for delegations of school children from Zimbabwe's ten provinces on the eve of Independence Day. These are formally hosted by the First Family in Harare's City Sports Centre. The children's party comprises of a speech by the President as well as entertainment in the form of traditional dance, poetry and local music groups. In his speech during the 2008 children's party, President Mugabe addressed the school children as follows: 'We want you to grow and develop in an environment of freedom [but] you should develop by knowing your history. Knowing your country's past would also help you knowing its future. You must also know the history of the struggle. Freedom did not come on a silver plate. Zimbabwe was once usurped by imperialists who seized it like robbers, but we got it back and we are proud to be Zimbabweans, not Rhodesians, Africans, not British'.⁴ Hence, a key aim of the children's party is to conscientise the so-called 'born frees' (those born after Independence in 1980) about the history of the liberation struggle.

The popular Independence Day 'music gala'

While Zimbabwe's official Independence Day ceremony can be described as a relatively sober, solemn and highly militarised occasion, evidenced by the performances by army and police as well as the numerous disciplined mass displays, some lighter entertainment is usually offered at the end of the day when popular Zimbabwean musicians perform and major soccer teams battle it out in the final of the Independence Trophy soccer tournament. However, in the early 2000s, the official ceremony held on national days was supplemented with a second popular, less formal celebratory event, the 'music gala'. The music gala led to an intensification of state-led national day celebrations and should be understood in the broader context of ZANU-PF's growing appropriation of music, performance and popular culture; an effort to salvage the ruling party's decreasing legitimacy of the ruling party through a resurgence of 'cultural nationalism' in Zimbabwe (Thram 2006a, 2006b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009; Muchemwa 2010; Mate 2012). The legitimacy crisis did not only give way to an increased use of force and state violence to quell any forms of dissent but also led to efforts to manufacture consent and to create a loyal, patriotic citizenry. Performance and popular culture became crucial to the particular form that power took in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s. For government, music functioned as a 'melodic press release', the ultimate means to communicate with 'the people'. Former Minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, explained the rationale behind this form of communication as follows: 'A department of information is a mouth of government departments,

³ See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimbabwean_Independence_Trophy (last accessed: 2 January 2012).

⁴ Kawadza, S., Zimbabwe will never be a colony again, *The Herald*, 18 April 2008.

one which like any public relations office, spews out Press releases which are inadvertently bureaucratic and in most cases cryptic — Press releases, which do not capture the mood of the people or speak in a language the people can identify with'.⁵ Hence, this is why the Department introduced a 'new form of Press statement [...]. One not based on high-sounding nothings but rather on the language of the people, a universal language — music'.⁶

The popular music gala was a project initially initiated in 2001 by the state-owned broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, but soon after it was appropriated by the Ministry of Information and Publicity which then took responsibility for the organisation of the event. Most music galas are broadcast live via ZBC which also screens numerous adverts on a daily basis to announce the event in the weeks before the gala takes place. Music galas were introduced to celebrate national days such as Independence Day, Heroes' Day and Unity Day as well as to commemorate veterans from the 1970s liberation war, or other distinguished politicians, such as Joshua Nkomo and Simon Muzenda. The first gala that was held was the Umdala Wethu Music and Cultural Gala ('Our Father' in siNdebele) which was launched in Harare in July 2001 to commemorate the death in July 1999 of ex-ZAPU leader and former Vice-President Joshua Nkomo. At least five annual music galas were organised in the early 2000s but these reduced in frequency in the mid-2000s due to lack of financial resources. The late 2000s and beginning of the 2010s saw a revival of music galas again with the Independence Gala for example taking place in 2010 (Harare International Conference Centre), 2011 (Ascot Stadium in Gweru) and 2012 (Harare International Conference Centre).

The popular music gala effectively syncretises the elite memorialism (which privileges the role of a select number of 'national heroes' at the expense of the contribution made by ordinary Zimbabweans to the liberation struggle) of the 1980s and 1990s with the cultural practices of the 1970s liberation war (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009).⁷ Music galas are normally announced as *pungwes*, hereby referring to the all-night gatherings which ZANU organised during the liberation war in order to draw support for the guerrilla fighters. An article in the state-controlled *The Herald* newspaper argued that 'musical galas are the reincarnation of the night vigils (*pungwes*) that whipped people into common liberation thinking and kept them informed, educated and united'.⁸ As compared to the highly militarised official national day ceremony described above, the popular music gala is relatively informal. The event is normally held in a different province each year and largely comprises of music performances by artists from different genres but primarily gospel, *chimurenga* and 'urban grooves'.⁹ While the music gala is strongly associated with government and the ruling party, the event does not tend to make explicit references to ZANU-PF or government nor are they used by politicians to make speeches (although politicians would occasionally briefly join the stage to make slogans).

Hence, the music gala could be seen as a 'softer', subtle and more relaxed attempts to discipline Zimbabweans into ZANU-PF's party-nation as compared to the intimidating, official,

⁵ Moyo, Jonathan, Why government is into music, *The Sunday Mail*, 10 October 2004.

⁶ Moyo, Jonathan, Why government is into music, *The Sunday Mail*, 10 October 2004.

⁷ See also Pongweni (1982) and Turino (2000) on the cultural practices of the 1970s liberation war, and Kriger (1995, 2003) and Werbner (1998) on the elite memorialism of the 1980s.

⁸ Guvamombe, Isdore, Galas a reincarnation of *pungwes*, *The Herald*, 26 July 2005.

⁹ 'Urban grooves' is a music genre that primarily emerged in response to the imposition of local content quota on ZBC in the early 2000s. New and young artists such as Flash Gordon, Decibel, Sanii Makhallima, Roy and Royce, David Chifunyise, Roqui, Leonard Mapfumo, Betty Makaya, Extra Large and Maskiri heavily draw from American music genres such as Rap, Hip Hop and R&B but song lyrics are mostly in local languages such as chiShona or siNdebele. See for further details Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009), Manase (2009) and Mate (2012).

militarised annual Independence Day ceremony in the National Sports Stadium. While the official ceremony appealed to Zimbabweans of all ages (including children who were involved in staging mass displays in the stadium and some of whom attended the children's party at the eve of Independence Day), the popular music gala was also particularly aimed at reaching out to the youth. Young Zimbabweans were a crucial voting constituency in the 2000s - not only because of the country's youthful population but also for the reason that young people often associated themselves more with the agenda of the MDC (and the concomitant promises of employment) than with the key campaign issues promoted by ZANU-PF (land reform).

Another key example of this attempt to reach out to the youth was a musical gala termed 'Freedom Youth Hangout' that was organised in March 2005 in Avondale Shopping Centre which is situated in a middle-class suburb in Harare. As other galas, the event was broadcast live on ZBC and the line-up was dominated by popular young 'urban grooves' artists such as Rocqui, M'afriq, Maskiri, Stunner, Double Trouble, Afrika Revenge, Taurai, Themba & Victor and Betty Makhaya. The event was announced as a *pungwe*, lasting from Saturday afternoon until early Sunday morning, thereby associating itself with the all-night gatherings organised during the liberation war. While *pungwes* during the 1970s sought to motivate young people into joining the struggle, the 'Freedom Youth Hangout' served to remind young Zimbabweans of the state of 'freedom' during which they were born and the importance of retaining this freedom by standing up against 'imperialist' forces such as the MDC. During the event, t-shirts were handed out with a logo that included the conical tower of Great Zimbabwe that is associated with the logo of the ruling party ZANU-PF. While the t-shirt itself did not explicitly mention ZANU-PF, inclusion of the Great Zimbabwe conical tower in the design indicated a subtle reference to the ruling party. The 'Freedom Youth Hangout' concert glorified the heroic nature of ex-combatants and invited youth to play a similarly 'heroic' role in the struggle against 'imperialism' in the 2000s as exemplified by the MDC.

These forms of 'soft power' should be seen against the background of a number of other, more forceful initiatives by ZANU-PF to gain control over young people. For example, in the early 2000s, the government embarked on a new national youth service training programme which, according to a human rights NGO, was 'moving rapidly from a supposedly voluntary, small scale training that allegedly aimed at skills enhancement, patriotism and moral education, to what is now intended to be a compulsory, large scale, paramilitary training' (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003: 10). A number of camps allegedly housed 'youth militia', also known as 'the green bombers' (see also Lindgren 2003), who were indoctrinated with a particular version of 'patriotic history' that largely glorified the achievements of ZANU-PF and discredited the MDC. The militarisation of youth in the 2000s bears resemblance to the way in which guerilla fighters were mobilised by ZANU during the 1970s to join the liberation struggle, either willingly or through force. As part of these efforts to discipline youth into loyal national subjects, the government also began organising visits for ZANU-PF youth to former liberation war camps, mass graves and shrines such as Chimoio in Mozambique which saw the killing of numerous Zimbabweans by the Rhodesian forces in November 1977. These visits would normally coincide with Independence Day and the delegation would include other government representatives and party officials. In 2008, the then Deputy Minister of Youth Development and Employment Creation Saviour Kasukuwere commented as follows on the aim of the visit: 'We want our youths to be politically conscious especially in these trying times. We want them to emulate and appreciate as well as jealously safeguard what their sisters and brothers died for'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Matambanadzo, P., Chimoio victims remembered, *The Herald*, 18 April 2008.

‘Old’ and ‘new’ meanings of independence

As the previous section demonstrated, the intensification of national day celebrations through the introduction of popular music galas should be seen against the background of the revival of cultural nationalism and as an attempt to appeal to the youth vote. But, unlike monuments and statues, national days were also highly malleable events that could be shaped and twisted to give them a new meaning and relevance in a changed political environment characterised by the rising popularity of an opposition party. Hence, the adaptable nature of national day celebrations was also partly responsible for their intensified use by ZANU-PF and enabled the party to restyle the celebrations for a new purpose. For example, during the Independence Day celebrations in the 2000s, ZANU-PF began to deploy the term ‘independence’ not only in reference to the year 1980 when Zimbabwe formally obtained independence from colonial rule but the term was given a new meaning in the face of the emerging opposition party MDC which was portrayed as an agent of the British government and white Zimbabwean ‘Rhodies’ who threatened the sovereignty of the nation. In media sound bites and public speeches, President Robert Mugabe and the Minister for Information and Publicity in the 2000s, Jonathan Moyo, regularly invoked ZANU-PF’s party slogan ‘Zimbabwe will never be a colony again’. While Zimbabwe was formally independent, election campaigns of the ruling party stressed that the country’s sovereignty was under renewed threat because of the rising popularity of the MDC which was backed by major world powers, and Britain in particular.

Both the ‘old’ and ‘new’ meanings of independence were mediated through the official ceremony in Harare’s National Sports Stadium and the popular Independence Day music gala, both of which were broadcast live on ZBC. For example, the old meaning of independence was expressed through an award ceremony during the official ‘Silver Jubilee’ celebrations in 2005 which marked 25 years of independence. The ceremony conferred ‘the country’s highest national honours and awards on Zimbabweans and foreign nationals who distinguished themselves in different fields and service to the liberation of Zimbabwe and its general socio-economic development’.¹¹ Among those honoured with a Silver Jubilee award were former presidents of the ‘frontline states’ such as Tanzania’s Julius Nyerere, Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda, Mozambique’s Samora Machel, Botswana’s Seretse Khama and Angola’s Agostinho Neto and Zimbabwean nationalists such as Leopold Takawira, Samuel Parirenyatwa, Joshua Nkomo, Simon Muzenda and Bernard Chidzero. In his 2005 Silver Jubilee Independence Day speech, President Mugabe summarised the contributing of neighbouring countries as follows: ‘We shall never forget that we shared the sacrifices with our brothers and sisters in all the neighbouring countries we used as rear bases for our struggle: Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola and Botswana. Their blood too, emblazons our flag, making them deserving shareholders in our freedom and pride. The honour we extended to their leaders last night, most of them posthumously, recognises and celebrates this *hushamwari hweropa* - friendship born of blood’.¹²

Old meanings of ‘independence’ were also mediated by the popular music gala, primarily through the inclusion of songs of the 1970s liberation war, known as the *chimurenga* music genre. During the war, music was a crucial alternative medium for liberation movements such as ZANU and ZAPU (Pongweni 1982). Songs were frequently sung during the so-called *pungwes* (all-night vigils) and broadcast on guerrilla shortwave radio stations *Voice of Zimbabwe* (used by ZANU) and *Voice of the Revolution* (used by ZAPU). In the early 2000s, recycled liberation war

¹¹ Silver Jubilee: Zim to honour distinguished individuals, *The Herald*, 15 April 2005.

¹² Independence marked new era, *The Herald*, 19 April 2005.

songs repeatedly featured on ZBC radio and television in order to remind Zimbabweans of the legacy of the struggle against colonialism. Government commissioned a number of artists or politicians-cum-musicians to produce a range of albums which became known as the ‘Third Chimurenga Series’. ‘Third Chimurenga’ was the term used by government for what it considered to be Zimbabwe’s final chapter in the struggle for land, independence and sovereignty in the 2000s. The term suggested that the land occupations and subsequent fast-track land reform programme should be understood as a continuation of the uprisings in the late nineteenth century (known as ‘First Chimurenga’) and the liberation war in the 1960s and 1970s (known as ‘Second Chimurenga’).¹³ Inclusion of *chimurenga* artists such as Comrade Chinx in the popular music gala served to remind Zimbabweans of the liberation war.

New meanings of independence particularly came to the forefront in presidential speeches during the official ceremony in the National Sports Stadium. A key theme emerging in these speeches was the continued threat to Zimbabwe’s independence posed by foreign powers such as Britain and the United States, and their ‘local representative’ in the form of the MDC. Independence, therefore, did not strictly refer to the moment in 1980 when the territory known as Zimbabwe came into being but the term referred to a condition of a nation-state that had come under renewed threat and had to be continuously defended from foreign intervention. Numerous speeches on Independence Day reminded Zimbabweans of the need to ‘jealously guard’ the ‘hard-won Independence’ as is evidenced for example by the following extract from President Mugabe’s 2007 Independence Day speech:

Today as we come to the same venue [of the first independence celebrations in Rufaro Stadium], we want to repeat to those in Britain whose ears are apparently deaf that: ‘Your flag went down here. *Makasunga twenyu tikati endai kwamunobva. Ko chomoramba muchititambudzira chii zuva ranhasi? Wenyu mureza hausisipoka muno. Waakubhururuka ndewedu wevanhu veZimbabwe. Tiregerei, siyanayi nesu!*’ Let the sound of our celebrations reach the ears of Britain and her allies, and let them know that we shall never, never again be their colony. Congratulations Zimbabwe, congratulations comrades and friends, on our refusal to be recolonised! [...]. Blair, who are you to Zimbabwe, to decide on regime change in Zimbabwe?¹⁴

As is demonstrated by this quote, in the tense political environment of the 2000s, President Mugabe’s speeches not only addressed Zimbabwe’s citizens but were increasingly directed at foreign powers such as Britain and the United States which were considered key supporters and instigators of the opposition party MDC. It is important to refer to the strategic use of English and Zimbabwe’s major local language, chiShona, here. While President Mugabe normally would deliver his speech largely in English, he frequently invoked chiShona at strategic moments in the speech when he wished to address an ‘in-group’ of chiShona speakers. After addressing the ‘out-group’ – Britain in the example above – President Mugabe switched to chiShona while issuing a threat about the external actor to Zimbabweans conversant with chiShona. This strategy reinforced the ability of the state to deal with external challenges that according to government threaten Zimbabwe’s independence in the 2000s. Within Zimbabwe, the strategy also served to exclude siNdebele speakers, many of whom are based in the marginalised Western part of Zimbabwe which became victim to numerous human rights abuses committed by the government-instructed Fifth Brigade army between 1982 and 1987, a period which later

¹³ The chiShona word ‘Chimurenga’ refers to a traditional warrior and legendary hero in the 1890s, Sororenzou Murenga, who was renowned for his fighting skills (Vambe 2004: 167).

¹⁴ Leave us alone, West told, *The Herald*, 19 April 2007.

euphemistically became known as *Gukurahundi* ('the early rain that washes away the chaff before the spring rains' in chiShona).

New meanings of independence were also reinforced in more subtle ways through the popular music gala. For example, during the 'More Fire Independence Gala' in April 2002, musician Last Chiangwa (also known as 'Tambaoga') performed a song called 'Agirimendi' ('agreement' in chiShona). In the song, Tambaoga attacked Britain's attempts to 'recolonise' Zimbabwe and mocked Tony Blair who he referred to as 'The only Blair that I know is a toilet'. 'Blair toilets' commonly refer to pit latrines in Zimbabwe which are prevalent in the rural areas. The song fitted well with ZANU-PF's focus on Blair's attempts to re-establish Zimbabwe as a British colony and endorsed the new meaning the government attached to 'independence'.

All in all, the intensified celebrations of Independence Day in the 2000s through both the official ceremony and the popular music gala glorified the achievements of ZANU-PF in the liberation war and ultimately aimed at conferring legitimacy on the party's continued rule over Zimbabwe. In some instances, the celebrations were not dissimilar from ZANU-PF party rallies, evidenced for example by the presence of people wearing party regalia in the National Sport Stadium such as women wearing cloths with Mugabe's face emblazoned on them and men sporting shirts with the same prints. Furthermore, a number of attendees would be holding banners carrying a range of slogans that would back up ZANU-PF's campaign issues either very explicitly such as the banners during the 2004 ceremony: 'Our land is our prosperity'; 'Viva Cde R. G. Mugabe'; 'Support agrarian reform' and 'Sendekera mwana wevhu'¹⁵, or more implicitly during the 2008 and 2010 ceremonies: 'Zimbabwe has no place for sell-outs'; 'Independence and sovereignty for all times'¹⁶, '1980 to 2010, from revolution to consolidation'; 'We are our own liberators'; and 'Inclusivity is the form, total independence is the goal'.¹⁷ It was precisely the privatisation of Independence Day celebrations for party-political purposes that began to be contested by range of actors.

Independence Day celebrations as contested events

The monopolisation of national days by the ruling party ZANU-PF certainly did not go unnoticed and became increasingly contested by private media outlets, MDC and other civil society organisations in the 2000s. Contestations over memory and the nation have, however, been part of Zimbabwe's history since 1980. As Werbner (1998: 8) wrote over a decade ago with regard to the politics of commemoration in Zimbabwe: '[p]opular counter-memorialism is strikingly on the rise. People, especially in the countryside, try to commemorate what the state deliberately suppressed in buried memory'.

In the context of the 2000s, both the official and popular Independence Day celebrations were contested in a number of ways. First of all, there is evidence that ordinary Zimbabweans resisted attending the official component of the annual Independence Day ceremony in the National Sports Stadium and were more interested in attending the last part of the ceremony which usually comprises of popular music performances as well as the soccer match part of the Independence Trophy. A journalist writing in the privately-owned newspaper, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, described the changing attitudes of Zimbabweans towards the official Independence Day ceremony as follows:

¹⁵ All set for celebrations, *The Herald*, 14 April 2004.

¹⁶ Country marks 28 years of independence, *The Herald*, 19 April 2008.

¹⁷ Kawadza, S. and Chakanetsa Chidyamatiyo, C., We're one people – President, *The Herald*, 19 April 2010.

Independence Day during the euphoric 1980s and early 1990s was a day most Zimbabweans looked forward to. The young and the old, the rich and the poor, would gather at stadiums around the country to watch traditional dancers and magnificent drum majorettes strutting their stuff, but above all, to drink, eat and make merry [...]. But, as Zanu PF's economic policies began to hit them hard, the picture gradually began to change for many Zimbabweans and Mugabe steadily lost his Messiah status. The attitude towards Independence Day and Mugabe began to change. Instead of filling up the stadiums in their thousands by 8.00am, the crowds began to arrive only around 3.00pm, not for the Independence Day celebrations or Mugabe's speech, but for the free soccer finals arranged for the day.¹⁸

These resistant practices did not go unnoticed to those in power. For example, during the April 2002 Independence celebrations, it was reported that ZANU-PF youth had taken over control over those entering the stadium from the police and began to refuse entry to anyone who would arrive at the celebrations after the President's speech as it was self-evident that these visitors would be mainly interested in the soccer match.¹⁹ The gates of the National Sports Stadium were reported to have been closed by 1pm so that only visitors who sat through the official ceremony were allowed to enjoy the soccer entertainment afterwards. Those unwilling to be truly patriotic subjects were no longer able to pretend. It is unclear whether this policy was continued in future years as it could of course also be a strategy to motivate visitors to arrive early, to 'rent-a-crowd' and secure a full stadium during the official proceedings. This was crucial in order to avoid any embarrassment as the celebrations are always broadcast live on television. This incident also demonstrates the growing power and militarisation of youth in Zimbabwe as was alluded to in earlier sections. It also relates to the broader disciplining of audiences during public events such as cases reported in both colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe in which people were forced to attend either *pungwes* or party rallies.

While some ordinary citizens decided not to attend the official proceedings of the Independence Day ceremony, representatives of the opposition MDC also boycotted most national day celebrations, arguing these had now turned into partisan events. For example, in 2005, the MDC spokesperson, Paul Themba Nyathi, argued as follows: 'The problem is that Zanu PF has personalised all national events and made them Zanu PF events and unless that changes we will never attend the national functions'.²⁰ The MDC also criticised the organisational process of the Independence Day celebrations and argued that these were no longer organised by the state but clearly controlled by the ruling party ZANU-PF. As Nyathi commented on the organisation of the Silver Jubilee celebrations:

In Bulawayo, where all the seven MPs are from the opposition and the executive mayor is from the opposition, the programme for the Silver Jubilee celebrations did not include even a single elected opposition official but had Zanu PF functionaries as directors of ceremony and guests of honour [...]. If the Silver Jubilee event was a national event then Zanu PF should also watch from the field and let the event become national.²¹

However, in February 2009, the political setting in Zimbabwe changed with the emergence of a Government of National Unity (GNU). After two opposition factions, MDC-M and MDC-T²²,

¹⁸ Kariati, M., Little to cheer as impoverished Zim turns 23, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 13 April 2003.

¹⁹ Mafunda, K., Zanu-PF militia hijack police duties, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 21 April 2002.

²⁰ Dube, L., MDC to boycott national events, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 24 April 2005.

²¹ Dube, L., MDC to boycott national events, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 24 April 2005.

²² In 2005, the MDC split into two factions, one led by the original party leader Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and one led by Arthur Mutambara (MDC-M).

joined a coalition government with ZANU-PF (see Chan and Primorac 2012; Raftopoulos 2013), a number of attempts were made to transform national days from partisan events into more inclusive national ceremonies. For example, in order to minimise any association with political parties, the organising committee of the 2009 official Independence Day ceremony decided to ban the wearing of any party regalia. As indicated above, prior to this measure, national day celebrations often resembled party rallies; the banning of party regalia was meant to transform the ‘party-nation’ into a more inclusive nation that would encompass a range of political perspectives. Furthermore, in his speech in the same year, President Mugabe also neglected attacking the opposition MDC — as was common in his previous speeches — but instead emphasised the importance of unity among Zimbabweans:

We have cause to celebrate as this year's Independence Anniversary comes against the background of recent positive developments that have demonstrated beyond any doubt that there are more values and aspirations that bind us than those designed to divide us as a people [...]. Yes, the reckoning that we share a common destiny bids us, the Zimbabweans, to find and discover each other as members of one national family.²³

In a statement preceding the 2009 independence celebrations on 18 April, the MDC also conveyed a similar message, and encouraged Zimbabweans to attend the ceremonies organised across the country:

The MDC urges Zimbabweans from all walks of life to attend the country's 29th Independence Day anniversary which comes amid a climate of new-found hope and better prospects for the country. As a party, the MDC had previously not attended Independence Day celebrations because the national day had been privatized and parochialised by unilateral political interests [...]. As a party, we believe this year's celebrations must reflect the new era of inclusiveness. The Independence Day programme, the speeches and the general arrangements of this important day must reflect a diverse people working together for the betterment of the country of their birth. The day must reflect the new-found camaraderie among erstwhile political protagonists in a new political atmosphere that engenders hope and prosperity for the people of Zimbabwe. The nation expects to hear speeches from the leaders of the various political parties who have decided to shelve narrow and partisan political interest for the national good.²⁴

Despite this new rhetoric of inclusivity, ZANU-PF politicians continued to be accorded more space during the 2009 Independence Day official ceremony, while MDC politicians were largely silenced. For example, the MDC-T requested that their Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai was given a platform at the official ceremony but he was not provided an opportunity to deliver a speech, as the MDC-T spokesperson Nelson Chamisa pointed out: ‘As MDC-T it was our belief and conviction that the inclusive government has inclusive processes and dimensions. The fact that the PM did not speak was an unfortunate accident which is not to be repeated’.²⁵ Hence, even after the establishment of the GNU, the inclusion of alternative voices to ZANU-PF in the official ceremony was uncommon.

These strategies to either boycott or demand to be included in the official Independence Day celebrations very much challenged the *mode* and *style* of celebration but there were also a number of ways in which the hegemonic *meanings* of independence, as conveyed by ZANU-PF,

²³ No Uhuru speech for Tsvangirai Uhuru line-up, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 20 April 2009.

²⁴ MDC to participate in independence celebrations, MDC Press Release, 16 April 2009, available from: <http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/mdcindep160409.htm> (last accessed: 23 September 2012).

²⁵ No Uhuru speech for Tsvangirai Uhuru line-up, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 20 April 2009.

were contested. As Neiger, Meyers et al (2011: 10) have argued with regard to the mediated nature of collective memory, ‘the right to narrate the past is no longer reserved for academic and political elites. Nowadays, major historical events gain their public meaning not only through academic and state-sponsored interpretations but also through television, films, and the press’. The establishment of the MDC in 1999 coincided with the rise of civil society organisations, an increase in private newspaper titles and profound technological changes associated with the internet. While the protocol of the official Independence Day ceremony in the National Sports Stadium was tightly controlled, a number of alternative spaces therefore opened up in the early 2000s that allowed Zimbabweans to discuss their history and heritage, which further underlines the growing role of both old and new media in collective memory (cf. Garde-Hansen et al 2009). For example, while MDC-T was not able to deliver its speech during the official ceremony, it had already — even before the foundation of the GNU government in 2009 — found other means to circulate its speeches such as via the party’s website or published as adverts in private newspapers. In this way, the party was able to convey its own understanding of ‘independence’. For instance, in his 2010 statement, which marked 30 years of independence, MDC-T president Morgan Tsvangirai encouraged Zimbabweans to reflect on the true meaning of independence:

The MDC is a party of excellence. We believe we must use this great day to reflect on whether our independence has come with freedoms. Are we really free as a nation to subscribe to the economic, social and political pursuits of our choice? Are we free to move, assemble and say what we want with neither fear nor coercion? Does our situation justify the blood of our gallant sons and daughters who lost life and limb so that future generations could walk again? [...] We must take the opportunity of this year’s Independence Day to recommit ourselves and fortify our belief in the struggle for real change. We must recommit ourselves to recovering the lost ideals of our liberation struggle and the true meaning of independence. Zimbabweans want a break from the past. They want to embrace a future full of hope, love, dignity, prosperity, freedom and security. Above all, they want this nation to celebrate its diversity if the spirit of Nehanda, Jason Ziyapapa Moyo and Mama Mafuyana is to truly rest in eternal peace.²⁶

While ZANU-PF defined independence primarily in the light of economic and political sovereignty, absence of foreign intervention and a conclusion to the ‘land question’, the MDC largely interpreted independence as the ability to access liberal civil and political rights such as the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Whereas ZANU-PF summoned Zimbabweans to join the ‘Third Chimurenga’ in order to jealously guard their hard-won independence from Britain, the MDC similarly called on Zimbabweans to dedicate themselves to a ‘second liberation struggle’ that would do justice to the heroes of the first struggle and accord them individual political freedoms.

These two very different understandings of independence were also echoed in the Zimbabwean press which has been extremely polarised and divided largely along partisan lines. For example, numerous opinion columns in private weekly newspapers like *The Standard* vehemently contested hegemonic meanings of independence through headlines such as ‘Uhuru Day shrouded in doom and gloom’; ‘Sovereignty is not enough for a starving population’; ‘Little to cheer as impoverished Zim turns 23’; ‘What is there to celebrate?’; ‘Independence without peace, security’; ‘Many say independence now ‘meaningless’’; and ‘A shameful betrayal of

²⁶ MDC cherishes Independence Day, MDC website, 15 April 2010, available from: <http://www.mdc.co.zw/index.php/news/45-around-zimbabwe/318-mdc-cherishes-independence-day.html> (last accessed: 22 September 2012).

national independence'.²⁷ This was in stark contrast to the upbeat headlines in the state-controlled *The Herald* newspaper which largely mirrored ZANU-PF understanding of independence: 'Celebrating victory over British forces'; 'Zim has every reason to celebrate'; 'Celebrate achievements made by government says Minister'; 'Thousands throng Rufaro for 27th Uhuru celebrations'; 'Show to mark success of Third Chimurenga'; 'Sterling performances at independence gala'; 'Uhuru joy sweeps across state'; and '30 years on, Zimbabwe has come so far as a nation'.²⁸

These contestations around both the style of celebration and meanings of independence clearly demonstrate the symbolic power of Zimbabwe's national days. As Lentz (2013: 217) has argued, national day celebrations often become 'a forum of debate about what should constitute the norms and values that make up national identity and, in the interstices of official ceremonies, provided space for the articulation of new demands for public recognition'. The political changes around the formation of the GNU in 2009 signalled a cautious modification of the official Independence Day ceremony in order to reflect a more inclusive nation. However, despite these changes, the opposition continued to feel sidelined in the proceedings, and was forced to use alternative channels to communicate their understanding of independence.

Conclusion

The popular music gala played a key role in the intensification of national day celebrations in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s. The popular and informal aesthetics of the music gala complemented the solemn, militarised and formal style of the annual official Independence Day ceremony in the National Sports Stadium in Harare. The appropriation of performance, music and popular culture by ZANU-PF should be seen in the broader context of a resurgence of cultural nationalism in the early 2000s — a project that was initiated to appeal to a younger constituency of Zimbabweans, the so-called 'born frees' who increasingly began to support the opposition party Movement for Democracy Change that had won a significant number of seats in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Through the subtle political messages conveyed by the music gala, the youth were urged not to forget the sacrifices their parents and grandparents had made to liberate Zimbabwe from its colonial yoke. However, both the official ceremony and the popular music gala mediated a narrow version of the 'party-nation' in which ZANU-PF glorified its contribution to the 1970s liberation struggle, silenced the part played by liberation movements such as ZAPU and discredited the opposition MDC as a party without history.

Nationalism, in the Zimbabwean case, functioned as a mode of control, as a way of disciplining Zimbabweans into loyal state subjects and party supporters, enabled by the conflation between nation, state and party. National day celebrations proved to be particularly

²⁷ Chimhete, C., Uhuru Day shrouded in doom and gloom, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 18 April 2004; Mhike, C., Sovereignty is not enough for a starving population, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 13 August 2006; Kariati, M., Little to cheer as impoverished Zim turns 23, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 13 April 2003; What is there to celebrate?, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 17 April 2005; Zambara, W. M., Independence without peace, security, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 16 April 2006; Chimhete, C., Many say independence now 'meaningless', *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 15 April 2007; Mutambara, A., A shameful betrayal of national independence, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, 17 April 2008.

²⁸ Celebrating victory over British forces, *The Herald*, 19 April 2007; Show to mark success of Third Chimurenga, *The Herald*, 12 April 2002; Zvayi, C., Zim has every reason to celebrate, *The Herald*, 18 April 2006; Celebrate achievements made by government says Minister, *The Herald*, 16 April 2007; Thousands throng Rufaro for 27th Uhuru celebrations, *The Herald*, 19 April 2007; Uhuru joy sweeps across state, *The Herald*, 19 April 2010; Saunyama, J. and Zimoyo, T., Sterling performances at independence gala, *The Herald*, 20 April 2010; Mugaga, C., 30 years on, Zimbabwe has come so far as a nation, *The Herald*, 22 April 2010.

suitable moments for ZANU-PF to renew their legitimacy as the only party justified to rule the country. First of all, because of the malleability of national days that made it possible for ZANU-PF to adjust the mode and style of celebrate to suit a new context. For example, the presidential speeches part of the official Independence Day ceremony often addressed new ‘enemies’, i.e. the MDC as well as the foreign powers it was thought to be profoundly linked to, warning them not to interfere with the Harare regime as ‘Zimbabwe would never be a colony again’. While in the early 1980s, ‘independence’ referred to the struggle to escape from the Rhodesian colonial yoke, ZANU-PF understood ‘independence’ in the early 2000s primarily as economic freedom and as the continuing battle to remain free from the intervention of external actors such as the MDC, a party allegedly supported by the United States, Europe and white farmers.

A second reason for the usefulness of national day celebrations — and Independence Day in particular — was the fact that the liberation struggle continues to be a key foundation myth of many former settler colonies in Africa. It offers a key advantage to political parties such as ZANU-PF who are able to reinvoké memories of the struggle now and again to legitimise their rule. As a relatively young nation, history has become a crucial political force in postcolonial Zimbabwe that can be mobilised endlessly in the service of power. While the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009 resulted in some amendments to the official ceremony so as to make it a more inclusive event, the opposition MDC continued to feel sidelined in the ceremony and was forced to use alternative channels to communicate its own understanding of independence. Through its website and adverts in private newspapers, the MDC was able to circulate statements from its president Morgan Tsvangirai to its supporter base, hereby emphasising that Zimbabwe still had not achieved independence fully given the absence of civil and political freedoms that kept the nation under the whim of ZANU-PF. However, while the internet offered the MDC the technological opportunity to offer an alternative perspective, the collective memory it spoke to did not fundamentally diverge from ZANU-PF. Hence, nationalisms in Africa continue to be profoundly shaped by the legacy of colonialism, and it might be a while before alternative collective memories will define the Zimbabwean nation.

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