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## 16 Gendered Contestations for Political Leadership

### An Analysis of the Masculinization of Power in Zimbabwe's Main Political Parties 2014-2023

*Tawanda Matutu*

#### Abstract

While Zimbabwe is one of the countries that are striving towards gender mainstreaming, leadership of political parties is still engulfed in the tentacles of masculinism. This scenario, which is arguably an inheritance from the African traditional leadership styles, has been Africa's greatest undoing in the continent's attempts to attain gender parity. The cases of Joyce Mujuru, Grace Mugabe and Thokozani Khupe are a clear testimony. Mujuru's unceremonious ejection from the Zanu-PF presidium in 2014 after being accused of harbouring presidential ambitions, Grace Mugabe's disgraceful expulsion from the same party for accusations of state-capture, Thokozani Khupe's neutralization by Morgan Tsvangirayi through the appointment of two male vice presidents and her controversial loss of party presidency to Nelson Chamisa and later to Douglas Mwonozora are glaring examples of how gendered the Zimbabwean political space has been. The CCC has also operated with a male president, two male vice presidents and a peripheral female vice president. All these developments have led to the absence of a woman in the presidium of some of these political formations and where a woman is part of the presidium, her wings will be so clipped that she remains more of a ceremonial official. This chapter argues that the leadership trajectory of Zimbabwean political parties has taken a very pronounced patriarchal slant. It is an unwritten norm that when it comes to leadership of political parties, women should play second fiddle. This has reinforced the old patriarchal *stereotype* that women should be seen and not heard. Indeed, these three, once political heavyweights, are now only being seen, very little or nothing is being heard from them.

**Keywords:** masculinization, contestations, gendered, presidium, patriarchal

## Introduction

The Zimbabwean political leadership trajectory since 2014 has been characterized by serious gender imbalances. Since the African traditional society has always been patriarchal; it can be argued that this exclusion of women from the political fraternity is a vestige of the traditional political discourse which arguably has roots in African Traditional Religion.

Since independence in 1980 glaring gender inequalities have been almost permanent features of Zimbabwe's presidium and cabinet. This has been demonstrated by the fact that no woman has held the position of president or prime minister since then. Male domination of the leadership of political parties and structure during Chimurenga II explains the lack of women at the apex of the post-colonial government. Just after independence, the government's Marxist-Leninist politics to build a post-independent state based on equality did not extend to gender equality. This was reflected by the presence of one minister (Joyce Mujuru) and one deputy minister (Victoria Chitepo) in the 1980 cabinet. However, for some feminists such as Everjoice Win (2004), Mujuru represented patriarchal interests and promoted femocracy. Contrary to her counterparts Dongo and Mahofa, Mujuru was accorded some sort of respectability, which she borrowed from her marriage to the late General Mujuru, so her presence in the male dominated political spaces should also be conceived in terms of her privileged identity. After the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) following a Global Political Agreement in September 2008, two women made it into the presidium, Joyce Mujuru (vice president) and Thokozani Khupe (deputy prime minister). However, the overall trajectory did not change as women were still significantly underrepresented.

The gender imbalances have existed despite the various international conventions that African states have appended their signatures to.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articles 2 and 21 state that everyone has a right to partake in the government of his/her country without discrimination based on sex (United Nations, 2015). In the regional sphere, the SADC Gender Protocol in article 12, paragraph 1, calls for a 50% threshold of women in decision making positions (SADC, 2008). Locally, we have the 2013 Zimbabwean constitution which stipulates that woman should have equal opportunities as those of men in all spheres including in political participation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). Despite the existence of these supportive instruments, Zimbabwe has

not fared well in advancing the participation of women in governance. The SADC Gender and Development Index highlights that Zimbabwe is at a 41% threshold of achieving set targets relating to the participation of women in governance. Furthermore, the SADC Citizen Score Card puts the Zimbabwean citizens' perceptions of their governments' commitment to gender in governance at the 61% threshold (Maphosa et al., 2015).

The political parties have opted to ignore all these conventions for political expedience. This has resulted in the marginalization of women in the leadership of political parties, an issue which according to justice theorists like John Rawls (1971) is an infringement on fairness. Rawls' conception of justice consists of two principles that he applies in his work *A Theory of Justice* (1971). The two principles are: "Each person should have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty to others" and "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and attached to positions and offices open to all" (Rawls, 1971). These are "the principles that rational and free persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamentals of the terms of their association" (Rawls, 1971). They are thus the guiding principles for social cooperation. They make citizens feel appreciated for who they are, as rational and free beings. Now is it correct to argue that these principles are tools for our understanding and our taking human rights seriously? The Rawlsian first principle is the principle of equal liberty. Rawls' argument is that all citizens ought to have as much liberty as possible. The basic liberties are political liberty such as the right to vote and run an office, freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, liberty to hold personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Rawls, 1971). To some extent, we can interpret the principle of equal liberty to mean that individuals have collective responsibility to each other for the protection of each other's liberty and dignity. Despite all these perspectives, women have never been very active political players in the history of Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, save for a few who rose to power on the patronage of some powerful men. The Zimbabwean political leadership arena has been a theater of gendered gymnastics. Traditionally, the political arena has been a male domain with women relegated to the kitchen.

Recent scholarship in gender studies has endeavoured to interrogate this imbalance. Scholars like Chitando (2012) and Manyonganise (2023) have

featured prominently in this regard. While Manyonganise (2023) largely views the current political arena as wholly unlevel for women participation, I maintain in this chapter that significant improvements have been made in terms of women participation at the lower levels, but a lot must be done with regards to the presidium. Men, still need to transform their masculinities to allow significant political participation by women through their incorporation into the presidium, not just as spectators, but decision makers. Chitando has gone to the extent of advocating for what he terms redemptive masculinities. He proposes that we embrace and employ the concept of redemptive masculinities as a way of identifying and characterizing masculinities that are life-giving in a world that has been ravaged by violence and the AIDS pandemic.

According to Kate Law (2020) many women believed that their participation in national liberation would be a precursor to a broader programme of cultural emancipation, yet as is clear now, governmental thinking in this period placed women as consumers and not producers of new nationalist culture. The sacking of Joyce Mujuru from ZANU-PF in 2014 marked the beginning of a well calculated supplanting of female political leadership in Zimbabwe. Ironically, in the Mujuru case, another woman was used to spearhead her dislodge arguably to pacify the discriminatory shenanigans. To elucidate the irony alluded to, the very woman who had been pivotal in the downfall of Mujuru later fell victim to the same political scheme by her former handlers. Thokozani Khupe, who had served the opposition MDC-T as its Vice President for quite some time had to unceremoniously vacate office, as the male dominated party leadership elbowed him to the dustbins of political history.

This chapter maintains the argument that the tale of these three female politicians was not in any way an accident of history. It was rather a well calculated and meticulously orchestrated move to get rid of female political leaders. Such a move as previously indicated, can be traced back to the patriarchal nature of the African society. The African society has deprived women of their citizenship rights and reduced them to subjects. This has not been healthy to both the oppressor and the oppressed, hence Chitando's advocacy for redemptive masculinities, that is, the need to develop masculinities that promote health and well-being for all (Chitando, 2012). For him, this distinguishes our longing for more accommodating and sensitive masculinities, as opposed to the current death-dealing masculinities (Chitando, 2012). It is important to note that this chapter acknowledges the developments that have been recorded so far regarding women

participation in politics in general. However, what has remained an issue of concern is the involvement of women in political leadership, especially, the leadership of political parties in Zimbabwe. This is why this chapter is limited to Joyce Mujuru, Grace Mugabe and Thokozani Khupe because they are the ones who have expressed keen interest in leading their respective political parties only to be frustrated by the gender barricade. The three female Zimbabwean politicians were close to assuming overall leadership of their political parties were frustrated and haunted out of reckoning because of the toxic masculinities that continue to be entertained in these political parties and in Zimbabwean politics in general.

## **Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative-textual analysis based on relevant existing works. This methodology involves reading and analyzing existing literature to ascertain what is essential. Hence, this chapter made an analysis of writings that address the issue of African masculinities. For this study, a specific kind of thematic analysis is employed, known as the thematic networks analysis as proposed by Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001).

## **Women Subordination in Africa: A Pre-colonial Vestige?**

The pre-colonial conception of masculinity was premised on a man's ability to acquire material, social and political status. Holland (2005) posits that within the Shona family unit and society, the show of physical fecundity by men indicated a successful negotiation into adulthood and social worth. Underlining this is the concept that men were/are expected to fulfil certain culturally specified masculine duties. Greene (1999) sought to show how gender and ethnicity overlapped in ways that determined the course of social change among the Anlo, an ethnic group in Ghana in pre-colonial Africa. She argues that there were justifiable reasons why women particularly the young ones were subordinated by the men. These were centred on the religio-cultural as well as political transformations that occurred which in a way reconfigured the Anlo society. Parpart and Staudt (1988) present a mixed view of women's position in pre-colonial Africa. Focusing on governance, Parpart & Staudt (1988) argue that throughout

history, African women have had a different relationship to the State than have men. Manyonganise (2023) argue that these scholars observe that while women in certain classes and ethnic groups may have had greater access to the State, women have been underrepresented in African state affairs. Their analysis of African pre-colonial societies shows that a few women were awarded some power, which was mostly informal and not authoritative, as shall be seen in the case of all the political parties to be discussed. This leads them to conclude that “women in Africa have tended to exert power indirectly rather than directly through positions of authority”. Manyonganise (2023) maintains that African women were treated as second class citizens in pre-colonial Africa as there were indigenous cultural practices and beliefs which relegated women to marginalized positions even before colonialism. A critical analysis of gender relations in the colonial period tends to show that in most cases, the colonial administrators only reinforced what already existed particularly within the Zimbabwean context with special reference to the Shona. This trajectory has spilled into the current traditional leadership trends in Zimbabwe. According to the Herald, the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer of 2018 found that there were only six female chiefs and 15 female headpersons in the country out of a total of 272 and 452 respectively (The Herald, 14 March 2021).

Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) analysed the portrayal of men in Zimbabwean literature and observed that scholars trace the notion of political leaders as “fathers of the nation” and as heads of households. Manyonganise (2023) noted that gender can be understood to have been a social organizing tool even in African pre-colonial societies. Machakanja (2015) engaged with the status of women in the political spaces of pre-colonial Africa. In reference to women’s political position, she argues that “indigenous political systems represent a period of extensive political variation in the political systems of ethnic groups in Africa. She observes that women were conspicuous in high places. She, however, notes that indigenous African women played important roles in many African cultures, for example, as queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of offices in towns and villages. She gives the examples of the Lovedu of Nigeria, the Nubian queens, daughters of Nubian kings who represented their dynastic interests in Southern Egypt. Women in Egypt are said to have enjoyed the same rights as men, though this is disputed by some scholars. However, for Machakanja, these examples dispel the no-

tion that African women were silent drudges who were subjected to bearing children, to the practice of female circumcision, and to accepting their husband's polygamous privileges unquestioningly (2015). Even in patrilineal societies, Machakanja argues that the sexual division of labour in indigenous agriculture gave women a great deal of power and formal authority. For her, women's labour made significant by the institution of bride wealth that accompanied marriage (2015). While Machakanja has attempted to dispel the notion of women subjugation in pre-colonial Africa, it remains a fact that women indeed occupied a very different social space from that of men. Various cultural beliefs and practices made it difficult for them to be at par with their male counterparts. For example, the marriage institution was practiced in such a way that the woman is somehow owned by the man. In Shona for example, *mukadzi anoroogwa uye murume anoroora* (Men marry while women get married). There is no parity in such a scenario, in fact, by "getting married" the woman tacitly consents to forfeiting a great deal of her rights. However, it cannot be ignored that in pre-colonial societies, African women did enjoy some leadership rights even though males were dominant. So, it can therefore be posited that what is happening in Zimbabwean politics is not simply a continuation of what was happening before colonization but rather a culmination of the intersection of pre-colonial patriarchy with colonial and even Christian forms of patriarchy.

## **Gendered Africa: A Tale of Four Female Politicians**

### **Joice Mujuru**

Since the attainment of Zimbabwean independence in 1980, Mujuru had emerged to be one of the most decorated woman ex-combatants in the country. Born in Mount Darwin, Mashonaland Central Province, she joined the liberation struggle in 1973 at the age of 18 and went on to receive military training in Zambia. She was married to Solomon Mujuru, which later gave her the political leverage to get where she got, beginning with her election as the secretary of the Women's League in 1979.

According to Manyonganise (2023) her position as the chairwoman of the league made her the second woman to sit in the Central Committee of ZANU PF in Mozambique together with Sheba Tavarwisa. The two

women made part of a 33-member Central Committee, and this, according to Manyonganise (2023) is a strong attestation to the claim that Zimbabwean political leadership has been marred by patriarchy. After independence, Mujuru became a cabinet minister, serving as Minister of Women's Affairs and Community Development. This made her the youngest minister in Robert Mugabe's inaugural cabinet. As a cabinet minister, she enacted laws that were pro-women such as LAMA of 1982 (Manyonganise, 2023). In 2004, arguably through the influence of her powerful husband, who in ZANU PF circles was widely viewed as the king maker, she was elevated to the post of Vice-President of ZANU PF and government until her political demise in 2014.

During her tenure in government, Mujuru displayed some unprecedented levels of acquiescence. She failed to live up to women's expectations. In fact, many women's organizations viewed her as a stooge whose appointment to the post was mere political expediency rather than any genuine desire to raise the political status of women in the country. These accusations were not unfounded. In 1998, at a Salvation Army women's meeting, Mujuru had rubbished calls for equality between men and women and labelled those lobbying for it as failures in life (Win 2004). Win argues that throughout her tenure in government, Mujuru had not spoken even once in favour of women. As such, Win views Mujuru as having fitted very well within patriarchy both in her party and government.

Besides the popular narrative that her husband was the influence behind her rise to power, Christiansen (2007) views Joice Mujuru's elevation to the position of Vice President as Mugabe's way of dealing with the succession issue which had constantly raised its ugly head in the party. At the same time, Mugabe also needed to pay attention to the restlessness that began to show in the Women's League on women's marginalization from top leadership of the party (Manyonganise, 2023). The basis of Christiansen's claim is that at a women's conference held in December 1999, the women's league had demanded that they be part of the presidium, failure of which they would boycott the ZANU PF congress (Manyonganise, 2023). The timing of Mujuru's appointment in 2004, just before the 2005 general election could also suggest that Mugabe felt the need to pacify women for fear of a possible *bhora musango* (a lingo referring to deliberately missing the target to avoid a win). Hence, Mujuru's elevation needs to be seen as Mugabe's way of pacifying the agitated women rather than a need to attain gender parity.

Unprecedentedly ironic is the fact that before her fall from grace, Mujuru was presented as a heroine who in 1974 had downed a British helicopter during combat, a narrative which was swiftly changed and vehemently rejected after her fall in 2014, confirming the view of history as the narrative by the ruling class. To kick-start her removal, it was alleged that Mujuru led a faction commonly referred to as 'Gamatox'. Manyonganise (2023) maintains that in 2014, when it became apparent that Mujuru was increasingly emerging the clear successor to Mugabe, a plot was hatched to thwart her. That is when various accusations were raised against her, including plotting to overthrow the President through witchcraft and corruption. Her rivals alleged that they had gathered overwhelming intelligence to this effect. However, Manyonganise (2023) claims when Mujuru's case is subjected to closer analysis, one will inevitably conclude that the major reason for all this was that she was a woman. Tendi (2016:208) has illuminated how the gendered nature of surveillance practices reinforces patriarchal national politics. Mugabe demanded to know why a woman (for that matter) wanted to succeed him. Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube (2015:129) argue that "the fact that the President said, "for that matter..." betrays all the efforts his government [had] made in an effort to bring about gender equality in political participation."

From Mugabe's perspective, it was inconceivable that a woman could ever imagine becoming a state president. Mugabe's sentiments are viewed by Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube as suggesting that women should not aspire to be leaders. For this reason, Manyonganise (2015) has taken Mugabe's statement to suggest that women are not human enough to warrant the highest office in the land. From a gendered perspective, the bastardisation of Mujuru's position has shown that a woman who dreams about becoming the president of Zimbabwe is dangerous to patriarchy and hence should be put in their rightful place, the political dustbin (Manyonganise, 2015). For Mugabe, Mujuru was not even qualified to be President as she was too simplistic. Consequently, she was subjected to verbal and emotional abuse and threats to harm her physically were also made. For her own safety, she absconded the ZANU PF Politburo meeting that was held before the December 2014 Congress and she was eventually fired from the Party. For Maphosa, Tshuma & Ncube (2015) "this signified the end of the ZANU PF career of a woman who epitomized women's fledgling political influence".

It is important to note that the demise of Joice Mujuru was spearheaded by other women, Grace Mugabe and Oppah Muchinguri. Grace Mugabe

was at the forefront though. This was used as an excuse by men in the various strata of social life and was seen as reinforcing the view that ‘a woman’s enemy is another woman’. What seemed to evade these men was that for any oppressive system to survive, it always recruits from the oppressed so that the oppressed become its mouthpiece. In other words, patriarchy was simply closing the door to any possibility of a woman leading the nation while hiding behind other women who were willing to be used as pawns in this political game (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000). So, using a woman to attack another woman shielded the male politicians from accusations of gender intolerance and gender abuse. If the male politicians had attacked Joice directly, everyone could easily interpret that as gender discrimination and even sexual harassment.

Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) makes a crucial observation that most women who made it to high political positions in ZANU PF were closely connected to male leaders in the party. Hence, Joice Mujuru’s ascendancy to leadership has been credited to her husband, Solomon Mujuru. Tendi (2020) has dubbed Solomon Mujuru as the kingmaker in ZANU PF. With Solomon Mujuru around, it had become obvious that Joice Mujuru would become the next President of Zimbabwe. Hence, to weaken her prospects, Solomon Mujuru was ‘eliminated’ in a mysterious fire. This left Joice Mujuru vulnerable politically. While this analysis may be viewed as problematic as it presents women with no patriarchal support as weak and powerless, it reflects the true nature of the political space in Zimbabwe. Joice’s political career was destroyed within days. Hence, to a large extent, her ouster eliminated the possibility of having a woman as a president of Zimbabwe.

### **Grace Mugabe**

Grace Mugabe was born Grace Ntombizodwa Marufu on 23 July 1965 in Benoni, South Africa. She hailed from Chikomba district in Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe. She was a secretary in the then president, Robert Mugabe’s office before she later became Mugabe’s secret mistress (BBC, 2017).

Grace Mugabe had until 2014, led a quiet private life, an aspect which accorded her the status of a mother figure. However, all hell broke loose in 2014 when she finally made the bold decision to enter the political fray, arguably to either manage the succession matrix or to be part of the succession figures. It is, therefore, largely thought that it was the old age of Mugabe that nudged her to enter politics (Manyonganise, 2023). Cassim (2014) argues that Grace entered politics with a bang and her entry was to

change the face and trajectory of Zimbabwean politics. When Grace entered politics, her first port of call was to attack the then Vice President Joice Mujuru in unprecedented scathing language. She accused Mujuru of a myriad of evil machinations ranging from practicing witchcraft to extortion via immorality. She was also accused of demanding 10% kickbacks from private companies. Based on these frivolous accusations, Mugabe sacked Mujuru together with other ZANU PF officials who were perceived to have been her sympathizers. Interestingly, Grace was subsequently nominated to be the ZANU PF's Women's League chairperson.

Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa replaced Mujuru as one of the vice presidents of both the party and government. However, it was not long before Grace Mugabe started to attack him as well during the much-hyped Youth Interface rallies. She started the 'Meet the People' rallies where she seized every moment to publicly undress Mnangagwa. Through the mantra 'Munhu Wese kuna Amai' (Everyone to the mother), she managed to capture the echelons of power in ZANU PF and portrayed herself as the most appropriate successor to the throne.

Biri (2020) analysed the above mantra and discovered that it, among other things, depicted a protest and a challenge to the existing political order that has been built on oppressive gender norms. Manyonganise (2020) views the slogan as a "quest to re-engage women in politics that had been disengaged by the ushering in of colonialism and a reconfiguration of motherhood never imagined in post-colonial Zimbabwe". Manyonganise (2023) further perceives the slogan as revealing the inadequacies of Grace Mugabe's leadership since she failed to come up with a political identity that is free from her being a mother. Her political identity was closely linked to that of her husband. Hence, people who were fed up with her husband could not accept her political bid for the presidency. However, there are challenges with the latter analysis because it seems to be oblivious of the political capital that Robert Mugabe had accorded Grace. Being the First Lady is a political resource, which every wife of a president would not hesitate to capitalize on. Hence, it was natural for Grace to climb on the shoulders of her husband.

Grace's political rivals had expected Mugabe to restrain his wife, but this did not materialize. In fact, Mugabe appeared to side with his wife thereby corroborating the widely held suspicion that he wanted to pave way for his wife to succeed him as the President of Zimbabwe. These suspicions, coupled with Grace's intensified attack on Mnangagwa, made it almost obvious that Grace was aimed for the party's presidency. Manyonganise (2023)

quotes Grace Mugabe as asking: “they say I want to be President. Why not? Am I not Zimbabwean?” Manyonganise analysed this question from a gender perspective and discovered that the question was loaded. For Manyonganise (2023), Grace’s question points to the *genderedness* of Zimbabwe’s political space:

Grace Mugabe casts a shadow on the restrictive perception of citizenship when it comes to women and political ... leadership. She in a way is rejecting such narrow definitions of citizenship, which are meant to contain women within prescribed spaces while denying them access in others. Grace Mugabe’s question is a call for Zimbabwe to rethink its conceptualization of citizenship when it comes to women’s political participation and leadership.

Hence, the unceremonious removal of Mugabe from power in 2017 was essentially meant to stop Grace from becoming the president of Zimbabwe. Scholars like Mudiwa (2020) even view ‘Operation Restore Legacy’ as suggesting not just an intervention in factional politics, but also a restoration of male leadership in the party. The legacy of having a male president was under threat from Grace Mugabe hence the need for a military operation to restore it. Indeed, the legacy was restored through the extermination of Grace Mugabe from the political scene and the re-introduction of Emmerson Mnangagwa onto the party and country’s presidency. Grace Mugabe was, therefore, victimized for becoming too ambitious for her gender.

As if the gender card was not enough, Grace was also viewed as lacking the intellectual capacity to be in such a position. Manyonganise (2023) observed that the pitting of women’s intellect against that of men is not something new. She adds that it has been used to sideline women in the Zimbabwean political space for too long. To reinforce her argument, Manyonganise (2023) refers to Simba Makoni’s sentiments about Grace Mugabe:

Makoni ... sees Grace’s entry into politics and her aspirations to become national president as belittling to motherhood as well as rescinding ‘decent’ womanhood. He is trying to take us back to the social constructions of who a good woman is: one who is passive, submissive, quiet, unambitious etc. By comparing Grace to Robert Mugabe, the two interviewees have succeeded in putting across the general sentiment that women should always live in men’s shadows when it comes to politics. While for Mugabe, Joice Mujuru was too unsophisticated, for Simba Makoni, Grace was stupid.

The above views summarize how the society views female leadership. The African society abhors women leadership with passion. In her description of Grace's fate, Biri (2020) argues that Grace's bragging was read as lacking decency and submission, virtues which the African society conceives as marks of motherhood. Biri (2020) further notes that the negative labels given to Grace are a sign of a society that is not ready for a challenge against patriarchy, and this confirmed that Zimbabwe is not ready for female leadership. She further posits that Grace Mugabe failed to show women's competence in political leadership.

### **Thokozani Khupe**

Thokozani Khupe was born on 18 November 1963. She started her political activities in the labour movement before her election as the secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' Women's Advisory Council. She became a member of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at its inception in 1999. She served the party in various capacities including being the Member of Parliament (MP) for Makokoba constituency in Bulawayo. In 2005, she was elected the Deputy President of the MDC-T, a post which she retained in 2014. The formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009, saw her becoming one of the deputy Prime Ministers until 2013 when the formation was dissolved.

Khupe's political downfall started with her alleged fall-out with the then party president Morgan Tsvangirai. The alleged fall-out was triggered by the introduction of two other vice presidents, Nelson Chamisa, and Elias Mudzuri. This was interpreted as an attempt to neutralize Khupe's powers as well as to manage potential squabbles likely to emanate from Chamisa's loss to Douglas Mwonozora. Manyonganise (2023) argues that soon after Tsvangirai's death, despite Khupe being the rightful successor according to the MDC-T constitution, Chamisa wrestled the post from her. After Chamisa's ascendance to the helm of the party, leadership wrangles ravaged the party to the extent that at Morgan Tsvangirai's funeral wake in Buhera, Khupe was reportedly beaten by pro-Chamisa MDC-T youths. It is further alleged that these youths even attempted to burn the hut in which she had sought refuge.

So, Khupe's attempt to tread the male dominated ground almost cost her the supreme sacrifice – her life. However, she remained resolute and determined to claim what she believed to be rightly hers. The intermittent internecine fights inevitably culminated in a split that saw Khupe retain-

ing the MDC-T party while Chamisa led the MDC-Alliance. These, however, were mere formations of the same party. The stronger formation was seen through the 2018 general elections when Khupe put up a dismal performance while Chamisa put up a strong challenge to ZANU PF.

In a bid to forge a new political trajectory, Khupe chose to align herself with ZANU PF and thus she joined the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), a platform put in place by ZANU PF where different presidential candidates that had contested in the 2018 elections would come together to dialogue on Zimbabwe's issues. To flex her political muscle and with the aid of the judiciary, she recalled MPs who were elected under the banner of the MDC Alliance claiming that they were members of her party. Her argument stemmed from the fact that the MPs had been seconded to the alliance by MDC-T. Manyonganise (2013) notes that questions were raised why she had contested as an MDC-T presidential candidate if her party was also a member of the alliance.

However, no sooner had she fully established herself as the president of the party than her close lieutenants, Douglas Mwonzora and Morgan Komichi had already plotted against her. It appears Khupe was just used to wrestling power from Chamisa only to hand it over to Mwonzora, a male member of the party. This scenario again serves to demonstrate how the African society is not prepared to have a female leader.

Manyonganise has this to say:

While she was basking in the glory of having weakened Chamisa and his party, Douglas Mwonzora was plotting to become the President of the party that she led. In December 2020, at an MDC-T congress, Douglas Mwonzora was 'voted' the President of the party. When Khupe realised how she had been cheated and protested the electoral process, she was beaten by Mwonzora's supporters. No one paid attention to her protests. She was later given the post of vice president of the MDC-T. In 2022, another conflict arose between Mwonzora and Khupe when Mwonzora decided to take away the MDC Alliance name from Chamisa in order to contest in the 26 March 2022 by-elections.

A lot of complications arose from the use of the name MDC-T and MDC-Alliance. The complications resulted in firings and counter firings between Mwonzora and Khupe. Manyonganise (2023) contends that:

By adopting the MDC Alliance name, Mwonzora was accused by Khupe of having fired himself from the MDC-T party. This conflict

resulted in the two firing each other from the party. Khupe, while still maintaining that she was the leader of the MDC-T party later announced that she was joining Chamisa's party (by then Chamisa had changed the name of his party to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)). When she was finally recalled from Parliament by Mwonozora, she played the gender and ethnic card. For her, she was in this political predicament because she was not only a woman but a Ndebele as well. Throughout all her political struggles, she was branded a prostitute. After her expulsion from parliament, she embarked on a campaign, which she called the 'Beat the pot campaign'.

Her campaign was an attempt to depict the plight of women in politics. For her, all the three arms of government, that is, the executive, legislature and the judiciary had been twisted against women. Manyonganise (2023) observed that Khupe's use of metaphors of suffocation are indicative of how the political space in Zimbabwe does not provide women with comfortable spaces for participation.

Manyonganise (2023) did an in-depth analysis of how patriarchy championed Khupe's political demise and discovered that:

She was tricked by patriarchy in more ways than one. For example, when it became apparent that in the event of Morgan Tsvangirai's death, she was going to be the MDC-T acting president, Tsvangirai appointed two unelected vice presidents in disregard of the party's constitution. He possibly secretly anointed his preferred successor, judging by the letter which was produced after his death. Hence, the violence that she suffered soon after Tsvangirai's demise was resistance against her ascendancy to the highest office in the party. Despite her insistence on following the party's constitution, she lost the battle. As a woman, she lived in Tsvangirai's shadow for too long to the extent that she failed to read the genderedness of politics in Zimbabwe regardless of political affiliation. She was only important in so far as she could play that supportive role to Tsvangirai. Mwonozora and Hodzi (2021:6) attribute Chamisa's success to grabbing power from Khupe as a result of cunningness, skill and grand scheming. It points to the fact that Khupe lacked these, and her gender cannot be removed from this failure. In trying to exercise her agency, she fell victim to the whims of both ZANU PF and Douglas Mwonozora. ZANU PF warmed up to Khupe because it wanted to use her to destroy the MDC as a political brand. Khupe might have lacked the courage to go the distance

required by ZANU PF. Hence, it brought in Mwonzora. To a certain extent, Khupe validates the traditional notion that outside of patriarchal support, women cannot make it in politics. She failed to sculpt her own identity as a powerful woman in politics. What makes her case a complicated one is that she had recalled other women some of whom were Ndebele from parliament.

This is not the first time that the opposition party has split. It is only the first time when the split has involved a woman and the woman being found at the receiving end. When the party split in 2005, and probably because the protagonists were men, they were allowed to co-exist by Parliament. Now that one of the protagonists is a woman, this was taken as glaring evidence of discrimination against women. In this regard, Khupe felt that a male Speaker of Parliament chose to support another man in the fight between a woman and a man. Ironically, as Manyonganise (2023) observed, it was difficult for women to sympathize with Khupe or for the parliamentary women's caucus to speak on her behalf because she had also victimized fellow women. This resonates well with Miescher and Lindsay (2003) who observed that in many African societies it is possible to have "masculinities without men." They argue that there exist several expressions of masculinities by non-males. What it means is that masculinities go beyond men's bodies or physiology (manhood) to include masculine expressions by females. In this case, Khupe herself may be accused of masculinity. Her eventual rejoining of Chamisa's party could be clear admission that she values patriarchy and she seems to have applied the *if you cannot beat them, join them* maxim.

## **The Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) and a Gendered Presidium: Is it Following Suit?**

The Citizens Coalition for Change is a relatively new political party formed by Nelson Chamisa and his loyalists after losing the leadership of the MDC and consequently the MDC-Alliance to Khupe and eventually to Mwonzora. The party was established on 22 January 2022, and it has a president and three vices. In this presidium, only one of the co-vice presidents, Lynette Karenyi-Kore, is female. This already raises questions of gender equality in the new political formation. The other two vices, Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube equally have a long history in the opposition

politics, having been key members of the opposition movement in its various formations.

Biti took part in the founding of the MDC in 1999 before he was elected Member of Parliament for the Harare East constituency in 2000. Biti was pivotal in the negotiations that culminated in the formation of the Government of National Unity where he then served as finance minister. Following the dissolution of the GNU and the party's defeat in the 2013 plebiscite, there were squabbles in the movement resulting in Biti falling out with Tsvangirai in 2014 and he was consequently expelled from the party. Together with other disaffected MDC-T members, he established his own political outfit, the MDC-Renewal and later changed to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Biti later joined hands with his political nemesis in the MDC to form the MDC-Alliance.

The other male vice president of CCC, Welshman Ncube is a founding member of the Movement for Democratic Change. He served as the party's Secretary General before breaking away in 2005 to lead the Movement for Democratic Change–Ncube (MDC-N). Ncube was instrumental, in the Global Political Agreement negotiations that led to the formation of what was known as the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 where he was appointed as the Minister of Industry and Commerce. Ncube returned to mainstream opposition politics via the same route as that of Tendai Biti.

The only woman in the four-member presidium, Karenyi, joined the MDC at its formation in 1999 and became ward 16 Secretary in Mutare before her elevation to district secretary for Mutare North in 2000. She joined Mutare City Council as a councillor in 2003. She served in various other capacities including provincial secretary for Manicaland province in 2006 and National Organizing secretary for the Assembly of Women in 2007. In the 2008 general elections, she was elected Member of Parliament for Chimanimani West and in 2014 she rose to become the National Chairperson of the MDC-T Women's Assembly. She held this position until her elevation to become the Vice President of the MDC-Alliance in 2019.

An analysis of the biographies of Biti, Ncube and Karenyi reveals that the former two have not been very loyal members of Morgan Tsvangirai, on whose legacy the CCC is established, yet they have come to be more notable in the organization than Karenyi. This is an indication that in political leadership Zimbabweans, primarily, consider one's gender before other

qualities are considered. Although it may be argued that the inclusion of Biti and Ncube in the presidium is an attempt to balance the power matrix in the opposition, it remains apparent that gender dynamics are equally at play.

## **Towards Gender Equitability in the Zimbabwean Political Space**

It has been maintained in this chapter that the exclusion of women in leadership roles in the main political parties in Zimbabwe is caused by patriarchy. This chapter has therefore reinforced Chitando's call for non-discriminative masculinities. It is a call upon society to revisit the dominant masculinities that Morrell (1998) refers to as hegemonic masculinities. Chitando's (2012) redemptive masculinities are a concept that has sought to free both men and women from the tentacles of patriarchy. Patriarchy has resulted in the marginalization of women in political leadership spaces. This can be achieved through a strong advocacy for gender balance in both public and private spheres. This is achievable especially since we have more women than men. Women need to be empowered to realize their full potential so that they develop the trust that is required in their fellow political leadership aspirants. On one hand, it seems women are not courageous enough to stand in solidarity with fellow women as they are oppressed by dominant hegemonic masculinities. On the other hand, it appears as if women are complicit in their own oppression and help perpetuate the oppression of fellow women. As a result, whenever an aspiring woman political leader faces a backlash from male counterparts, other women do not give her the much-needed moral support. When Mujuru was fired, no fellow woman had the courage to fight in her corner. In fact, a fellow woman, Grace Mugabe was used by men to spearhead Mujuru's downfall. The same applies to Grace Mugabe, when it was her turn to face the axe, her former colleagues in ZANU PF such as Oppah Muchinguri openly supported the move to have her expelled from the party. Hence, in most cases, women are their greatest undoing by supporting the downfall of their fellows.

Chitando (2012)'s notion of redemptive or life-giving masculinity is most probably best captured by his use of the term 'gender equitable'.

For Chitando, such men:

are respectful to women, show concern about the feelings and opinions of their sexual partners, and seek relationships based on equality and intimacy rather than on sexual conquest; Believe that men and women have equal rights; Assume, or share with their partners the responsibility for reproductive health and disease prevention issues; Are, or seek to be, involved domestic partners and fathers, who are responsible for at least some of the household chores and their children's care giving. Are opposed to violence against women in their intimate relationships. Are not homophobic.

Affirmative action can also go a long way in rectifying the gender disparities in the political arena. Affirmative action is one of the policies, which have had an impact on the involvement of previously marginalized groups. It has a direct impact on the recruitment, hiring and promotion of personnel in an organization. This is a set of public policies and initiatives designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex, gender or national origin. In this chapter, focus has been on gender. Affirmative action is intended to promote equal opportunity. It can be instituted by government and political parties to ensure that marginalized groups within a society, such as women are included in political leadership. The justification for affirmative action is that it helps to compensate for past discrimination, persecution, or exploitation of women by their male counterparts due to hegemonic masculinities.

These calls take as a given the capacity of men to change and even their own involvement in bringing about this change in the ways gender relations are configured in society (John, Siwila & Settler, 2013). The calls are also based on the understanding that masculinities are not fixed or frozen, that men can be transformed, and that they are capable of “giving up” their patriarchal privileges (Chitando, 2012). His call to arms is that men must do so for the world to be a more gender equitable place. He, however, warns his readers against the “marginalization” of men in efforts to bring about gender justice, for him that would be counterproductive. In other words, he does not call for reverse discrimination, but he calls for a holistic approach that includes men and women working together as the sure path to gender justice.

## Conclusion

The Zimbabwean political space seems to be highly masculinized to the extent that very little room has been left for women. While the participation of women is notable at the lower levels of political leadership, it is evident that all major parties in Zimbabwe have an unwritten norm against women. The three women politicians discussed in this chapter had their political leadership ambitions frustrated arguably based on their gender. It has also been noted that women are also their own undoing since they always rally behind male politicians at the expense of fellow women. But this can be attributed to socialization whereby women are nurtured to believe that leadership is for men. It has been noted that political parties, which are the key gateways for women's participation in national leadership, are the greatest perpetrators of obstruction. These parties have the tendency of replicating gender relations of male supremacy and female subordination. It has been noted in this chapter that party leadership is controlled by men, who in turn hinder women from reaching the top positions in party hierarchies where crucial decisions are made. The patriarchal nature of political parties inevitably makes women susceptible to active exclusion, discrimination, and often open hostility, despite the Rawlsian proposition that each person has the same and infeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all.

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