

A chilling lesson in the fragility of democracy

Written by Administrator

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TV Review of 'President' by Carol Midgley

If you were in the mood to become enraged last night, Camilla Nielsson's excellent documentary 'President' was just the ticket. It followed Zimbabwe's 2018 election after Robert Mugabe's removal by military coup and was filmed from within the heart of the MDC Alliance, the opposition party led by the popular young lawyer Nelson Chamisa. Chamisa was challenging acting president and former Mugabe man Emmerson Mnangagwa and promising to root out corruption. What transpired was a lengthy demonstration of how to steal an election – crudely. As MDC's outraged executives said, to paraphrase: 'At least Mugabe was sophisticated as a fraudster.'

Some of the tricks seemed spoof-worthy, such as claiming Mnangagwa had polled more votes in a certain province than there were people. Some 16 polling stations returned identical results. But horrifically, a polling agent and her husband were both raped. Citizens were offered food for votes.

When the public protested, the army was deployed and six people were killed. Nielsson had remarkable access to Chamisa's campaign. The film showed, in real time, democracy being

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violated in plain sight. It showed people desperate for change, who were impotent in the face of a inscrutable government machine. If you wanted a lesson in how fragile democracy is and how easily it can be trampled on, this is it.