

Naming, Identity, Politics and Violence in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT Naming is a powerful tool for identity construction and its strength lies in a history of a nation. Identity is used to associate or disassociate with the other, history and culture or landscape and to create links with the past and the present. Politics, on the other hand, is a matter of power, struggles of masculinities and hegemony and combine with identity to become powerful tools in the production of violence. Identity and politics are joined together by contestation and struggles that emerge from it are struggles of power, relevance and memory. Nations and other social groups engage in politics of identity in an attempt to avoid sinking into oblivion by making reference to what are regarded as significant past events. Such has been the case of the Zimbabwean state whose history of violence driven by identity struggles and politics goes back into the pre-colonial and colonial period. The authors are aware of the pre-colonial and colonial violence but the goal in this paper is to delineate post-colonial violence. The violence noted in 1983-84 in Matabeleland, the 1999-2000 violence that attended farm invasions and post-2000 violence that characterised elections until the June 2008 Presidential run-off elections all make sense when recourse is made to a historical past. Electoral violence as witnessed from 2000 onwards evolved from the history of liberation struggles, colonialism and struggles of hegemony. Our paper aims to explain the reasons for the culture of violence and why it became prominent in the post-2000 period and show how the issue of identity is connected to the culture of violence. The paper discusses the link between identity and politics in Zimbabwe's culture of violence and examines the circulating discourses of violence about Zimbabwe. This paper therefore, adopts a broad qualitative analytical approach by tracing the cycle of violence from the early phases of Zimbabwe's independence to the present dispensation. The paper highlights the synergy between identity, party politics and violence and helps in the reconceptualization of the nature, manifestations and continuities of violence in Zimbabwe. The paper demonstrates that the military factor in Zimbabwe politics is attributed to the fact that most of the current leadership and politically prominent individuals are war veterans of the liberation struggle against White minority rule.