

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.

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's transition into independence was characterised by ethnic tensions that culminated in the *Gukurahundi* war leading to the death of up to 20 000 people as the country was just emerging from the protracted war of independence. The ruling part also spent some of its energies anticipating and pacifying any opposition against its rule. The country has been ravaged by a vicious cycle of violence since 1981. There was violence at Entumbane, Connmara and Ntabazinduna in February 1981 where over 300 people died, the *Gukurahundi* killings of 1983-87 and the unprecedented 2008 electoral violence. Narratives on the complexities and challenges facing Zimbabwe's transition to democracy however tend to concentrate on policy dimensions in their account for the political and economic challenges experienced in the country. This however, eclipsed the problem of ethnicity, party politics and racial cleavages in understanding the culture of violence that has threatened all facets of human security in the country.

This paper gives a critical overview of the scope and nature of patterns of violence in Zimbabwe by paying special attention on such variables like party-politics, race and ethnicity. Critical events to be discussed include the 1983-87 *Gukurahundi* violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands province, the 1985 electoral violence targeting the opposition party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZAPU), 1990 electoral violence targeting another opposition party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), the 2000 farm invasion violence and the post-2000 increased militarisation of the state and electoral violence. It is the contention of this paper that political violence in Zimbabwe cannot be explained in isolation from the ruling party hegemony and ethnic as well as the racial connotations. The paper argues that the ruling party Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in its bid to maintain political party domination deliberately perpetrated violence along political and ethnic lines and this strategy has been consistently applied up to the present era of the Government of National Unity.

The next section of this paper discusses the conceptual dimensions of identity, politics and violence as a way of demonstrating their synergy.

Politics of Violence - Conceptual Dimensions

In *Clash of Civilisations*, Huntington (1993) accounts for the global violence by linking it to incompatibilities in religious and cultural values. This model has been employed to explain the post-Cold War contestation between Christianity and Islam and the resultant violence. Huntington's approach, while correctly highlighting values and culture as an explanatory model for global violence, fails to pay adequate attention to other factors such as power-politics (party politics) ethnicity and race. Moreover, unlike Huntington's model, Neo-Marxists have persuasively explained violence in the context of political economy by linking violence to poverty, social and economic inequalities (Sen 2008). It is further argued that impoverished people resort to violence in a bid to register their discontent (Sen 2008). Despite their wide appeal, Marxists and Neo-Marxists explanatory models of violence fail to take into account situations where the state is the chief perpetrator of violence as what has been the case with Zimbabwe. What both Huntington (1993) and scholars aligned to Marxism seem to have underplayed in their explanations is the critical role of notions of identity in cases where the state has been the chief perpetrator of violence.

This paper is more aligned to ontological explanations of political violence and claims that issues of identity and labels are crucial in explaining violence of political nature. That is why issues of identity are key to this study since they enable us to understand political attitudes, perceptions and behaviour that emerge in the Zimbabwean context. Fearon (1999) argues that identity is a social construct pointing out that it may refer to social categories as defined by membership rules and characteristics as well as the expected behaviour. Deng (1995: 1) concurs by positing that identity is about how individuals or groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of either "ethnicity, race, language, religion and culture. Similarly, Herring (1993: 371) says that social identities envisage notions of group "distinction, dignity and place within historical specific discourses" or

their shared world view of certain social, economic and political structures.

In trying to connect politics and identity, Kowert and Lergro (1996: 435) are of the position that political identities are "perspective representation of political actors themselves and evolving of their relationship to each other." Bloom (1990) brings another dimension of nationalism to the concept of identity arguing that when a group of people attach a national tag to their existence, it becomes a national identity. Taylor (1989) reinforces that identity politics is premised on shared experiences of colonial subjugation and social exclusion of certain members of a group. It is along these reasons that members of society or group organised themselves to repel the colonial yoke through liberation wars in the context of Africa. Most nationalist political parties in Africa were formed along identity politics and to date their claim to legitimate power and control derives from the liberation history.

Another dimension to the discourse of identity is the aspect of race. Omi and Winant (1994) used the term biological essentialism, to explain how some racial groupings always strive to be the dominant ones and this again is a product of social constructs.

From the above discussion, it can be argued that the explanatory value of the term identity is in its ability to enable us to explain and understand human behaviour as well as their actions. The action identity model by Fearon (1999: 27) illustrates that group violence stems from collective identity where "members of society or society share certain norms, beliefs, desires and habits." In this regard, the quest for defending one's identity or group identity at times triggers violent conduct. In retrospect, identity therefore, becomes a struggle for honour, self-respect and status as well as domination. Kalyvas (2003: 475) posits that "actions and motivations" of politically motivated violence portrays elements of identity possibly in the form political part, ethnicity and religious affiliation as triggers to such. In the same vein, group loyalty and beliefs creates a culture of group enmity, hence polarisation of violence. It is further explained that group violence manifest in two dimensions which are targets or perpetrators. In most scenarios, opposition political parties and minority ethnic and racial groups emerge as targets while, the ruling parties or major ethnic or racial groups

emerge as chief perpetrators of violence (Kalyvas 2003). With respect to identity construction, Sen (2006) notes that attributes such as nationality, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and ideology play a role and violence perpetrated along these attributes is easily polarised.

The next section elaborates on how these theoretical explanations on the politics of violence relates to Zimbabwe's post-independence national situation.

Background to Ethnic Politics in Zimbabwe

Comaroff's (1991) definition of ethnicity helps us make sense of the challenges of ethnic violence in post-independent Zimbabwe. Comaroff (1991: 32) describes ethnicity as a set of human relations and a mode of consciousness that constantly keep changing. He further notes that ethnicity reflects a socially constructed "collective consciousness of society." The ethnic composition of Zimbabwe matches Comaroff's definition. African Black people account for 98% of the population of Zimbabwe. Of these, Shona people constitute 82%, Ndebele 14%, other 2% (mainly Tonga, Hlengwe and Venda), while mixed and Asian 1%, and White less than 1% (Encyclopaedia of Nations 2013). Shona and Ndebele are the dominant ethnic groupings, with Shona being the main language.

The issue of ethnicity in Zimbabwe has some traits dating back to pre-colonial times, mainly between the Ndebele and Shona speaking people. In the distant past, the Ndebele were renowned for being a powerful tribe and survived on raiding the Shona (old Karanga Kingdom), for cattle, crops and women (Musindo 2004). These practices created serious ethnic rift between the Shona and Ndebele people and were only abrogated by the coming of the colonial settlers in 1890. The British colonial administration took control of Zimbabwe, thereby seizing all the powers from the Ndebele. In a way, White rulers were intent on casting in stone ethnic sensibilities which were very much fluid.

The challenge of ethnicity in politics manifested during Zimbabwe's war of liberation of 1963 to 1979. According to Sithole (1995), the Southern Rhodesia African Nationalist Congress (SRANC) that was established with the motive of waging a war of liberation in 1957 was spoiled by ethnic barriers between the Shona and Ndebele people. The same ethnic tensions surfaced again when the Front for Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI) which was formed in October

1971 was crippled by ethnic tensions between the Shona and Ndebele speaking groups. Political mobilisation therefore, became an ethnic play where Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) had to mobilise from the Ndebele, while ZANU had the Shona as its resource base (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008b).

Despite agreeing on the common objective of liberating the country from White minority rule, major ethnic tensions between the major Zimbabwean liberation movements, namely ZAPU and ZANU resulted in waging the war of liberation along ethnic lines. Due to some ethnic founded differences, the defection from ZAPU by those who formed ZANU in 1963 resulted in the polarisation and political rivalry between the two along ethnic lines with ZAPU being Ndebele dominated and ZANU being mainly for the Shona speaking people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008b; Sithole 1995). Throughout the liberation war, there were tensions between the two military wings of the two parties, namely ZAPU's Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), which operated from Zambia with the strong backing of USSR and ZANU's Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) which was Chinese backed and operated from Mozambique (Sithole 1995). There were some skirmishes between the two liberation military wings, and it was no surprise that the Gukurahundi violence actually started within the integrated Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) in 1982, after ZIPRA cadres within the ZNA were accused of having arms caches for carrying out a coup to topple the ZANU (PF) government (Sithole 1995).

To ZANU (PF), ZAPU was therefore a suspicious partner by the virtue of being Ndebele dominated and ZANU (PF) demonstrated its belief in one party politics by absorbing ZAPU in 1987 because any political view which was not in line with government and ruling party ideology was labelled subversive and unpatriotic (Ranger 2003). It should therefore be acknowledged that the ethnic political landscape in Zimbabwe, which after the formation of MDC extended to areas traditional regarded as Shona and into urban areas, can be traced back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

Ethnic Politics in the Post-colonial Era

The post-colonial nation building project in Zimbabwe was convulsed by ethnic conflict between the periods 1982 to 1987. The ethnic conflict started when some ZIPRA military cad-

res objected to the post-independence reintegration where ZANLA and ZIPRA military wings were to be merged (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008b). It is alleged that the dissident activities by some members of ZIPRA prompted ZANU to conduct a crackdown in an operation code-named *Gukurahundi* (CCJP and LRF 1997). The alleged dissident activities were confined to Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces and the ruling party ZANU-PF authorised ‘counter insurgency’ by the ZANLA North Korean trained 5th Brigade which were mainly Shona speaking (CCJP and LRF 1997). The *Gukurahundi* violence was predicated on both ethnicity and party-politics. What started as a crackdown on some rogue elements within the ZIPRA, ended up being an all-out war against the Ndebele people. The *Gukurahundi* violence reflected the inseparable link between ethnicity and politics in the Zimbabwean situation. Ethnic hatred prompted President Mugabe to describe the Ndebele as a “dissident community” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008b: 35). The contention was that ZAPU was connected with the dissidents, who were Ndebele; hence, all Ndebele people were dissidents (Musindo 2004). Such a fallacy of composition resulted in serious destruction of property, displacement of people and deaths estimated at 20 000 (CCJP and LRF 1997). There are also reports of disappearances and abductions of Ndebele speaking people during the *Gukurahundi* violence. In essence, the amount of force invoked during the *Gukurahundi* seemed not proportional to the perceived dissidents’ threat and this may explain why critical voices argue that *Gukurahundi* was a well calculated political and ethnic violence against the Ndebele speaking Zimbabweans (CCJP and LRF 1997).

However, despite assuming an ethnic complexion, Sithole, and Makumbe (1997) posit that the Matabeleland violence was mainly due to incompatible vision of the future of Zimbabwe between the two liberation parties. They allege that ZANU-PF wanted to propagate a “one party model” while, PF-ZAPU advocated a “multi-party” democratic system (Sithole and Makumbe 1997: 184). As a result, the violence that erupted became a struggle for political power and hegemonic status. Joshua Nkomo was singled out as enemy of the state, which forced him to flee the country into exile in London in 1983 (Sithole and Makumbe 1997; Nkomo 1984). The Ndebele on the other hand were labelled as an untrustwor-

thy tribal group who paid allegiance to Nkomo and his PF-ZAPU (Sibanda 2005). It is further alleged that people were also interrogated on their political party affiliation, instructed to denounce PF-ZAPU, forced to attend ZANU-PF rallies and buy ZANU-PF party cards. Sloganism during ZANU-PF rallies vilified Joshua Nkomo as a dissident and hatred between Ndebele and Shona ethnic groups was aggravated by elitist scholarship within ZANU-PF political cycles which portrayed PF-ZAPU as secondary player in Zimbabwe’ (Dabengwa 1995). The horrific results of the *Gukurahundi* according to Bhebhe (2004b: 15) demonstrate the state’s failure to integrate the Shona and Ndebele into “one national identity of Zimbabwe.” This also explains the phenomenon of Ndebele particularism alienated by the Shona dominated government in Zimbabwe. For many of the Ndebele people, *Gukurahundi* is believed to be an all Shona crusade against the Ndebele (Lindgren 2005). There are also claims by modern humanitarians to give a genocide label to the *Gukurahundi* ethnic killings in Zimbabwe. The 2010 Genocide Watch lobbied for referring Ndebele killings to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in order to prosecute the perpetrators. Whether or not the killings constitute a crime against humanity remains contested, but the crux of the matter is that military violence against the Ndebele had an ethnic orientation.

The *Gukurahundi* ethnic and political violence were only terminated when the late Joshua Nkomo settled for a political compromise which saw the merging of ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU to form one ZANU-PF under the auspices of the Unity Accord in 1987 (Brett 2010). It is believed that the Unity Accord between ZAPU and ZANU in 1987 brought peace but also political laziness, lethargy and corruption because of the lack of a strong political opposition, misuse of public funds, incompetence, and abuse of political positions, which frustrated many citizens (Todd 2007). The merged ruling party leadership took people for granted and used their liberation war credentials. The *Gukurahundi* violence is significant in the sense that it became the defining pillar of ZANU-PF’s political conduct. As will be illustrated in the course of the discussion, from the *Gukurahundi* to the March 2008 political violence, a culture of criminalisation of opposition politics had been internalised and this is attributed to ZANU-PF’s bid to propa-

gate and impose its hegemonic political status throughout the country.

Civil Dissent and Violence in the 1990s

At first glance, it appeared that the Unity Accord of 1987 would herald a new era of peace and tranquillity in post-independence Zimbabwe, but soon the Zimbabwean government found itself at war with its own people. The end of the Cold-War in the 1990s meant adjusting to the imperatives of the new international economic and political order as demanded by the global financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) (Parsons 2007). Zimbabwe adopted the prescribed liberal reforms such as economic structural adjustment programmes (ESAP) and privatisation. These measures had serious implications for the welfare of ordinary Zimbabweans. ESAP led to sudden shrinkage of public service jobs, decline in workers income, high unemployment, introduction of unaffordable user fees in schools and hospitals (Parsons 2007). The situation at large affected urban dwellers and triggered popular dissent characterised by nationwide strikes, food riots, looting of shops and destruction of property between from 1996 onwards (Reeler 2009). The 1996 public sector strike brought the country to a standstill as nurses, doctors, public service workers and teachers suspended their services. Confronted with such a situation, the Zimbabwean government responded by waging an undeclared war against its people. Running out of options on how to address popular demands, the police descended on people with brutal force, torturing, beating and detaining the protesters' leadership (Raftopoulos and Alexander 2006). The ZANU (PF) government assumed that its power was being challenged and as result it unleashed military violence on its citizens. The state security forces' brutal force on protesters soured relations between the military and the civilian populace leading to the formation of the Movement for the Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. The MDC quickly became a powerful opposition political party against the ruling ZANU PF, majority support from the disgruntled working class, as the Zimbabweans sought a political alternative.

Thus, from 1999 the ZANU (PF) government and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) had not only disengaged, but the urban

dwellers and the MDC party became labelled puppets of the Western neo-colonial powers by ZANU (PF). This culminated in the 2005 country wide 'military invasion' of the urban dwellers by the government in what was coined operation *murambasvina* or clean up the mess (Dzimir and Runhare 2012). Ranger (2004) further observes that any political party that offered an alternative view to the ruling ZANU (PF) party, such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) would be labelled as traitorous operating under the control of Western neo-imperialists. From the above discussion, it can be argued ZANU (PF) demonstrated its intolerance and unwillingness to share the political stage with any opposing view as evidenced by the negative naming of opposition voices.

Farm Invasions and Racial Violence in Zimbabwe

The ZANU-PF urban orchestrated violence against economic protesters was not to be the end of Zimbabwe's woes. The country experienced yet another form of violence, this time with a racial dimension orchestrated by the war veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. A short period after the dislodging of White settler government, Whites ceased to be a prime concern in Zimbabwe's domestic politics. Racial antagonism only resurfaced in Zimbabwean politics when war veterans embarked on the invasion of White owned farms, popularly known as *Jambanja* in local parlance (Sachikonye 2005). Continued social and economic inequalities between Blacks and Whites after the attainment of majority rule triggered feelings of racial prejudice as well as the question of "citizenship and identity" (Muzondidya 2010: 13). The fact that the majority of Blacks languished in poverty while the bulk of the means of production, especially land, was in the hands of a few White minority saw the widening of the rift between Blacks and Whites and this infused a sense of radical land reforms among the war veterans. Since 1890 when Zimbabwe fell under the British colonial system, the White settler community, by conquest took most the fertile lands and pushed the Blacks to infertile rural areas (Muzondidya 2010; Mlambo 2006; Sachikonye 2005). In order to bridge the polemic gap on land ownership, the war veterans supported by the ruling ZANU PF embarked on violent land seizures

(Stiff 2000). Any White farmers who tried to resist the farm seizures and evictions without compensation were labelled as 'racist Rhodeses' who deserved to be deported out of the country (Reeler 2009).

Therefore, the farm invasions led to violence which took a serious racial dimension as it ended up being a Black versus White conflict over land. Land grabbing coupled with confiscation of White farmers' property were all premised on racial identity as Whites were described as imperialists preying on African resources, hence the need to evict them from the farms. Though there are no exact statistics available to illustrate farm related deaths or human violations, there are reports that most of the White farmers who could not comply with the war veterans demands were tortured, beaten and forcibly evicted from the farms (Stiff 2000). It is estimated that 29% of Black farm workers were tortured and up to 9% of White commercial farmers were victimised (Reeler 2009). The farm workers who were targeted were those accused of being in solidarity with their White employers. Some scholars have argued that the real motive behind the attacks of White farmers was the unexpected defeat in the year 2000 of ZANU PF by the Whites' supported MDC in the referendum to a new constitution which contained provisions for the government to compulsorily acquire White owned land.

This suggests that the racial dimension of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) violence was motivated by ZANU-PF's desire to punish White commercial farmers for supporting the MDC (Coltart 2007). The FTLRP coincided with the 2000 Constitutional referendum which ZANU-PF anticipated would authorise acquisition of land without compensation (Sachikonye 2005). It is fair to argue that the watershed in the descent of Zimbabwean politics into a racial confrontation was authored by the government's economic failures especially in the urban areas. It was the confrontation between Mugabe and the war vets which led to the parcelling out of unbudgeted gratuities. This in turn led to the collapse of the Zimbabwean dollar in November 1997. In order to divert attention from the deteriorating economic lives of urban dwellers, ZANU-PF told the war vets that their problems could be solved if the land was taken away from White farmers. However, ZANU-PF lost the

constitutional bid as the majority of Zimbabweans cast a "no" vote (Brett 2006). It is then that the government used a racial rhetoric and accused the White farmers of trying to reverse the gains of the liberation struggle by supporting the opposition MDC (Phimister and Raftopoulos 2011). In essence, all Whites were declared enemies of the state and the "language of race" was invoked to justify all violent acts against them (Muzondidya 2010: 17). The FTLRP was master-minded and put in motion by ZANU-PF and used as a tool for political manoeuvre especially, to win back popular support. To demonstrate that the racial violence of the FTLRP was sanctioned by the government, Smith (2000: 343) cites utterances by the then Minister of Information and Publicity Chen Chimutengwende who attested that the only way to stop the escalation of racial violence was for "the White farmers to surrender their land and [that] any other solution like using the police to stop the invasions" would only provide temporary relief.

The racial nature of the land invasions and the accompanying violence was catalysed by a nativist discourse which became a defining pillar of Zimbabwean politics. Sithole and Bretton (2004) point out that ZANU-PF's propaganda that it wanted to return the land to its rightful owners gained acceptance from the older generation who still had memories of the colonial experiences. However, for the younger generation what mattered most was having a stake in the political and economic spheres of the country.

So far, the cycle of violence in Zimbabwe has been linked to ethnicity, power politics and racial dichotomies. The next section discusses the scope and nature of electoral violence in the country.

Political Labelling and Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

Despite the ethnic and political dimension of the Zimbabwean violence, there is also an electoral explanation to it. It was through the conduct of democratic elections that Zimbabwe attained the Black majority rule and this has been sustained from 1980 to the present. While elections are the pathway towards democratic consolidation, Matlosa (2011) posits that what matters most is integrity and credibility in the conduct of elections. Matlosa (2011: 3) describes elections as a "double edged sword" in the sense

that they can be both a source of stability and instability. It is true that democracy is only possible through elections but elections can be conducted in situations where democracy is highly constrained. Matlosa (2011: 5) describes this as the “fallacy of electoralism.” Diamond (2008) also argues that what matters is not the quantity of elections or the number of times a country has held elections but the quality of those elections, that is, how free and fair those elections are. A critical analysis of pre-and post-electoral violence in Zimbabwe augurs well with Matlosa’s and Diamond’s explanations. The regularity of elections in Zimbabwe has failed to translate into peace. A culture of violence has always been part of Zimbabwe’s electoral politics.

There is a view that violence between 1980 and 1985 was amplified by electoral campaigns. Prior to the 1985 elections, PF-ZAPU posed a threat to ZANU-PF’s power base and as a result, ZANU-PF resorted to violence in its bid to force the opposition out of the electoral contest. The police, army, intelligence and other arms of the state security forces unleashed violence against PF-ZAPU leadership and their Ndebele supporters (Sithole and Makumbe 1997). Driven by intolerance and the quest for electoral hegemony, ZANU-PF detained most of the PF-ZAPU leadership like Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa in 1984. As has already been indicated it was the threat of violence which forced Joshua Nkomo to flee into exile in England (Sithole and Makumbe 1997). Electoral violence accounts for much of the human rights violations during the *Gukurahundi* and since then, violence has become way of maintaining political party dominance by ZANU-PF.

The detention of PF-ZAPU leadership and the subsequent signing of the 1987 Unity Accord meant that Zimbabwe was practically a “de facto one party-state” (Sithole and Makumbe 1997; 122). Unlike the 1985 elections which were compounded by party politics and ethnic violence, the 1990 general elections and presidential elections in Zimbabwe made conspicuous the challenge of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The late Edgar Tekere, formerly ZANU-PF secretary general, opposed the idea of introducing a one party-state model soon after the signing of the Unity Accord (Sithole and Makumbe 1997). Together with other disgruntled members of ZANU-PF, Tekere formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) in 1989 and contested the

1990 elections. ZANU-PF perpetrated violence against ZUM leadership which resulted in the shooting of the late Patrick Kombayi who had challenged the late Vice President Simon Vengesai Muzenda for the Gweru parliamentary constituency (Muzondidya 2009; Sithole and Makumbe 1997). Selective application of the rule of law resulted in arbitrary detention, forced disappearance and torture of many ZUM sympathisers. Since 1990, ZANU-PF’s confrontational strategies against the opposition have been used to silence critics and opposition political parties. Clearly, right from the attainment of independence party-politics became contention problem as violence was perpetrated along political party affiliation.

Challenges to ZANU-PF Political Hegemony and State Militarisation

Electoral violence in Zimbabwe became more pronounced in the post-2000 dispensation with the formation of the Movement for the Democratic Change (MDC). The honey moon period between 1990 and 2000 that had seen ZANU-PF enjoying party dominance was threatened when the MDC emerged as a forceful political contender. From the previous discussions, it can be deduced that violence had an ethnic dimension, but the MDC managed to “transcend the regional and ethnic identities” that previously defined political interactions (LeBas 2006: 423). Capitalising on civil dissent that characterised the food riots of the late 1990s, the MDC initially appealed to the youth and urban populace as it presented itself as the only option towards bringing sanity to the social, economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe. The motto for political mobilisation for the MDC was around the theme of change, while the ruling party revived the liberation war rhetoric. The whole country was divided along party politics and subsequently, violence became prevalent. ZANU-PF initially derived its support from the old people who had experienced the horrors of colonial rule, mainly in rural areas. However, with the passage of time, the MDC’s message of change percolated to the rural areas previously believed to be ZANU-PF’s strong holds. It can also be argued that the contest for political power by ZANU PF and MDC has assumed an identity character as MDC portrays itself as a progressive and Democratic Party. On the other hand, ZANU PF de-

picts itself as a revolutionary party that protects the gains and values of the liberation struggle. By so doing, ZANU-PF brands all its opponents as enemies of the people, the revolution and the state.

The 2002 presidential elections, 2005 parliamentary elections and the 2008 harmonised elections were all characterised by unprecedented levels of violence since the *Gukurahundi* killings. ZANU-PF systematically resorted to violence in order scare away the opposition party from campaigning and also to “force populace compliance” (Makumbe 2009). Increased reliance on force for political support saw the ZANU-PF led government being at war with national those viewed as opposition supporters. The promulgation of repressive pieces of legislations prior to the March 2002 presidential elections legalized political violence by the ruling party. Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and the Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) were all enacted in order to restrict the political space for the MDC (Coltart 2007). As a result, the political terrain became uneven as evidenced by reports of harassment, intimidation and torture of MDC supporters (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation Report 2006). AIPPA was meant to create media Black-out on matters of forced evictions, arbitrary arrests, beatings and torture and political killings. POSA insured that the MDC would not hold any political rally without the approval of the police. Since the police are at the service of the state (ZANU-PF), all MDC meetings were declared illegal and this also involved arbitrary arrests, detentions and harassment as well as labelling MDC as British puppets.

In order to understand the scope and nature of electoral violence in the post-2000 dispensation, it is vital to understand the agents, command structures and the victims. What makes the post-2000 political violence unique is the expansive role of the military sector in matters of governance (Murithi and Mawadza 2011). As a result of the waning support, the Mugabe regime appointed former liberation war commanders into key security services positions. The military involvement in politics prevented ZANU-PF from acknowledging political diversity and from viewing the MDC as equal player in politics. This political-military nexus created some form of patronage where the state security services are at the service of the ZANU-PF par-

ty (Bretton and Masunungure 2008; Chitiyo 2009). Masunungure (2011) adds that this also led to party-state duality where there is a thin line between the state and political parties. Since the year 2000, state security forces have shaped the strategic direction of the country. That is why Masunungure (2011: 4) euphemistically describes the military as “politicians in uniform.” The violent conduct in Zimbabwe’s electoral system has seen the police, army and intelligence taking the commanding political roles while the war veterans and the National Youth Services (NYS) were being have been co-opted as instruments of violence. State monopoly of violence through the security structures has been premised on the revival of the liberation war rhetoric, where ZANU-PF officials claim that their actions are informed by the need to preserve the values of the liberation struggle (Chitiyo 2009). Violence has become an instrument for electioneering and people are coerced into voting for ZANU-PF for personal safety and security (Chitiyo 2009).

Rupiya (2005: 117) attributes the unprecedented levels of political violence in the post-2000 era in Zimbabwe to what he terms “governance through military style.” Military style governance was also reflected during the 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina*. Coincidentally, Operation *Murambatsvina* was conducted in the aftermath of the 2005 parliamentary elections (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012; Bratton and Masunungure 2007). The fact that the ruling party ZANU-PF lost dismally to the opposition MDC in most urban areas triggered a suspicion that the *Murambatsvina* violations were meant to punish the electorate for dumping ZANU-PF (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012). Operation *Murambatsvina* fits the label of political violence when one critically examines the timing of the exercise. The humanitarian consequences of *Murambatsvina* points to a well calculated state sponsored violence on the urban electorate.

The pre- and post-colonial violence in 2008 was another moment of trials and tribulations for the people of Zimbabwe. This took place after the March 2008 harmonised presidential, parliamentary, local government and senatorial elections where MDC polled 47 per cent against ZANU-PF’s 43.3 per cent (ZESN 2008). The fact that the MDC failed to win majority votes led to election run-off which was scheduled for 27 June 2008. Unlike the relative peace that had prevailed

before the March 2008 elections, this time ZANU-PF resorted to its usual tactics of militarising the campaigns. Prior to the run-off, the police and the army were seen conducting rallies and forcing people to denounce the MDC in what Masunungure (2008: 85) describes as “militarised election.” Studies on the 2008 electoral violence in Zimbabwe reveal that there is a core-relationship between voting patterns and the levels of violence (Solidarity Peace Trust 2010). Most of ZANU-PF’s support bases like Mashonaland West, Central and East, became the “epicentre” of violence (Bretton and Masunungure 2008: 51). State security forces supported by the war veterans and the youth militia conducted a reign of terror torturing, abducting, parading and beating them in public. Members of the non-governmental sector (NGOs), civil society groups and teachers were persecuted for allegedly politicising people in voting against the ruling party (Muzondidya 2009). Sadly, as the violence intensified of violence radicalised the MDC also adopted violent tactics purportedly as a means of self-defence.

Violence became conspicuously perpetrated along political party identity. The politics of name calling has been used for identity construction as well as justifying violence. The military-ZANU-PF nexus fomented violence by name calling the opposition and its supporters ‘sell-outs’ or *Vatenges* in Shona language (Marowa 2009). The name ‘sell-out’ featured most during the liberation struggle to describe those who collaborated with the colonial Rhodesian Front (RF) (Marowa 2009). The ‘sell-out’ label was malleably used to designate anyone in solidarity with ZIPRA and RF. The irony with the application of the name ‘sell-out’ is that despite the fact that ZIPRA was fighting for the common cause, due to political party intolerance, ZANU-PF harboured hate and resentment for the opposition party. Towards the 2008 presidential run-off elections, those believed to be opposing the so called values of the liberation struggle were paraded, denigrated and beaten in public.

Political violence unleashed by ZANU-PF and its supporters against the opposition forced the MDC leader to pull out of the June 2008 run-off election race. ZANU-PF invoked a policy of annihilation which saw the displacement of opposition supporters, burning of houses in the case of rural areas and destruction of property (Chitiyo 2009). State security forces spearhead-

ed a post-run-off election operation code named Operation *Makavhoterapapi*/Whom Did you Vote for? This was a witch hunt exercise meant to punish those who voted for the opposition. Reeler (2008: 5) describes the harassment of opposition supporters and their leadership as “subliminal terror.” Terror tactics were meant to instil fear and unconditional compliance with ZANU-(PF) demands. According to Chitiyo (2009) torture camps were established throughout the country and the so called ‘sell-outs’ were beaten in public with some killed.

In the post-colonial phase however, the reconstruction of the ‘sell-out’ label assumed new forms. Even former ZANLA liberation cadres like Joshua Nkomo and Edgar Tekere and lately Dumiso Dabengwa and Tsvangirai earned the description of ‘sell-outs’ for the mere fact of voicing their concern over ZANU-PF’s undemocratic conduct. Naming became a powerful tool for identity construction since the military sector invoked the liberation war credentials in their bid to strengthen ZANU-PF’s grip on political power. The idea of naming calling comes to the limelight when opposing forces were named ‘sell-outs’ and ‘puppets’. The danger of this to democratic elections in Zimbabwe lies in the observation that political labelling has also fallen into the hands of the military and political elites who advocate ZANU-PF hegemony for the sake of maintaining their accumulated political and economic privileges under the ZANU (PF) led government. The Sunday Mail, a Zimbabwean weekly newspaper paper of 5-12 May 2013 had a headline: “I have no time to speak to sell-outs”, referring to Chiwenga, Zimbabwe Defence Forces Commander refusal to meet with Tsvangirai. This shows the extent to which the politics of labelling has been used to instil fear among the opposition by the military service chiefs, who openly identify themselves with ZANU (PF) instead of the nation at large. The partisan nature of the army was also reflected when Brigadier-General Nyikayaramba publicly announced that he was for ZANU-PF and would not live to see Tsvangirai as president since he lacked Liberation war credentials. This also complemented the 9 January 2002 position by the security chiefs that they would not salute any leader lacking the liberation war credentials (Masunungure 2008). Clearly, any attempt to address the challenge of political violence in Zimbabwe

first requires the definition of the role of state security structures as well as depoliticising them.

Partisan Politics and Polarisation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA)

Political violence in Zimbabwe subsided with the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in September 2008. This was also a precursor to the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009. The MDC is believed to have entered into the GNU power sharing arrangement mainly for violence prevention purposes. The scale and levels of political violence prior to and after the June 2008 run-off elections compelled the MDC to share the political stage with ZANU-PF despite their ideological incompatibilities (Raftopoulos 2013). However, the power sharing deal between the MDC and ZANU-PF did not address the issue of political violence, due to the fact that ZANU-PF does not want to be subjected to any political contest. Reports of political intimidation and arbitrary arrests of some MDC party supporters illustrate the continuation of violence in Zimbabwean politics. Even within the coalition government formed in 2008, were reports of intra- and inter-ministerial antagonism in the GNU cabinet (Mazarire 2013; Muzondidya 2013). Within one ministry, the co-ministers seemed to promote their party interests and ministries headed by MDC or ZANU (PF) ministers have contradicted each other on several occasions. A clear example is the MDC Minister of Finance and ZANU (PF) Reserve Bank governor whose offices failed to collaborate on important state programmes.

CONCLUSION

Our paper demonstrates that since independence, Zimbabwe has experienced different levels of violence and this has been a major impediment to nation building. Our discussion also sought to establish a close link between identity, politics and violence in the Zimbabwean political landscape. ZANU-PF has repeatedly shown itself to be intolerant of any political opposition. As a result, it has created a political environment of domination, hatred and enmity, marked by violence. The democratic space is constrained as all political opponents are labelled enemies, deserving of violent punishment. Inte-

gral to this project of eliminating opposition has been the process of denigrating and naming calling all who stand up against political abuse and intolerance as 'sell-outs' and 'puppets.'

As a recommendation, it is the position of this paper that for purposes of transitional justice in Zimbabwe, primacy should be given on matters of political, ethnic, racial harmony and social cohesion. In essence, diversity should be cherished.

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