Youths and Contested Political Space: A Critique of Post-Colonial Zimbabwean Governance

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Abstract

Political and economic developments in Zimbabwe in the past five years, 2000-2004, have assumed global resonance. There was the chaotic and violent land reform, economic decline, debilitating corruption, massive brain drain, constriction of the media and consequently international condemnation, ostracisation, and at times indifference by some states especially in Southern African. All this pressure linked to declining legitimacy compelled the ruling party to revive its political fortunes through aggressive and violent means. Various interest groups were co-opted by the establishment in an attempt to win lost political ground. Youths, among others, have been the most convenient tool for repression and indoctrination by the ruling party. The Zimbabwean crisis shows strong elements of failure to negotiate differences and incapacity to share political space by the ruling elite. Incapacity to tolerate political plurality and to harness diversity for development runs throughout Zimbabwe's post-colonial era. This paper attempts to explore the roles and terms of participation of youths in post-colonial Zimbabwean politics and governance. In practical terms, governance can be defined as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It also comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate, exercise legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. In Zimbabwe and much of Africa, governance equates to elderly male domination. The youths are a marginalized lot. Their aspirations, ambitions and expectations are often wrongly assumed to correspond with those of elite male power brokers. They have limited room to generate effective solutions to their problems such as poverty, unemployment, and political emasculation. This study therefore seeks to show how youths have been co-opted and participated in politics and governance often on terms determined by male political entrepreneurs and social manipulators. This is shown through the various ideological phases that post-colonial Zimbabwe has gone through i.e. the socialist/commandist phase (1980-1990), the neoliberal phase (1990-2000) and the contemporary radical/neo-nationalist phase.

Introduction.

Ever since the dawn of the new millennium Zimbabwe has been in the spotlight all for the wrong reasons such as violence, chaotic electoral processes, economic decline, unemployment and massive brain drain. The unfolding scenario is inimical to democratic political pluralism, rule of law, transparency and accountability. Diverse views have emerged in an attempt to explain the Zimbabwean crisis. Some argue the crisis has deep seated roots in the country`s body politic. The pervasive culture of intolerance, intimidation and violence originated from the liberation struggle. The guerilla armies and the nationalist parties were not democratically structured and did not operate in a democratic fashion. They were highly commandist and authoritarian (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 102). The liberation struggle instilled in many political leaders and their supporters a militaristic conception and perception of politics and political processes (ibid). Presently ZANU (PF), the ruling party under whose banner independence was won, takes pride in its violent past and unparalled capacity to use violent tactics against opponents. Upon independence, the ZANU (PF) government inherited the colonial and violently repressive legal machinery of the Rhodesian state (ibid). Both settler colonialism and African nationalism were schools of violence and intolerance, as settler brute force had to be met with an equally brutal and intolerant African nationalist strength (ibid: 102- 118).

In 2000 in the wake increasing lack of legitimacy, a vocal civil society and vibrant political opposition President Mugabe decided to seize land from white commercial farmers using veterans of the liberation struggle, the youths and party cadres in an effort to revive his party's waning fortunes. The process, though noble and just in principle, was expedient, chaotic and violent. His party quickly embraced the infamous cliché "*The land is the economy and the economy is the land*". Land assumed a hegemonic position in day-to-day discourse, political rhetoric, the media, and the country's international relations. It became the sole signifier of patriotism and sovereignty. So emotive was the land question that two vehemently opposed standpoints emerged, largely predicated on the factors of race and history. The United Kingdom, the United States of America and much of the Western World condemned the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe was ostracized from the international community. On 5 December 2001, the United States Congress passed the Zimbabwe Economic and Democracy Bill, which imposed smart sanctions on the country's political elite. The muzzling of the press and the political opposition were the rationale for the Bill. The European Union and the United Kingdom also imposed travel bans and smart sanctions on the country`s leadership. This situation was aggravated in March 2002 when Zimbabwe held its Presidential elections. The Commonwealth and the European Joint Parliamentary Assembly refused to endorse the election outcome and the reelection of president Mugabe citing electoral fraud and massive pre-election violence. Zimbabwe was quickly suspended from the Commonwealth. On the other the African Union, the Southern African Development Community and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries endorsed the elections as fair. In spite of the intensive vilification of Zimbabwe by the West, African and other third world countries have resolutely stood behind the country much to the frustration of the of the West. One of the ardent supporters of the *African position*, Antonio de Figueiredo observed that:

> In Africa, regional diplomatic unity had already proved effective in frustrating ill-informed British attempts to replace Mugabe, over a localized land issue, that could well have been misunderstood by the EU… (De Figueiredo September 2002)

President Thabo Mbeki, contrary to the expectations of many in the Western diplomatic circles, has either come strong in support of Zimbabwe or engaged in *quite diplomacy*. When Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth was extended for a further one year at the December 2003 Abuja Summit President Mbeki scathingly noted that:

> This outcome (further suspension of Zimbabwe) demands of us that regardless of the fact that we are poor and need the support of others richer than ourselves to overcome our problems, we should always refuse to "rationalise the upside way of looking at Africa". Our poverty and underdevelopment will never serve as reason for us abandon our dignity as human beings, turning ourselves into grateful and subservient recipients of alms, happy to submit to a dismissive, intolerant and rigid attitude of some in our country and the rest of the world, towards what we believe and know is right, who are richer and powerful than we are (The Herald 13 December 2003).

Mbeki`s quite diplomacy has been seriously castigated by some in Zimbabwe and the international community. Many wanted Mbeki to be more firm and proactive in solving the Zimbabwean political conflagration. Besides African solidarity this position can be appreciated from the premise that:

> If there is nothing or very little in the subject of human rights for politicians trying to get elected, there is not much in it for states either. Upsetting a foreign government on behalf of a victim does little for the state. It is a cost not a gain (Elliot Abrams quoted in RJ Vincent, 1986:136)

Given this widespread mentality of "*whats in it for us*?" human rights issues can only surface in two kinds of situations: when it serves the interest of the state and when attention to it endangers no other interest of the state (R J Vincent,1986: 136). Since the land question, the fulcrum of the Zimbabwean debacle, is so emotive in South Africa, and many other Sub-Saharan enclaves, President Mbeki cannot condemn, at least in public, what is happening in Zimbabwe. Again, President Mbeki being particularly concerned with international relations seems to confirm the view that human rights issues do not excite foreign policy professionals. Vincent succinctly observes that:

> When forced to take up a particular case, they (foreign policy experts) prefer acting behind closed doors to conducting it in public, and they place great stress on the efficacy of "quiet diplomacy", making use of their professional skills to go to the limits of the possible. And, …taken up reluctantly, by diplomats in response to small but articulate domestic lobbies, human rights are received as a problem not a solution. They get in the way of ordinary diplomacy; they inhibit the flexibility necessary for operation in the world of states. They are enormously complex. Each new case requires different handling so that human rights policy cannot be turned into a routine. Any successes are better not claimed, while failures make the front page (R J Vincent, 136-7).

In deed so controversial are the events obtaining in Zimbabwe that the ZANU (PF) government of President Robert Mugabe has fervent admirers and ardent opponents both on the domestic and international spheres. To many of the marginalized in the Third World Mugabe is their swashbuckling hero, the man who can square up to age-old Western humiliation, embarrassment and exploitation. His cogent arguments and articulate voice can not be ignored and this was quite manifest at the United Nations Earth Summit in Johannesburg (24 August to 4 September 2004) when he noted that:

> The Unilateralism of the unipolar world has reduced the rest of mankind to collective underdogs, chattels of the rich, the willful few in the North who beat, batter and bully us under the dirty cover of democracy, rule of law and good governance. Otherwise, how would they undermine at the global level the same values of good governance and rule of law they arrogantly demand from the South? Institutionally we have relied for much too long on structures originally set to recover and rebuild Europe after a devastating war against Nazism… That is why, for example, the IMF has never been a fund for the poor peasants seeking sustainable development. Even the UN, a body that is supposed to give us equal voices, remains unreformed and undemocratic, largely because of resistance from the powerful and selfish North.

Finally, it is from this complicated international matrix that this paper seeks to expose how the youth have been manipulated and participated in Zimbabwe's dramatic politics and governance in the past five years.

Youths and Governance: A Critique

Youths are a contested category. Archie Mafeje argues that their constituency is volatile. "Not only is youth a passing phase but the youth represent no particular historical class. As such, they can only play a supplementary role to either of the contending classes, with the intention of being assimilated into it, eventually" (Mafeje 1992:55-57). In cases where there are competing classes, ideologies, and interests youths are often not a category for themselves but an appendage of some group of *powerful men*. The term youth is problematic and multifaceted. Definitions of youths range from those that are purely of a legal nature to those that are of a functional one. The definition of youth can embrace people as young as ten years and as old as twenty-five years. At the same time, for purposes of defining child labour, the legal age of majority, which is eighteen years in Zimbabwe, may be used. Thus, the term youth in the latter case might refer to the population below eighteen years, while in the former it might refer to those below the age of twenty-five years. An all-encompassing definition of a youth refers to anyone not older than thirty years of age (Sithole, Mangongera and Sithole 2001:3). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and common international practice defines a child as anyone below eighteen. This scenario is in fact a somewhat arbitrary and Eourocentric cut-off point of "childhood". In Africa and elsewhere–older children and young adults, spanning both sides of the age eighteen Rubicon, represent a unified social and cultural category. In patriarchal societies all those who are single and uninitiated fall in the category of youth irrespective age (de Waal 2002:2). Politically, "youth" is not gender neutral. The category refers primarily to males, because females are less socially (publicly) and politically visible. A married woman, especially one who has children, is

rarely a "youth", but a married father can retain that status (Ibid: 13). Generally, the term youth gives rise to confusion and conflicting images-some see youth as a threat to the established order while others focus on young people as the hope for the future (Ibid: 16) "Youths" are not typically conceived of as productive and constructive social actors, nor, as they often are in reality, as victims, but rather as potential sources of political success, disruption, delinquency and criminality (Ibid: 13). Political entrepreneurs and social manipulators organise and mobilize young people to do all kinds of things by conditioning, using either reward or punishment as incentives. They condition jobless, ill educated and hungry youths to do their bidding. Most African countries, including democratic ones, have paramilitary youths wings, sometimes referred by the euphemism of "party militants". Often, their leaders ignore delinquency, drug taking, rape and other anti-social criminal behaviour, or even encourage them (Ibid: 15). However, it would be unfair to regard youths as antithetic to positive political developments. Organized students have long been one of the main motors for social and political change in Africa. Student unions and similar associations have been at the forefront of radical change in a number of African countries (Ibid: 21).

It is imperative for societies to invest in their children by inculcating good values in them Children and young people who are socialized into democratic and tolerant behaviour are the foundation of an orderly and peaceable society (Ibid: 7). Children who are healthy, well- educated and optimistic about the future will themselves bring up the next generation to be more healthy, better educated and to be better world citizens. In this respect, realizing the rights of children is an inter-generational public good.[i] The achievement of child rights is embedded in the realization of a range of other rights, including democratic rights and the rule of law. This requires good governance: a multifaceted improvement of political representation and institutional capacity, alongside economic development and poverty reduction (ibid: 6). Good governance assumes a government's ability to maintain social peace, guarantee law and order, promote or create conditions necessary for economic growth, and ensure a minimum level of social security. (http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and governance/technical _area/governance/) Policies implemented by governments should promote the well being of citizens. As regards events obtaining in contemporary Zimbabwe Edison Zvobgo, one of the country's long serving ministers now out cabinet, observed that:

> At the present there is mainly a deficiency or ailment in terms of governance, a failure in the delivery of state responsibilities such as health, or in terms of the management of the economy such as rising prices, inflation, interests rates, unemployment-these come from a lack of will in government to address these issues adequately. (Commonwealth Foundation 2000:70)

Youth , Politics and Governance in Post-Colonial Africa.

Youth participation in post-colonial governance reflects the autocratic streak of many African governments. In a democratic dispensation, multi-partyism exists, periodic free and fair elections based on universal suffrage are conducted, and press freedom, human rights and the rule of law are guaranteed (Lindberg et al in Sachikonye 1995:4). Taken in another way it entails the vibrancy of civil society. Civil society refers to those groups that are mobilized from below in pursuit of goals that challenge the established order of

things, especially that of the state and political parties (Ibid). Civic groups include human rights organizations, church organizations, women pressure groups and even economic organizations. In society, "organs of civil society" will enhance democratic culture only if they distance themselves from political organizations; consequently, democracy implies "civil society" disengaging itself from the state (Amin: 1987). In independent Africa, there has always been a contradiction between democratic practice and political control. This is sometimes expressed in terms of which set of principles should take precedence over the other increased popular participation or greater efficiency (Ibid). Nzimande and Sikhosana argue that:

> During times of civil war, national emergencies, sudden crises and so forth, the emphasis on control is understandable but in times of normalcy and of stability, good management and popular participation should take precedence. However, independent African leadership, whether in peace or in war, has always given credence and preference to "control". Popular democracy has been asphyxiated because African governments believe that political stability should take precedence over liberal political participation. (Nzimamnde and Sikhosana 1995).

As such, the state has become all permeating in independent Africa and having no clearly defined boundaries beyond which it would be reluctant to exercise its authority or interference, it becomes a major hurdle or obstacle in nearly every occupation (Galborne 1987:27). A number of Zimbabwean Scholars argue that the nation state of Zimbabwe embraced *in toto* the repressive, legislative, executive and bureaucratic arrangements of the colonial state. Before 1990, Zimbabwe did not have in place an enabling environment for democratic governance. Zimbabwe then was flirting with the notion of one party stateism. ZANU (PF), the ruling party, was the only *legitimate* political organization. Moyo condemned this by noting that:

> To suggest that political participation is only possible within the context of the machinery of the ruling party is tantamount to saying that what is good for ZANU (PF) is good for everyone, a suggestion which is patently false as far as what is known about the diversity of the human conditions goes (Moyo1992: 85)

Tajudeen Abdul–Raheem observed also that:

> ZANU (PF), as typical of all revolutionary parties of the time, was a very ideological party, fancied itself as a socialist vanguard and tilted towards the Chinese compass in the Socialist battle for hegemony between the Soviets and the Chinese. It brooked no opposition to what it saw as its historical mission of liberating Zimbabwe's peasants and working people (Daily News 24 June 2000).

In 1990, the Zimbabwean government reneged from its stance to establish de jure a one-party state. This was prompted by pressure from civic groups composed of university students and workers.

Youths in Post-colonial Zimbabwe: Paradigms, Problems and Solutions, 1980-1990[ii]

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 Socialism was in vogue in the Third World. Zimbabwe quickly embraced it as its governmental ideology. It was seen as the

best way of achieving socio-economic equity, justice and prosperity for all, especially for the black majority who had suffered politico-economic deprivation due to the racial segregation practiced by the white minority government of Rhodesia. The recently ended war of liberation had caused massive destruction of infrastructure and the population had swelled beyond the capacity of existing facilities. Consequently, there was an exigency for infrastructural rehabilitation, reconstruction and expansion. The immediate post-colonial era witnessed phenomenal growth in Zimbabwe. Many schools, clinics, veterinary and crop marketing facilities were availed to the people. In the aftermath of the struggle for independence, the government had to move fast in dealing with the popular demands that informed the struggle. Anyang`Nyongo aptly noted that:

> It was observed that the appropriate response to popular demands was development; that development could be planned for; that planning essentially involved the optimum utilization of available domestic and foreign resources to achieve certain growth targets; and that for the majority of popular masses to benefit, these growth targets had to be in the rural areas, hence rural development. (Nyong`o 1987:18')

All sections of society were supposed to contribute to the development of society under the tutelage of the socialist state. Youths were encouraged to engage in developmental projects such as co-operatives in order to uplift the living standards of the people. They partook in environmental rehabilitation projects and engaged in various development oriented projects. Before independence, only input supply and marketing co-operatives were encouraged. A policy document on co-operatives was drafted in 1983 and from then a number of producer cooperatives were formed. The policy document gave impetus to co-operative formation. Cooperatives were intended to provide institutions through which democratic participation by the rural population in production, consumption and the decision making process could be realized (Zimbabwe Government 1983,part1: 1)

All these moves uplifted their standards of living. However, in the political arena the dispensation that emerged had no room for diversity. Those whose views were different to those of ZANU (PF), the ruling party, were castigated for being anti-revolutionary. In fact, this has been the paradox of post-colonial governance; the liberation movements under whose banner independence was attained apparently fought for plurality on the political space but upon the attainment of independence, the opposite obtained. Post-colonial governance has been blighted by problems such as corruption, ethnicity and perennial wars. Consequently, ruling parties, unable to maintain their hegemony as a moral force, became coercive instruments of social control, whose mission costs primarily in helping the government to hold the people down (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1992:10). Frantz Fanon pointed out that:

> The party is given the task of supervising the masses. The party plays understudy to the administration and the police and controls the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation, but in order to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline (quoted in Nzongola-Ntalaja 1992:10).

It was in this context of intolerance that youths were co-opted into ruling party structures often at the expense of plural political participation. In Zaire, the youth branch of President Mobutu`s party had a specialized section called, the "Disciplinary Brigade". The same applied to Malawi under President Kamuzu Banda. These youth's branches worked in collaboration with state security agencies in law enforcement and intelligence gathering (Ibid)

As regards the Zimbabwean scenario a number of scholars show that the post–colonial era resulted in the marginalisation of youths from the politico-administrative process (see Ranger 1985 and Kriger 1992). These scholars advance the "sudden break with the past" notion whereby the youths who had played crucial roles as gatekeepers to the guerillas during the war lost power and influence with the attainment of independence in 1980. In corroboration of these views, Alexander notes that:

> Far from empowering the disadvantaged through democratic bodies, [post-independence] policies reinforced patriarchal authority within communities, thus helping to marginalize women, the young and the poor. Older and relatively wealthy men form leadership of rural institutions (Alexander: 1990)

Though correct, this view does not succinctly capture the role, influence and power of the youths in the post-independence era. After independence, the ruling party transformed itself from being a political front to a vanguard political party. It established structures that permeated all strata of society. Among these were Youth Brigades or party vigilantes. These vigilantes, "easily identifiable in their green/red shirts and khaki trousers, were particularly active during the early 1980s when they force marched to…rallies."(Daily News 3 March 2001). They had became a law unto themselves, harassing civilians in the townships and during football matches, under the guise of maintaining law and order (Ibid). J Chitambo, a former Youth Chairman recalls that:

> We used to catch thieves and beat them up. We would beat them before handing them over to the police. Our activities did not conflict with those of the village heads. In fact, we were allowed to do what we were doing. Later towards the end of the 1980s, the government abolished the beating of people by Youth Brigades. This laxity is the sole cause of the increase of stealing and various other forms of criminality now prevalent (interview with J Chitambo)

The youths went for drilling at the various service centers in the country between 1980 and 1987. Some of these youths were recommended to join the army, police, rural special constabulary force and vocational training centers. The Youths Brigades were also involved in income generating projects such as tree planting, poultry and fishing. When Growth Points were established, as part of the independent government's service decentralization programme, in the mid-1980s, the vigilantes in the districts were rounded up to mould bricks for the various constructions at the Growth Points. They were nominally paid since they were doing a service to the nation. As ZANU (PF) consolidated its hold on power during the *de facto* one party state era, the relevance of the vigilantes fizzled out and society began to rebuff their inordinate demands. The case of the Youths Brigades shows that the youths, just like in the liberation war continued to

exert themselves upon society and this is quite contrary to the picture shown by scholars highlighted above.

In the late 1980s University of Zimbabwe students waged a series of anti-corruption demonstrations. Their demonstrations coincided with the Willowgate Motor scandal of 1988, which resulted in the expulsion of high-ranking officials from government. These ministers were alleged to have bought cars cheaply at the government owned Willovale Motor industries and then sold them at heavily inflated prices to the public. The government appointed Sandura Commission unearthed these scandals.

On 29 September 1989, students decided to hold a gala to marks the First Anniversary of their "Anti-Corruption Demo". The police forcefully stopped this gala and occupied the University of Zimbabwe for the whole night of 29 September. On 2 October, the Student Representative Council president A Mutambara issued a radical and uncompromising statement castigating state repression. The state's response was swift and harsh. Mutambara and the Secretary General E Chikweche were arrested for subversion. On 3 October students boycotted classes in solidarity with incarcerated colleagues. The situation became tense and volatile and volatile as time progressed. Consequently, on 4 October students stoned and attempted to set the Vice Chancellor's government supplied Mercedes Benz on fire. The police brutally suppressed the demonstration by beating and tear-gassing students. As a result, the VC after consultation with the State President closed the University indefinitely. Many sections of society closed condemned the closure of the University among these was the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). The ZCTU`s Secretary General Morgan Tsvangirai published a document in solidarity with the students. Characteristically the state's response was tough, Tsvangirai was arrested. These arrests were ruled unjust by the High Court. However, the state ignored the ruling.

Though most of these demonstrations and strikes were brutally quashed, they were an embarrassment to the government's one party state agenda. The formation of E Tekere`s Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) in 1988 and the collapse of socialism in the Eastern Bloc all compelled ZANU (PF) to recant one-party stateism. In the 1990s the government's response to increased pressure from civil society involved the enactment of a series of debilitating legislative pieces. Attempts were made to severe the ZCTU-student link through the introduction of the Labour Relations Amendment Act of 1992 and the University Amendment Act of 1990 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:11). These two instruments aimed to curtail the autonomy and assertiveness of the workers and the students in post-1990 politics. In 1995 the government introduced the draconian Private Voluntary Organisations Act (PVO) in a bid to muffle civil society voices. This Act replaced the liberal Welfare Organisations Act of 1965. (Ibid)

The 1990`s: From neo-liberalism to neo/militant nationalism

In the 1990s, the Zimbabwean government adopted market driven economics spearheaded by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Associated with these the government was also supposed to liberalise the political space. The same period was characterised by :

> Underperformance of the economy caused by mismanagement and corruption, unfair terms of trade and indiscriminate servicing of foreign debt, soon began to show the contraction of the manufacturing industry. This increased the levels of unemployment and, combined with reduced government expenditure on social services increased public disenchantment with the government creating the environment for the emergence of opposition to the state (Zimbabwe Election Support Network 2002: 23).

This failure and social costs of economic reform initiated a wave of NGO start–ups, the majority of them pursuing an apolitical agenda(Mair and Sithole 2002: 12). During this period, the state did not try much to interfere with the activities of the youth. Some played significant roles in the newly enlarged democratic space. When the opposition, Movement for Democratic Change was formed in September 1999 students, and youths in general, were a significant constituency in the new party.

From 1995, the Zimbabwean economy began to collapse. Fiscal deficits, foreign currency shortages and fuel scarcity became common. Civic organizations increased in number and began to critically shape society's views. Of major interest in this regard was the emergence of vibrant civil society, notably the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in late 1997, which spearheaded the crusade for a new constitution to replace the anachronistic Lancaster House Constitution of 1979. The government responded by establishing the National Constitutional Commission (NCC). The NCC was mandated to seek people's views and consequently formulate a homegrown constitution. However, the NCC`s draft constitution was rejected by the people in the February 2000 Referendum. This outcome was due to opposition decampaigning of the Commission's Constitution through both the electronic and print media by the NCA and the new opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change.

The government began to face intense pressure, starting from the late 1990s, from many quarters calling for socio-economic reform. Much of this agitation began to be articulated through the newly formed neo-liberal oriented MDC.

> This party was an "outcome of broad alliance politics, bringing together trade unionists, intellectuals, the urban middle class, rural producers, commercial farmers, and sections of the industrial class. The alliance-based on a widespread disillusionment with the government's economic mismanagement, the demand for constitutional, and criticism of a trans parent land reform process-has brought together many seemingly contradictory interest groups into a conjectural alliance, which faces many tensions over future policies (Raftopoulos 2001:1)

All this pressure linked to declining legitimacy compelled the ruling party to revive its political fortunes through aggressive and violent means. Various interests groups were co-opted by the establishment in an attempt to win lost political ground. Veterans of the liberation war and unemployed youths were used to aggressively mobilize and co-opt the disenchanted masses back to the ruling party fold. President Mugabe began to use radical rhetoric to condemn the West, the whites and the "misguided opposition" for being responsible for the country's increasingly poor state. He capitalized on the peasantry's

land hunger by attempting to generalize the struggle for land to a continental level and project it into the proposition that the struggle over land was the sole signifier of authentic, liberated nationhood (Ibid: 3). In 1997, President Mugabe restored the prominence of the War Veterans Association, after a long period of neglect. He granted each vet Z$50 000 once off, plus a Z$2 000 pension per month. The vets, in turn, became party`s shock troopers after the February 2000 Referendum defeat, taking over more than 1 5000 white-owned farms, and allowing President Mugabe to resurrect, yet again, the claim that only ZANU (PF) could resolve Zimbabwe's land inequality (Bond 2001:36). With that claim, contradicted as it is by two decades of land reform failure, came something else: a memory of an anti-colonial struggle that only ZANU (PF) can invoke, a memory of a time when the party was in fact a fish within the sea of a the rural masses (Ibid). According to Raftopoulos:

> This mobilization has taken place through a heightened, racialised discourse, reminiscent of the liberation war rhetoric, that has also sought to project a radical, Pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist image. Whether in SADC, the OAU, or in Harlem, Mugabe has proclaimed the need for a broad black, Africanist alliance, an essentialised and combative subject, to confront the racist West that has dismissed him as an anti-democratic tyrant…Those who seek to question the modalities of Mugabe`s version of land redistribution, are defined as outside the nation, and mere imposters for imperialist designs. The central target for this invective has been the MDC, who have continuously been characterized as outside of "genuine" nationalist aspirations (Raftopoulos 2001:3)

This revived form of nationalism emerged because of the government's failure to improve the citizens` material reality in the 1990s. According to R L Sklar, "any government that fails to cope effectively with problems of society will seek solace in escapist, reactionary, and racialist forms of nationalism, which obscure the cause of its failure and accomplish little lasting value."(quoted in Falola 2001:3)

Universities and intellectuals have assumed contradictory positions in the Zimbabwean crisis. Some have been supportive of the ZANU (PF) government while others have become disengaged and agnostic about national affairs. However, the few who engage in politics either as supporters of ZANU (PF) or the opposition MDC, appear to have done so for private advancement and are simply manipulating academia for private gain. Between 2000 and 2003 programs such as *Nhaka Yedu* (Our Heritage) and *National Ethos*, whose main panelists are academics, were aired on national television apparently to revive national consciousness. In these programmes, party political positions were advanced and the *debaters*/panelists would pander in unison, without variance and diversity as is normal to debates. The panelists denigrated the opposition riding on the back of intellectualism. The culture of debate on politics though not dead is certainly comatose. Intellectuals have turned political debate to a matter of personal attacks, recriminations and counter recriminations. Academics at times defend positions not because they believe in them but because they would like to reap personal gains. This has resulted in the political commodification of knowledge. Events obtaining in contemporary Zimbabwe tally with the African Studies Centre of the University of Pennsylvania`s observation that:

> The intellectual and the university as the mediator of knowledge, ignorance or mediocrity, have been at the center of power and powerlessness in post-colonial Africa. The ambivalent position and importance of the university as an institution lie in its appeal both to the reactionary and revolutionary forces in society. Thus, while autocratic regimes have traditionally drawn from universities and co-opted intellectuals to provide the conceptual noises they have needed too justify their excesses, promote a culture of violence and silence, foster mediocrity, disempowered arms of civil society have also, in their helplessness, sought to recruit their torchbearers and messiahs from the universities. Indeed, at the same time that most university authorities and some lecturers have tended to side with repressive regimes, more progressive ones and most students have been at the forefront of liberation struggles all over the continent (Universities.http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Current_Events/afuniv0101.html,)

The state is now tough with students who try to express disenchantment with national issues and even local university matters. For the past three years, student protests have been brutally quashed. For example on June 2 2003, the day of the commencing of the opposition MDC`s Mass Stay Away code named the *Final Push*, the police and army invaded the Midlands State University in Gweru armed to the teeth in a convoy of tanks, apparently in a show of force to scare off students from participating in the *Final Push.* Consequently, students, in Gweru as in many parts of the country did not dare join the demonstrations. Police posts are now a permanent feature of State Universities.

A series of restrictive laws were passed in early 2002, which undermined people's freedoms. These laws include the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and the Protection of Privacy Act (AIPA). These laws have been selectively applied. Once AIPA was enacted, 14 journalists and editors found themselves in custody at various times, charged with the crime of "publishing falsehoods.[iii] (Daily News 10 August 2003). A crime, which carries a maximum two years imprisonment term. In all, 44 media practioners were arrested in 2002(Ibid). Of these, two cases were prosecuted to completion, six had charges withdrawn, 22 were released without charge, one was deported and 13 cases were by early August 2003 (Ibid). Two cases have since been dropped when the Supreme Court found certain aspects of AIPA (section 80) to be in violation of the country's constitution. Amendments to the Act were then effected in June 2003[iv]. Despite several false stories in the state run media not even one journalist or editor from this sector has been arrested or charged. On the other POSA was passed to give the police more powers to deal with *terrorist activities* and *criminal elements* (The Herald 25 January 2002). It was reported that between June and December 2001, there was an upsurge in politically motivated violence with 288 reported cases ranging from kidnapping, murder, arson, malicious injury to property, assault and theft (Ibid). " These acts were *carried out by both parties* with the MDC topping the list with 18 counts while ZANU (PF) was involved in the commission of 77 cases. At least 428 arrests were made of which 67 were whites."(Ibid) The Act empowers a police officer in a district to prohibit the carrying or displaying of weapons in his area of jurisdiction, where he believes that such an activity is likely to cause a breach of peace. The Act makes it

mandatory for any organizer of a public gathering, demonstration or procession to notify the local police in writing. As part of the Act it is an offence for any person to publish or communicate falsehoods with the intention or upon realizing that there is a risk of promoting public disorder, adversely affecting the defense or economic interests of the state, or disrupting an essential service (Ibid). The Act was passed to curtail violence and irresponsible reporting that had becoming rife in the independent media but in reality, it was designed to proscribe opposition politics. In the run up to the March 2002 Presidential elections the MDC director of elections, Paul Themba Nyathi, charged that the police were selectively interpreting and applying POSA, in favour ZANU (PF). The MDC claimed that ZANU (PF) had flouted most of the POSA provisions because the law was never meant to be applied to all the parties contesting the Presidential election (The Daily News 7 March 2002). He noted that:

> ZANU (PF) is free to bus people to all its rallies, they are free to *toyi toyi,* to gather anywhere, and to conduct door to door campaigns. The police always turn a blind eye to all those illegal activities as long as it is ZANU (PF) that is involved. However, if it is the MDC, they quickly arrest people and accuse them of all sorts of things under that law. This law, as we have said much time before, has nothing to do with the maintenance of the law but with the suppression of democracy and the will of the people in the country. The police ban our rallies for spurious excuses. The liberal interpretation of POSA is in favour of ZANU (PF), and it is a piece of legislation with no justification in a democratic country (Daily News 7 March 2002).

Besides the cancellation of rallies and restriction of political activities ZANU (PF), youths declared certain areas no go areas for the opposition; they established roadblocks and conducted regular party card checks especially in Gokwe. During the Christmas and New Year (2001/2 period) holidays, these youths were forcing travelers off buses and confiscating copies of the Daily News. Passengers were required to produce ZANU (PF) membership cards. Those who failed were ordered to return to Harare. This obviously was a violation of POSA but not much was done to bring the culprits to book. The decision to seal off rural areas and restrict freedom of movement for the opposition denied many a sense of national pride, denied them access to sources of power, limited the flow of ideas and rendered them speechless (National Constitutional Assembly 20 January 2002). Opposition youths have also been involved in this orgy of violence and intolerance that has enveloped Zimbabwe of late. In November 2002, the Daily News observed that:

> Five policemen arrived at Muzerengwa`s (the MDC Chairman of Buhera South) and found four of his 15 wives there…They tried to force them to give them details of their husband's whereabouts, but they refused. This infuriated the police and they started beating up the women. Their action angered MDC youths in that village who pounced them. The police were overpowered… later the police were deployed in the village and Muzerengwa`s four wives were detained and put in custody at Muzokomba Police station obviously to lure Muzerengwa to the station (Daily News 6 November 2002)

Violence and counter violence was rife in some parts of the country and the ZANU (PF) spokesman for Manicaland Province noted that:

> It is a seesaw affair. Last time ZANU (PF) supporters` houses were burnt and this time, the MDC claims their supporters` homes were set on fire. Its unfortunate…they should report to the police. But Tsvangirai is creating a battlefield in his home area in order to gain international sympathy (Daily News 29 June 2002).

Buhera North is the home area of the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai. As of June 2002, Buhera North and South constituencies had been rocked by post-election violence, which left more than hundred families homeless after their homes were razed to the ground by both ZANU PF and MDC supporters (Ibid). At times ZANU PF youths were used as auxiliaries to the police, to maintain law and order and to thwart opposition political activities. The most eloquent example of this was during the opposition called mass stay away between 2 and 6 June 2003. It was observed that:

> ZANU (PF) supporters, most of them youths brought into the capital city from rural and peri-urban areas close to Harare, marched through the city …clad in white T-Shirts inscribed with the slogan **No To Mass Action**…The youths, who had the full backing of heavily armed police and soldiers, descended on several news-stands and harassed vendors, tearing copies of the *Daily News*, which they accused of supporting the opposition organized protests. In most Harare high-density suburbs, ZANU (PF) youth militia members patrolled the streets… singing songs in praise of the ruling party and intimidating most residents into staying in doors (Daily News 7 June 2003).

Youths in the neo-nationalist dispensation.

Youths have been co-opted into the political realm in the past three years in scenes analogous to the 1980s when ZANU (PF) was still a hegemonic, commandist-cum paramilitaristic party, which had no regard for dissenting ideas on the economy and politics. The participation of youths in the Zimbabwean body politic has been viewed with skepticism. Some have castigated the cooption for creating social and political banditry (Daily News 6 September 2003). Youths have been involved in both pre and post election violence (Daily News 5 March 2002). Much of the violence in Zimbabwe's highly polarized political terrain is ascribed to the youth. They have significantly to the shrinkage of democratic space in the recent past. In an attempt to win support the ZANU (PF) government revived the Youths programmes of the 1980s in the form of the National Youth Service. Ostensibly, the National Youths Service was introduced to reorient Zimbabwean youths into patriotic and self-reliant young men and women but in reality it was designed to woo, the young back to the ruling party fold. The compulsory national youth service programme, was introduced in early 2000. National Youth Service was instituted to regain lost support base by the ruling party and to motivate young men and women not to leave the country in the face of a declining economy. Recent reports indicate that close to three and a half million Zimbabwean professionals were now working outside the country. Only effective economic policies could stem the tide but the government thought it better to introduce the youth training programme. In July 2002 the Minister of Higher Education and Technology observed that the programme was a multi-

pronged one as it was meant not only to instill a spirit of nationalism and national consciousness, but also to arrest brain drain. He noted that:

> We can not continue to be a training ground for people who are not committed to the development of the nation…The national youth service is one such initiative by the government that is meant to persuade our youths to appreciate the problems in Zimbabwe and evoke a sense of nationhood[v]

Besides this need to limit the effects of the economic decline induced brain drain, the Programme was also to woo the youths into the ZANU (PF) ambit. In December 1999 the ZANU (PF) Third National People's Congress noted that one of the biggest challenges facing the party in the new Millennium was how to woo the 2,7 million registered young voters that were not yet their members. The Congress underlined this as a top priority second only to the land reform and resettlement programme. The delegates agreed that that the forth-coming June 2000 elections presented a big challenge in the face of unemployment, poverty and discontent gripping most people of voting but young age (The Sunday Mail 9 January 2000). It was also highlighted that there were 4 million registered voters on the voters roll. Of this figure, 2.1 million was registered ZANU PF members, and that left a "majority" of 2.8 million *unknown quantity*[vi] (Ibid). These were "mostly unemployed school leavers, disgruntled university or polytechnic graduates, and a host of other impressionable youngsters born after independence in 1980…. The challenge is to find a way to woo at least 50% of this electorate to become *bona fide* members."(Ibid). In polytechnics, National Strategic Studies were introduced and made compulsory. It is from this point that the National Youth Service was conceived and conceptualized and its aim was to regain lost political space, a fear that was confirmed by the February 2000 Referendum.

The government established National Youth Training centres and the first and most famous of these is the Border Gezi Training Institute in Mt Darwin. Some argue that the violence that swept through Zimbabwe in the past two years can easily be traced to unemployment and hopelessness. There are large pools, hungry and idle minds ready for any thing (The Daily News 19 March 2002). The *graduates* from the Border Gezi Training institute wreaked havoc in the country in the run-up to the presidential election held in March 2002, manning illegal road blocks, intimidating, assaulting and raping suspected supporters of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (Daily News 19 June 2002). ZANU PF has used them as electoral campaign tools, being given impunity and implict powers to mount roadblocks, disrupt MDC rallies and intimidate (The Sunday Times, South Africa, 7 September 2003). ZANU PF used the advantage of incumbency to recruit youths to do its dirty work of discrediting and trying to destroy the MDC nationwide by pretending that they were being taken to train in community service activities as a prerequisite for being enrolled at tertiary institutions[vii] The violent activities of the youths have contributed to the international condemnation of Zimbabwe's last two general elections[viii]. Soon after the June 2000 parliamentary elections the Commonwealth Election Observer Team strongly refused to endorse the election due to its unfair conduct. The head of the team General Abdusalami Abubakar noted, "It is our view that the ruling party used its incumbency to exploit state resources for the benefit of its electoral campaign. This was compounded by the government's near monopoly of the broadcast

media". The Commonwealth Team was particularly concerned about the activities of ZANU (PF) paramilitary youth group organized under the national youth training service. They were responsible for a systematic campaign of intimidation against known or suspected MDC supporters (Daily News 15 March 2002). His group was concerned that the police seemed to deal high-handedly with the MDC, while being lenient with ZANU (PF). "This failure to impartially enforce the law seriously calls into question the application of the rule of law in Zimbabwe"(Daily News15 March 2002)

The national youth training programmes have compromised the health and well being of the youth. Numerous allegations of rape in the youth training centers have emerged and this is quite disturbing in the context of prevailing high HIV/AIDS rates. Recently a report in the media noted that:

> Confessions of a former ZANU PF youth who said she is HIV positive left some people in tears when she recounted how female members of the National Youth service are often raped by their colleagues…The 21 year old woman recounted to the congregation how she was forcibly conscripted in 2001 and sent fro training at Ntabazinduna just outside Bulawayo. The group had 2000 members, 900 of whom were females. She said the youths were later moved to a camp at Burnside where they slept in one big room regardless of sex…the boys take turns in raping the girls and when they reported to the base commanders they were assaulted and labeled MDC traitors (Daily News 1 March 2003).

This shows that violence has gender dimensions. As in conflict situations women are used as "weapons of war", to hurt and spite opponents.

Conclusion

The abuse and manipulation of youths in post-colonial Zimbabwe is a by-product of the ruling elite's incapacity to tolerate plurality and diversity. ZANU (PF), the ruling party since independence, is a hegemonic, commandist and totalitarian party. Ndlovu-Gatsheni aptly analysed this style of management by noting that:

> the post-colonial Zimbabwean state under ZANU (PF) failed dismally to break with the tradition of nationalist authoritarianism and guerilla violence as well as colonial settler repression. The ruling party, itself having been a militarized liberation movement, failed to demilitarize itself, not only in practice, but also in attitude and style of management of civil institutions and the sate at large. The new ZANU (PF) government readily assumed the resilient management colonial and military oriented structure left by the retreating Rhodesian settler sate, with serious implications for democracy, human rights and human security of civil institutions and the state at large…From the beginning also, the ZANU (PF) government thwarted the chances of the formation of new civic structures outside party and government patronage, representing different voices in civil society, which resurfaced with the end of the liberation war to assert an autonomous position. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni ,2003: 5)

Youth involvement in politics at the instigation of adult political entrepreneurs and social manipulators has compromised seriously good governance in contemporary Zimbabwe. Youths on both sides of the country's political divide have destroyed property, violated freedoms of assembly, expression and association. According to the Zimbabwean Electoral Act, it is an offence to threaten or use force in order to induce a person to vote or refrain from voting. Youths have violated this cardinal rule of electoral conduct and this has been a drawback on citizens` security. The political co-option of youths has not been out of a desire to share "space" with the young but to make them expedient political tools. The state should disengage from abusing the young. Leadership must be proactive, should not see citizens as threats, and should step out of their way. Command and control is antithetic to democratic existence.

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[i]A (Global) Public good is something that is not owned by any individual or institution but brings benefit to all people across the world. Thus a clean environment, the eradication of disease, or an increase in scientific knowledge or for that matter the development of a new style of music-are all public goods with a global appeal.

[ii] This section is based on my M A Thesis "The Dynamics of Zimbabwe's Struggle for Liberation: The Case of Buhera District from 1950 to 1990", submitted to the Department of History, University of Zimbabwe, June 2001

[iii] See The Daily News, 10 August 2003, page 15. These statistics were provided by the Media Institute for Southern Africa. (MISA)

[iv]Two important amendments include the provision for a number of members of the controversial Media and Information Committee (MIC) to be appointed by journalistic and media associations. Previously all MIC members were to be appointed by the Minister of Information. Further, the publication of falsehoods is now an offence if the state can prove that the journalist did so intentionally or maliciously.

[v] The Herald 2 July 2002.

[vi]These Figures were provided by the then Minister of Home Affairs Dumiso Dabengwa

[vii] See Off The Record With the Mole, The Daily News, 15 March 2002. On 24 June 2002 It was reported in the Daily News that the government had ordered all teacher training colleges to suspend selection of candidates for September 2002 intake and reserve places for ZANU (PF) trained youth brigades from the Border Gezi National Youth Service center in Mt Darwin.

[viii] Zimbabwe held its parliamentary elections in June 2000 and subsequently the presidential elections in March 2002. International observers because of violence and unfair electoral practices condemned all the elections. This ultimately resulted in the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth in March 2002. Presently the country is a pariah in the international community.

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