

The Responsibility to Protect and the Youth: A Case Study of the Youth Activism in Zimbabwe

Patrick Dzimiri

*University of Venda, School of Human and Social Sciences, Department Development Studies,
Box X5050*

E-mail: patrick.dzimiri@univen.ac.za

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ABSTRACT The 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) as a new international intervention norm for human protection entails the reconceptualisation of state sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a right. The R2P norm has its conceptual genesis in Africa and the fact that its principles have been embraced by the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act is indicative of the fact that Africa is a stakeholder in the entire debate. Africa also happens to host a disproportionate share of global humanitarian crises, and has a relatively younger population than anywhere else in the world. Young people are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations owing to their common socio-economic vulnerability. There is compelling evidence to demonstrate that African youth are targeted and exploited to participate directly or indirectly in armed conflicts and other politically motivated violence. By adopting a case based approach of the Zimbabwe youth militia, this paper examines the African stake in R2P, specifically through the prism of its young and vulnerable population. The paper posits that youth experiences in Zimbabwe show that they are co-opted as agents for destructive engagement and to commit atrocities. By introducing the subject of youth in the R2P debate, this study contributes to the discourse of responsible leadership among youth. It is the contention of this paper that the young and vulnerable are the ones deserving to be beneficiaries of R2P and need to be oriented on the norm and its underlying principles so that the next generation of Africa's leaders will be R2P-smart.

INTRODUCTION

The 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) norm endorsed by the 2005 United Nations (UN) World Summit represents a landmark consensus and the most recent codification of humanitarian intervention at global level (UN 2005). As a new international intervention norm for human protection purposes, it entails the reconceptualisation of state sovereignty as a responsibility rather than a right (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) 2001). The report further outlines three key responsibilities bestowed on the society of states. The first one is the responsibility to prevent, which entails the duty to address the root causes, as well as, direct causes of internal conflicts and other human-made catastrophes. This is followed by the responsibility to react which focuses on the means and ways of responding to situations of serious humanitarian crisis with appropriate measures. These may include coercive measures such as sanctions, international protection of civilians, and in extreme cases, military intervention. Finally, there is the responsibility to rebuild, which envisages providing assistance with recovery, reconstruction, reconciliation and addressing the causes of the hu-

manitarian crisis to avert further recurrence (Evans 2008; Thakur 2007; ICISS 2001). These three components of R2P are essential for a holistic, legitimate and accountable approach to human security.

Existing studies of R2P have not paid adequate attention to the plight of youth during conflict and other violent situations yet they are usually the worst victims during and after the conflict. It seemed the youth dimension just like gender, remains an under explored topic in R2P writings. It is submitted in this article that integrating youth experiences during conflict and other violent situations may help to bolster the protection and prevention mandates of the R2P. Building from the submission by Stamnes (2012:1) it is important to identify youth's experiences in connection with mass atrocities and examine their role "as agents in commissioning as well as prevention and protection" against such heinous crimes.

Worth mentioning is the sad reality that Africa, more than any other part of the world, experiences conflict related crises (Ashford 2007). As a result, young people are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations owing to their common socio-economic instabilities. There is compelling evidence that African youths in countries such

as Sudan's Darfur region, Liberia and Zimbabwe, among others, are targeted and exploited to participate directly or indirectly in armed conflicts and other politically motivated violence (Njeru 2011; Ashford 2007). This paper, therefore, discusses the African stake in R2P, specifically through the prism of its young and vulnerable population.

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has been engulfed in serious social, economic and political crisis. The crisis has been attributed to corruption and predatory elements within the ZANU-PF political cycles (Mlambo 2006). The crisis impacted on every facet of human security and this created a fertile ground for the creation of the formidable opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Brett 2010). With the creation of the MDC in 1999, ZANU-PF's power base was threatened and as a result resorted to coercive strategies like intimidation, torture and in some instances murder, in order to force civilian compliance (Murithi and Mawadza 2011). While acknowledging several acts of political violence in the 1980s and 1990s, the expansive role of the youth since 2000 in perpetrating political violence, makes the youth factor a critical element in any discussion about human rights violence in Zimbabwe.

In the light of the many ways in which Zimbabwean youths have been implicated as either perpetrators or victims of violence any study on intervention for human protection purposes as encapsulated by the R2P norm should take into account their plight.

This study takes its cue from the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon's call on 17 July 2008 that protection of children in armed conflict is a moral issue and deserves to be placed above politics. These remarks were made during the Security Council meeting on Children and Armed Conflict by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon 17 July 2008 (UN 2008). Ban Ki-Moon appealed to the international community to respect global conventions on the rights and protection of children by not involving them in any war or conflict. The Secretary General emphasized the need for increased action to safeguard young people caught up in violence (UN 2008). This article will argue that Africa is a uniquely placed stakeholder in R2P given that the R2P norm has its conceptual genesis in Africa. The idea that its principles have been embraced by the AU's Constitutive Act is indicative of the fact that Africa

is a stakeholder in the entire debate (Spies and Dzimiri 2011). The Act endows the organisation with the right to intervene while simultaneously articulating the commitment to conflict prevention and the organisation's responsibility to override the non-interference principle in "grave circumstances such as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide" (Mwanasali 2008: 9). Youth in Africa should therefore be the key drivers in the process of converting the norm into doctrine. The quest to make the youth the focus of the R2P debate does have a legal foundation to support it. The Rome Statute of the international criminal court (ICC) classifies the recruitment of children into fighting forces as both a war crime and crime against humanity. Complementing this provision is the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 of 1999 which calls child soldiering one of the worst forms of child labour (ILO 1999)

Focus and Objectives

This paper, builds from the analysis of both primary and written literature and it aims to demonstrate how the polarisation of political violence has subjected the youth to exploitation by political elites to commit human rights violations against perceived opposition party supporters. Through the discussion of several episodes of political violence in Zimbabwe, the paper demonstrates how co-opting the youth in destructive political acts threatens human security. In particular, the paper utilises the experiences in Zimbabwe in order to bring to light the need for a youth focused approach to the R2P doctrine. The paper seeks to illustrate that including the youth in matters of human protection is vital for the realisation of human rights on the African continent and this will go a long way in creating a culture of responsible leadership.

LOCATING YOUTH IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES

This paper adopts the UN definition of the youth which defines the youth as those between the ages of 15-24 years. Age has always been used as a yardstick for definition. Age groups between 15-24, though not universally applicable to all contexts, have been adopted as the international paradigm for defining youth according to the 1986 United Nations Children's Fund

(UNICEF 1986). A study by De Waal (2002a) demonstrates that the definition of youth is a social construct, to the extent that a number of factors like space, society and time need to be considered. As noted by McIntyre (2003), the definition proffered by the UNCRC and the ACRWC equates youth to children and in that case, reference to youth as children in this paper is no coincidence. Transition from childhood to adulthood which is marked by rites of passage in the case of sections of Africa, has been used as a referral point (UNDP 2006). This illustrates that youth in general lies between childhood and adulthood (Ellis 1999). On a more gendered dimension, it is alleged that boys and girls might be young in a completely different way such that a universal definition cannot be given. There is a view that for boys, the world opens for them when they are deemed man enough to take care of themselves, while for girls the world closes and becomes a restricted space in and outside the homes (UNDP 2006). In essence, the world is said to expand for boys and contract for girls, resulting in gender inequality (UNDP 2006). The lack of clarity on the definition of youth has led to ignoring their plight in society (De Waal 2002a).

In Zimbabwe, the total population is projected to be 13 million and from this number, 6.3 million are said to be under the age of 18 (Child Soldiers Global Report 2008). This is attributed to declining infant mortality rate, healthcare improvements and high fertility rate among other factors (Bremner et al. 2010).

In the context of Zimbabwe, there is a view that because of media blackout, the public has been kept in the dark with regards to corrupt practices and economic mismanagement by the Zimbabwean leadership (Human Rights Watch 2012). This situation has been changed by the process of globalization and technological advancements such as twitter, face book and other social networks which enable the youths to compare their lives with the rest of the world. The 2011 socio-political resistance to undemocratic systems in North Africa demonstrates that failure to integrate the youth in social, economic and development activities is a ticking time bomb for violent uprising by the youth.

In most African violent conflicts, youth constitute the bulk of the fighting forces and are direct and indirect principal perpetrators of the violence (Njeru 2011). Their participation in conflicts has either been voluntary or forced with

some recruited at a very tender age (Njeru 2011; Ashford 2007). A demographic explanation given by Richards (2011) is that, young people are demographically too many and can be coerced into fighting bandits. This explanation makes the youth crisis an important issue for those engaged in matters of responsibility to protect young people. For example, the Human Rights Watch (2003) reports that 58 percent of the population in Southern Sudan are under the age of 18 and eke a livelihood through fighting. This could be attributed to exploitation by the warlords as well as the need to survive. Young men and women are reportedly subjected to systematic rape, exploited and are forcibly recruited as militias, soldiers and as agents of war by the belligerent forces (Njeru 2011). This has threatened the fabric of human security and thus undermined the youth's personal development and that of the region. In like manner, militarisation of the youth poses a security threat when there are no solid measures to monitor the entire process. The invasion of Freetown in Sierra Leone by child and youth soldiers of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in January 1999 shows the extent of youth participation in politically motivated violence (The Economist Intelligence Unit 1999). It is reported that the young fighters conducted a reign of terror characterised by abducting fellow youth forcing them to become fighters in an operation called 'Operation No Living Thing' (The Economist Intelligence Unit 1999: 1). The civil unrest caused by the youth participation in the Sierra Leone conflict is reinforced by the observation that despite being conscripted or forced to fight, many youth exploit violent situations for expressing their discontent over "exclusion and alienation" and that violence is "a plea for attention" when policy makers forget that the youth exist (Richards 2011: 20). Despite all these horrific developments, the plight of the youth has not been afforded enough attention by the R2P architects. Buckingham (2000b: 18) asserts that the youth crisis is amplified by the fact that youth are not recognised as social, economic and political actors and issues that affect their wellbeing are discussed "over their heads."

It is alleged that there is a continuous tendency in Africa to marginalise the youth in decisions that affect them and their future. The youth in Africa like elsewhere, have been undervalued, treated like second class citizens, misunderstood

and distanced from mainstream society (Richards 2011; Krauss 2008). Poverty and unemployment have also rendered the youth vulnerable to power hungry politicians who take advantage of their frustrations and turn them into political thugs and agents of violence (Njeru 2011). Most of the youth are not mature and the AU Charter Article 22(2) clearly states that member states shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain from recruiting any child. Despite all these legal provisions, the youth remain the prime target for recruitment by warring parties. The gap between theory and practice is wide since most of the international and continental codes of conduct (conventions included) regarding the conduct of war and youth are evidently violated and the offenders get away with it. This has been complicated by the radical adherence to the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention as a shield against any form of intervention.

At this juncture, it is fundamental to examine youth experiences in Zimbabwe, especially in the light of its touted 'National Youth Service Programme.' The Zimbabwean leadership is alleged to be living in the comfort of the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention and misinterpreting the R2P by arming the youth to destroy opposing political structures. As will be demonstrated later in the discussion, the Mugabe regime has hijacked the R2P to imply the youth's responsibility to safeguard their peers from subscribing to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party and its so-called pro-Western ideologies.

YOUTH'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ZIMBABWE CRISIS

In Zimbabwe, few issues attract greater concern and censure than those that surround youth. For a long time, researchers and social commentators were reluctant to even use the terms 'brigade' or 'gang' but, of late, such reluctance receded. In both urban and rural parts of Zimbabwe, it is claimed that youth 'brigades' or 'gangs' funded by ZANU-PF and its powerful members are commonplace. Cases of political violence perpetrated by the youth are routine. To account for the crisis situation in Zimbabwe, it is important to locate the role of the youth and how it impacts on their general welfare. To understand youth crisis in Zimbabwe, it is also pertinent to

define the term 'youth crisis.' According to Richards (2011: 20), youth crisis refers to "a societal crisis impacting on youth, resulting in a feeling of uneasiness in the face of societal transformations and challenges." Youth crisis includes deliberate failure to integrate and involve them in matters affecting their lives and this may have a negative impact on society at large (Richards 2011).

Zimbabwe has been embroiled in social, economic and political crisis since the attainment of independence in 1980. The first notable political crisis in Zimbabwe during its early phases of independence in the 1980s was the infamous *Gukurahundi* campaign against the Ndebele speaking nationals *Gukurahundi* is a Shona term referring to the early rain which washes away the chaff prior to the spring rains (Phimister 2008). According to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) (1997) the anti-government destabilisation activities in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces in Zimbabwe compelled the government to declare total war on the Ndebele between 1980 and 1987. An estimate of 20 000 people were massacred, yet this did not attract enough criticism from the international community (Phimister 2008; CCJP 1997).

What makes *Gukurahundi* special to discussing youth crisis is their involvement as military brigades between the periods 1980 to 1987. The youth were disproportionately affected by the *Gukurahundi* political unrest that erupted in the 1980s. The political disturbance exacerbated earlier challenges and there was concern that the situation of youth was becoming unsustainable in some parts of Zimbabwe, representing a threat to social cohesion. ZANU-PF was reported to have youth Brigades in the most dissident affected areas like Gokwe, Plumtree, Gweru and Beitbridge. The ZANU-PF leadership co-opted the youth to act as home guards and the youth rampage left over 2000 homeless with others dead in both the Midlands and Matabeleland (CCJP 1997). Prior and after the 1985 presidential elections in Zimbabwe, the youth brigades were also accused of committing electoral violence against the perceived supporters for Joshua Nkomo of the opposition Patriotic Front for Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU). The tribal dimension of the *Gukurahundi* demonstrates that ZANU-PF indoctrinated the *Shona* youth to hate and commit crimes against the Ndebele speaking nationals. Again, what makes the *Guku-*

rahundi of special concern is that most of those targeted as dissidents were mainly youth from the Ndebele tribe, most of whom were innocent. Furthermore, the Shona youth were incited against their other peers in Matabeleland.

The new era of peace ushered by the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 was short-lived. Zimbabwe found itself in a serious economic crisis heralded by the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990s. Reports on Zimbabwe's post-colonial era reveal that the state-building process has been fraught with challenges (Saunders 1996). Zimbabwe, just like other Third World countries was on the receiving end of the post-Cold War political developments, especially after the demise of the Great Soviet Empire which exposed the Communist funded government of Zimbabwe to the widespread economic and political liberalisation reforms (Saunders 1996). This new international economic order advocated by the world's big financial institutions, specifically the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), forced developing countries such as Zimbabwe to adopt policies to bank-roll the state, privatise many state-owned enterprises and place caps on public wage bills (Parsons 2007; Saunders 1996). Anti-inflationary economic policies like ESAP led to massive redundancies and a decline in workers' income (Parsons 2007). The strained economy failed to create enough jobs for thousands of young men and women mainly school leavers and graduates from colleges and universities (Grant 2003). Education and the health sector introduced user fees which were beyond the reach of most urban working families, let alone the peasant class (Saunders 1996). As a result, this triggered a youth orchestrated nationwide discontent which resulted in food riots, looting and destruction of shops from 1996 up until 1999 (Parsons 2007). The government of Zimbabwe responded to the nationwide strikes with brutal force characterised by beatings, torture and arrests and this sowed the seeds for opposition politics in Zimbabwe and the end of ZANU-PF dominance in the 2000 elections (Reeler 2009).

Having been confronted with the challenge of series civil strikes, the Zimbabwean government blindly plunged itself in the 1998 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) conflict. The military expedition impacted heavily on the youth. What makes the DRC conflict important is the involvement of the youth as fighting forces. Despite lack of proper documentation on

forced recruitment of young men and women to participate in the 1998 DRC war, it is noted that the pool of the fighting troops from Mount Darwin National Youth service (NYS) branch were deployed in the DRC (The Financial Gazette 2002). Most of these lacked proper military training and could not make it back home. The government's involvement in the 1998 DRC War saw desperate youth enlisting and joining the battle only after three month of basic training. This has not received adequate scholarly attention, but the legacy of youth recruitment in the DRC war still leaves a lot to be desired.

The plight of the youth in Zimbabwe was intensified by the introduction of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) in the late 1990s. The Land grabs soured relations between Zimbabwe and Western countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, and UK as well as the bulk of the EU countries. The land reform resulted in the imposition of smart sanctions by the EU and the USA in 2002 and this fueled further economic stress, leading to a massive resentment of ruling party, ZANU-PF by the people of Zimbabwe (Sachikonye 2005). The sanctions in fact, affect ordinary youth of Zimbabwe, as evidenced by the massive exodus of Zimbabweans into South Africa in search of jobs and better living conditions.

The involvement of the youth militia masquerading as war veterans in the institution of the FTLRP however, has raised questions regarding the credibility of land as a grievance in Zimbabwe. The youth militia was exploited by the ruling elite in invading the farms and in the process committed wanton human rights violations like torture, harassment and looting of valuable assets of the former white farmers (Smith 2000).

The radical introduction of the FTLRP has been touted as part of the government's initiative to empower the people and address colonial inequalities in land distribution (Smith 2000). Ironically, the youth still complain that they were left out and did not benefit from the FTLRP (The Herald, January 13, 2012). They further argue that the government should allocate more land, funding and other farming implements to the youth. It is evident that despite adopting populist policies like the FTLRP, the government of Zimbabwe does not prioritise on improving the conditions of the youth. The formation of an organisation called '*Upfumi KuVadiki*' which trans-

lates to 'Wealth to the Youth' is another indication that the youth feel marginalized in economic activities of the country.

A more perplexing issue is about the age of the ZANU-PF youth leader in Zimbabwe, Absolom Sikhosana who is 60 years old. Within ZANU-PF, the youth's quest for recognition is shown by their bid to have Sikhosana, relieved of his duties and pave way for young blood (NewsDay 2012). Unlike other parts of the world where youth leaders are elected by the youth, Sikhosana was appointed by the President and this reveals the patron client relationship between ZANU-PF and the youth. A survey conducted by Great Indaba (2012) shows that most of the youth leaders in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are below the age of 30 or are slightly above 30 years of age. It is only in Zimbabwe where the youth leader is 60 years and one wonders if such a person can represent the aspirations of the youth given the age gap.

Any study on the Zimbabwe crisis situation would be incomplete without factoring the humanitarian tragedy of the 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina* which impacted on every facet of human security of urban habitation. *Murambatsvina* which translate to 'Restore Order' or 'Clean Filth' constitutes one of the most publicised post-independence inhuman conduct by the government of Zimbabwe when it engaged on the demolition of 'illegal' urban settlements (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012). The objective of the operation according to the government was to destroy 'illegal' urban structures that foster criminal activities and stemming the black market trade in foreign currency (Dzimiri and Runhare 2012). The July 2005 report produced by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka and other related impact assessments reveal that over 700 000 people were made homeless by the 'Clean Up' operation. The urban population was affected either in terms of loss of shelter or sources of income, especially in the informal sector. The unemployed urban sector mainly the youth who totally depended on the effective and efficient operation of the non-formal sector were adversely affected by the operation. This includes the home industry young workers in high density suburbs like Glen View, *Budiriro*, Warren Park, Highfliers in Harare, among other areas in the case of Harare (Tibaijuka 2005). The legacy of *Murambatsvina* is even felt

today and the main victims of *Murambatsvina* are the young and unemployed urban dwellers whom the state security agents perceived as potential recruits for social unrest. According to the 2011 Amnesty International report, the plight of the youth was intensified when the government dumped them in resettlement areas without schools and other services. It is further alleged that the victims have been driven into abject poverty while denial of education means young people have no real prospect of extricating themselves from continuing destitution (Amnesty International 2011).

THE MILITARY FACTOR IN GOVERNANCE AND THE MILITARISATION OF THE YOUTH

One major development in post-2000 political dispensation in Zimbabwe was the revival of the Joint Operations Command (JOC). JOC is comprised of the heads of state security structures that is the army, police, air force, intelligence and prison service and these service chiefs are also War Veterans. Previously, JOC was established by the colonial government as a means of thwarting any uprising against the system. Involving the military in governance explains the reason why the colonial system was repressive and brutal. The same repressive mechanism was adopted as a strategy for governance by the ZANU-PF government (Rupiya 2005). As noted by Masunungure (2008), the revival of non-statutory JOC as ZANU-PF's shadow politburo served a blow to all national efforts to democratize the political system in Zimbabwe.

In the light of all these developments of the military and security complex, the youth were conspicuous in conducting a number of witch-hunting operations ranging from *Murambatsvina* (Clean up) in May 2005, Operation *Taguta* (Operation Eat Well, meant for intense government involvement in all the food production process in newly resettled farms) and the 2008 Operation *Makavhoterapapi* (Whom did you vote for) and a host of other inhuman campaigns. The politicisation and militarisation of the youth resulted in miscarriage of justice since they could commit all sorts of crimes with the support of the state security structures. This resulted in adverse decay on civil military relations, as well as "public trust" in Zimbabwe (Hendricks and Hutton 2009: 4).

The Post-2000 National Youth Service in Zimbabwe

The conspicuous militarisation of the youth by ZANU-PF has colonial antecedents (Masunungure 2011; Phimister 2008). In most colonial administrative systems in Africa, state security forces were at the helm of enforcing laws during mass demonstrations and popular uprisings. In the post-independence period in Zimbabwe, however, the role of the state security apparatus in governance-related affairs was not conspicuous up until the post-2000 political instability (Phimister 2008). This is notwithstanding the fact that, the military is held responsible for the infamous (1980-87) massacre of the Ndebele speaking nationals during the operation code named *Gukurahundi*. Existing studies show that the pre-1980 colonial practice of the Cadet System is the “forerunner and guiding manual” to the present day’s NYS program in Zimbabwe (Mada 2007: 174). This practice (Cadet System) was meant to inculcate a sense of civil defence and obedience among the youth as well as to give the youth a military orientation at a very tender age as suggested by the term, ‘Catch them Young’ (Mada 2007). The target groups for the Cadet System were males between the age groups of 13-14 for junior cadets and 16-18 for senior cadets who were in turn nurtured on how to operate guns and other battlefield tactics.

With the attainment of Independence in 1980, the practice of Cadetship was not given special consideration up until the outbreak of dissident activities in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces in the 1980s. Unsettled by threat perception in the two provinces, the government of Zimbabwe formed the Zimbabwe People’s Militia (ZPM) in October 1980 (Chitiyo and Rupiya 2005). The architects of the ZPM established this program with the aim of creating a home guard force or ‘village defence militia’ against dissident incursions, (Chitiyo and Rupiya 2005). Unlike the Cadet System, the ZPM recruitment was open to ages between 18-60. However, only those below 36 received formal military training. The ZPM, unlike the current NYS, was properly constituted with a formal structure under the Minister of Defence. Chitiyo and Rupiya (2005) further note that senior army officers supported the command structures by training and managing the ZPM. Initially, the program was originally confined to the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces

which experienced dissident disturbances, but was later expanded countrywide. Over 20, 000 ZPM were trained by 1985. However, these were disbanded in 1991 after the signing of the 1987 Unity Accord. The 1987 Unity Accord marked the end of political tension between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU when Joshua Nkomo (ZAPU-leader) and Robert Mugabe (ZANU-PF) joined hands. This also marked a reduction of threat perception within the country. As a result the ZPM suffered from political party patronage since this arrangement served ZANU-PF political ends.

From 2000, the ZPM program resurfaced under a new name, the National Youth Service (NYS). This followed serious social, economic and political disintegration that embroiled the country. Political developments such as the formation of the MDC with a large membership from the youth ranks, ZANU-PF’s defeat in the year 2000 referendum, the majority win for MDC in the 2000 parliamentary elections and mass protests and food riots by the unemployed youths, all signaled the demise of the ruling regime. Runhare and Hwami (2009: 105) contend that ZANU-PF was in fact losing political legitimacy to its claim as the “vanguard of the people.” In a bid to contain these developments, ZANU-PF, immediately established the Ministry of Youth and Development and Employment Creation in 2000, concurrently with the NYS program (Mada 2007; Nyakudya 2007). The 2003 Solidarity Peace Trust report posits that the chief objective of NYS “[to shape] youths in a truly Zimbabwean manner” (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003: 4). This again is summed up in the National Youth Policy in Zimbabwe (2000) which spells out that the program is meant to instill a sense of patriotism, responsible leadership and prepare the youth for the world and to “work for their country (The Herald 2001).” At face value, the NYS idea looked pragmatic, especially the quest to develop vocational skills, create employment opportunities and also integrating the youth concerns into national policies. At its onset, membership to the NYS was optional and the target age groups were between 10 and 30. Surprisingly however, what started as national program metamorphosed into a large scale compulsory paramilitary training. Taking advantage of the dismal economic performance and the shrinking job market, the government of Zimbabwe today uses the National Youth Program as the one-way ticket to employment to

any government institution, be it parastatals, nursing training, teacher training and other colleges owned by the government (Nyakudya 2007). Those who do not get NYS training are marginalised, ostracised and labeled sell-outs.

Runhare and Hwami (2009) argue that there was a wide suspicion in Zimbabwe that educators were teaching antigovernment issues and supporting the MDC and its Western ideologies. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MoHTE) therefore introduced National and Strategic Studies (NSS) as an additional and compulsory curriculum in tertiary institutions such as nursing and teachers' colleges (MoHTE NSS 2000). The programme was introduced in order to claim what the government deemed to be a true Zimbabwean identity, positive attitudes and a sense of patriotism among teacher trainees in the country (MoHTE NSS 2002). NSS, just like the NYS is heavily criticised by scholars and various sections of the media as designed to indoctrinate and 'brain wash' the desperate youths with ZANU-PF political ideologies. Runhare and Hwami (2009) lament that NSS was meant to serve an ideological end given the fact that the arms of the ruling party are responsible for designing the curriculum and examinations. In respect of gains and losses, NSS does not benefit the youth since whatever was or is taught is not job market related. NSS does not empower and equip students with any skills for the betterment of their lives, but rather sought to "effectively implement government thinking through educational studies" (Runhare and Hwami 2009: 115). In the light of the fact that NSS and NYS were introduced in the aftermath of the post-2000 political challenges to the ZANU-PF power base, one would be fair to argue that the ruling party sought to legitimise its illegal claim to power by targeting the youth ideologically.

The NYS program, just like the ZPM has thus become an extension of the Zimbabwe state security structures (Runhare and Hwami 2009) and this was explicitly echoed by the former Minister of Defence, Sydney Sekeramayi who casually referred to the NYS as the lucrative recruitment ground for the Zimbabwe militaries (The Chronicle 2003). Before and during the 2002 presidential elections, the NYS was reportedly partaking in violent ZANU-PF political campaigns and setting 're-education political camps' throughout the country (Solidarity Peace Trust Report 2003). Advancing certain political agendas like the Fast

Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe has been one of the major preoccupations of the youth. It is alleged that ZANU-PF took advantage of the youth's unemployment, restlessness and urged the youth to invade farms, loot property and violate the rights of both farm workers and white farmers (Solidarity Peace Trust Report 2003).

Politicization and militarisation of the youth under the rubric of the NYS resulted in their implication in perpetration of violence during the pre and post run-off presidential elections in 2008. It is reported that the youth-militia proudly boasted that they were 'ZANU-PF's "B team", while the Army is "the A team", meaning that there is a thin line between the roles and functions of the state security services and that of the youths (Solidarity Peace Trust Report 2008). A study by the Solidarity Peace Trust in 2008 demonstrates that the ZANU-PF led youth-militia percentage share of violence was 43.9 per cent, higher than other state security apparatus. The war veterans were at 17.3, police 13.0, army 18.8 and other ZANU-PF supporters 25.7 per cent (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008: 53)

From the study, it can be deduced that the 'Green Bombers' as they are called in the Zimbabwean parlance, are implicated in committing electoral related human rights violations more than the state security services. The name Green Bomber is derived from the green uniform worn by the members of the NYS. The name also carries sentiments of criticism and caricature since in the Zimbabwean context, Green Bombers also refers to the green flies which favours raw sewage and filth places. The Human Rights Watch report (2008) adds that youth are accused of instigating violence in rural areas, conducting roadblocks in search of opposition party supporters, denying medical care to opposition members during the cholera outbreak, denying people fertilizer, seeds as well as the closure of shops and Schools in all MDC strongholds (in what was dubbed Operation reduce prices, Human Rights Watch 2008). Looting by the youths was worsened by impunity and lack of accountability, as well as the scramble for what can be loosely termed, 'politics of the last supper.' As discussed above, corrupt practices within ZANU-PF triggered serious pillaging on the few available resources, and in this case, the youth also joined the rest of the political elite for the share of the spoils. During the ZANU-PF strategy of starva-

tion or scorched earth policy against the so called 'sell-outs', the youth again were at the forefront, controlling relief AID distribution and forcibly mobilising people to attend ZANU-PF political rallies. The 'Green Bombers', with the support of the war veterans in their disregard to the rule of law, allegedly continue to terrorise the remaining commercial farmers (Human Rights Watch 2010).

The rhetoric that the youth are to jealously defend the values and gains of the liberation struggle from the forces of neo-colonialism has led to misrepresentation and abuse of the R2P by the Mugabe regime. This partial application of the R2P has actually led to criminalization of opposition party politics and perpetuation of the sell-out label. The idea of sell-out stems from the pre-independence liberation war discourse whereby fellow black Zimbabweans who were accused of deserting the objectives of the war of liberation by supporting the Rhodesian forces instead earned the label 'sell-out', translated as *Vatenges* in Shona Language (Marowa 2009). It is further argued that the notion of the 'sell-out' during the liberation struggle applied to those individuals, groups or families believed to be traitors. These people were tortured and their family members were subjected to the same severe torture and death (Marowa 2009). This idea of sell-out was revived during the presidential elections pre-runoff and post-runoff political environment in Zimbabwe. Both the MDC leadership and their supporters earned the sell-out label. This hinges on the philosophy of "one-party model" which inculcated a sense of political intolerance and entitlement within ZANU-PF political circles (Oslo 2011: 4). The ruling party, through various sections of the media, has been telling the nation and Africa at large that members of the MDC are Western puppets intent on reversing the gains of the liberation struggle. This licensed the criminalization of the opposition political parties and culminated in several deaths, torture, forced displacements and destruction of houses and property of those accused of supporting opposition parties. In all these acts of miscarriage of justice, the Green Bombers are found to be at the forefront. For the ZANU-PF leadership, this has been done in the name of defending the nation. In 2011, the ZANU-PF sponsored youth allegedly stormed the Parliament of Zimbabwe and harassed the MDC members of parliament (The Zimbabwean 2011). The fact that MDC legislators were assaulted while the police and oth-

er state security agents acted like spectators is indicative of the partisan nature on the application of the rule of law. Again, the youth are granted total immunity despite their outrageous behavior, which shows total abdication to deliver on state responsibilities by ZANU-PF.

A 2013 report by the AIDS-Free World revealed horrific stories of gang rape, during prior to and after the June 2008 elections. It is alleged that ZANU-PF used "widespread gang rape and torture of women throughout the country" (AIDS-Free World Online 2013). It is obvious that the victims were either MDC supporters or relatives of some MDC leaders and there are fears that such heinous acts could be repeated again during the 2013 elections (AIDS-Free World Online 2013). Already, there are reports that in its preparation for the 2013 elections, the ruling party, ZANU-PF is in the process of reviving the youth militia groups and this will obviously pollute the electoral process in Zimbabwe (Corcoran 2012). They are blatantly ZANU-PF's instruments of violence, thereby threatening the already fragile power-sharing arrangement.

Hamber (2004: 1) talks of the insidious impact of conflict on society and those who participate in it arguing that "trauma and psychological disorientation" normally affect an individual as a result of participating in conflict as a combatant or from being a victim of a conflict situation. Many young and old people who committed atrocities during the height of the crisis in Zimbabwe are alleged to be experiencing serious mental derangement. More importantly, social relationships between individuals, as well as between individuals and society at large, were compromised. The NYS have lost credibility and are in fact ostracised by the society for causing untold suffering on fellow Zimbabweans. Simpson and Rauch (1991) also bring another dimension of the cumulative impact of conflict which is synonymous to the political developments in Zimbabwe. They argue that as a result of being victimised, people or conflicting parties end up sanctioning violence. In Zimbabwe, many people reacted differently to the havoc wrecked by the ZANU-PF sponsored militia with some resorting to countering violence with violence. As a result, violence became normalised throughout the country. What worries most is that the youth are always on the receiving end with some losing their lives. There are reports that the 2008/

9 electoral violence affected the youth and they “suffer interrelated health issues involving both physical and psychological wellbeing” (Youth Health Initiative 2012). All these developments warrant approaching the youth crisis in Zimbabwe from an R2P point of view.

EXAMINING YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE R2P

What makes youth’s experiences in Zimbabwe an R2P concern is that they have been used to commit crimes against humanity intentionally or unintentionally and have been affected socially, economically and politically. The R2P is there to redefine the relationship between the state and its citizens, together with the international community as captured in the phrase ‘sovereignty as responsibility’ (Evans 2008; Thakur 2007; ICISS 2001). This global initiative which is meant to help the government exercise responsible leadership seems to be falling on deaf ears in the context of Zimbabwe. By recruiting the youths to act as gangsters against their own brothers, relatives, kith and kin, the Zimbabwean government has failed on its R2P obligations. Key to the R2P norm is the message that the state is duty bound to prevent such inhuman acts like persecution of members of a group, collectively or politically, enforced disappearances, torture, murder, rape, imprisonment or severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law and forcibly displacing people among other crimes against humanity (Evans 2008; ICISS 2001). By merely looking at the R2P target elements, the government of Zimbabwe could be blamed for inciting the youth to commit such crimes. More importantly, the Mugabe regime violated several conventions on the rights and protection of youth including the 1990 African Union Convention on the Rights and Welfare of Children and Article (38) of the 2002 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement in armed conflict, which Zimbabwe is a signatory. The African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted in 1990 and went into effect in 1999. Basing this argument on the recruitment age group for the NYS, (10-30), it shows that most of the youths were subjected to some form of banditry. The government deliberately gave the youth powers to act with impunity and to

use whatever means possible to deny the MDC political space. In the process, most of the youth were initiated to kill, maim, torture and rape. The most notable and notorious experience is the pre and post-runoff presidential election era where youth, with the support of the ruling party unleashed Operation *Makavhotera Papi* (Operation whom did you vote for) (Masunungure 2011). Human rights and civic society reports concur that the operation caused severe displacement of people, destruction of property and politically organized deaths. In all these reports, MDC supporters and leadership were the main victims (Physicians for Human Rights 2009). The post-June 2008 electoral violence perpetrated by the youth and state security forces affected the youth in terms of accessing educational facilities. Educators were the prime targets of the Operation *Makavhotera Papi*, especially for allegedly voting for MDC and this led to closure of many schools in the rural settings (Siyahamba 2008). This had serious impact on youth development and advancement as many dropouts were recorded in Zimbabwe. That electoral violence orchestrated by the youth had the military as directors of the command structure makes it tantamount to what Alemika (2011: 18) calls “organized crime.” What makes the violence fit the definition of organized crime is that the command structure was well defined and the prime target was clearly demarcated. The nature of electoral violence perpetrated by the youth in Zimbabwe involved disruption of opposition rallies, intimidation, hate speech, forced disappearances, murder, torture, abductions, destruction of property, rape and beatings among other gross human rights violations (Masunungure 2011; Alemika 2011).

The youth were also put to risk by the so called ‘NYS’ programme. It is reported in the *New Zimbabwe* of 29 January 2012 that a mass grave was unearthed at a former NYS training camp in the Matabeleland province. So far, it has not been established as to whether these are youth who died during the training or the bodies of the suspected MDC supporters. This reveals that the NYS is not an innocent endeavor especially when the youth are put at risk and made to commit atrocities. The practice of using the youth as cannon fodder in a crisis they neither created nor understand has serious implications on their moral and psychological well-being (Siyahamba 2008). Most of the youth have been socialised in

violence as well as miscarriage of justice and are finding it difficult to adjust to stable social and political environments.

ZANU-PF, by militarizing the youth has sown the seeds for destruction through its hate-filled political conduct. A youth-focused approach on R2P, championed in this study, resonates with the assertion by Slim (2007) that the youth need to be socialised in liberal education and that they should be included in all the initiatives to prevent mass killings, ideological fights and other political criminal activities. By allowing the youth to unleash violence, it means the state in Zimbabwe is at war with its unarmed civilians. It is high time ZANU-PF takes the R2P seriously and demilitarise the youth for the attainment of future responsible leadership. As noted by Slim (2010), adherence to hate speech and miscarriage of justice for the sake of wealth and power by the leadership, yields to serious moral decadence among the youth. Such a deeply entrenched culture of violence will be difficult to eradicate and might be the basis for future conflict. In that respect, it is high time that the leadership in Zimbabwe put more emphasis on values than power.

Test cases from the experiences of the youth in the political crisis in Zimbabwe are evidence enough to suggest that if ever the R2P norm is to graduate into doctrine, a bottom up approach should be adopted. The plight of the youth, who are the custodians of the future, should be the central focus in all humanitarian intervention debates. Factoring the subject of the youth R2P debates pays dividends given the fact that they can act as social educators for the communities through utilizing their relations with their peers. Krauss (2008) notes that the youths can challenge their colleagues to think reflect and push them towards moral uprightness. The wisdom is that youth should no-longer be instruments for political ends, but actors with a potential to guide and help the young to arrive at self-knowledge through the process of transformative learning.

CONCLUSION

The paper has explored the nature of militarization of the youth in the broader framework of the crisis situation in Zimbabwe. It is acknowledged that the R2P as a new norm for intervention for human protection purposes is gaining currency from a conceptual point of view and that fundamental to the development of the con-

cept from theory into practice is to factor in the plight and input of the youth. As demonstrated in the discussion, Africa's future is held by the youth who constitute the bulk of its total population, hence the need to make them participate in decision making. The paper argues that in Zimbabwe, there is direct and indirect involvement of the youths in conflicts and other politically motivated violence which demonstrates that power hungry politicians take advantage of unemployment, poverty and frustrations among the youths. As a result of their vulnerability, youths are turned into political thugs and agents of violence. It emerged from the discussion that the R2P is being misinterpreted and violated in Zimbabwe to maintain ZANU-PF's political hegemony by portraying the MDC as a threat to national security. By adopting a retrospective analysis of the politicization and militarisation of the youth in Zimbabwe, it is demonstrated that the youth are both political instruments and victims of violence. It is argued that young people should not be used as instruments of violence in conflict situations but rather valued as actors holding the future in the case of Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R2P should be domesticated into law by incorporating it in national constitutions across the African continent. Continued human rights violations in Zimbabwe require political commitment as well as incorporation of the R2P norm into domestic legislations. This will enable popular participation by the youth and other stakeholders. The militarisation of the youth calls for institutionalization of R2P in schools and university curriculums in order to promote a spirit of harmony and stability among the youth. The corporate world needs to join hands with governments in a bid to propagate the fundamental principles of the R2P. As further recommendation, all humanitarian studies and programs should include young people's concerns and any post-crisis rebuilding initiative (responsibility to rebuild) in Zimbabwe needs to include demilitarisation as well as depoliticisation of the youth for attainment of positive peace. Considering the gravity of the youth crisis in Zimbabwe, there are fears that unless action is taken urgently, the situation of youth brigades will become unsustainable, representing a threat to social cohesion. As youth represent a valuable resource to the

economy, businesses and society, there is need for a paradigm shift in the manner the government of Zimbabwe can absorb the youth in the productive sector of the economy. The paper further recommends that the Youth should be treated as stakeholders in the healing process in Zimbabwe and should not be relegated to the level of inciting violence and committing atrocities against fellow citizens. Achieving this goal will be a fitting response to the Secretary-General Ban's call for moral challenge, and may indeed galvanise the global effort to operationalise R2P.

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