

The Continuum of Political Violence in Zimbabwe¹

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ABSTRACT The paper interrogates political violence in Zimbabwe. The interrogation discusses violence in the pre-colonial era, the colonial era and the post-colonial era. The study used the desktop approach and reviewed secondary sources as literature review. The findings are that in Zimbabwe violence goes beyond ordinary episodic eruption as commonly experienced by societies generally, as it is entrenched in political systems that existed in various cultural forms over the years and encompasses the known history of Zimbabwe. The paper established that there is a history of political violence in Zimbabwe that predates the Zimbabwean state-system modeled on the European Concert of state. The paper concludes that violence in Zimbabwe is both systemic and political. Violence was used as a tool to control nation-states in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, to colonize Zimbabwe, and to liberate Zimbabwe from colonialism. As such, it continues to be used for statecraft, and therefore, intrinsically linking violence to political muscle.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will demonstrate that violence in Zimbabwe predates the onset of British colonialism, notwithstanding that it was also through violent means. Prior to colonialism, the political landscape in Zimbabwe was vitiated by contestations and fighting between tribes and civilizations that existed in the geography of present-day Zimbabwe. The British explorers and settlers' arrival on Zimbabwean soil was equally marred by harsh, feigned, vicious and aggressive intentions and actions. Political independence in Zimbabwe was consummated by violence means together with guerrilla warfare. Governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe has been, by and large, enforced through violence and the threat of violence. This trend arguably continues to date. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010: 281-295, 2013: 168) and Sadomba (2011: 229) enumerated some politically turbulent and violent episodes in the history of Zimbabwe as follows: First *Chimurenga*¹ (1896-1897), Second *Chimurenga*² (1965-1980), Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa*³ (2007), Operation *Gukurahundi*⁴ (1983-1984), *Hondo Yeminda*⁵ (2000), Operation *Murambatsvina*⁶ (2005), and Operation *Mavhotera Papi*⁷ (2008). Most recently, of the violent episodes in Zimbabwe, is the crackdown on street vendors in 2015 (News Day: 2015). One can almost observe a trend that in post-colonial Zimbabwe, there has never been a decade of peace where the government or the state has not emitted violence on innocent and unarmed citizens. This

observation is mirrored in the article published in the News Day on 17th May 2016, entitled '*Violence is embedded in Zim Psyche*' (News Day 2016), and by Rupiya (2005: 118) who argues that Zimbabwe has, since independence, been ruled through military-style operations. There is a visible and clear pattern of violent contests in the state systems that have been used in Zimbabwe over the years, particularly over political power. Hence, the argument advanced by this author and Benyera is that violence in Zimbabwe 'must be analyzed not as episodic but rather a continuum' (Benyera and Nyere 2015: 6522).

Objectives of the Study

The study intends to demonstrate that violence in Zimbabwe predates colonialism. It has always been a part of statecraft in the various cultural forms and civilizations that inhabited present-day Zimbabwe. The study is a genealogical analysis of violence in the known history of Zimbabwe. As such, it seeks to demonstrate that, while it could be argued that colonialism was violent and exacerbated violence in Zimbabwean societies, violence has been endemic to Zimbabwe and was used as a political tool in Zimbabwe prior to the British settlers' arrival.

THEORIZING ON VIOLENCE

It is noteworthy from the onset that 'there is no time period in human history or any region of the world that has been free of conflict and vio-

lence' (Alvarez and Bachman 2008: 29), and otherwise believing this would be perpetuating a myth. This suggests that violence is a corollary of human society. As such, violence ordinarily is part of human society. What is of grave concern is the political muscle behind violence in Zimbabwe. It is argued that violence in Zimbabwe is by-and-large state-led, thus politically motivated. While violence can be conceived 'as the use of force by one person against another, or against oneself' (Bradby 1996: 1), it is suggested that violence is relational and therefore collective. This assertion is consolidated by a sturdy pool of scholars who hold the idea that violence is collective as evidenced from their works (Stevenson 2008; Burton 1997; Conteh-Morgan 2004; Anderson 2004).

The continuum of violence in Zimbabwe denotes a system or force that is political in nature. For the purposes of this argument, the paper will use •i•ek's theory on violence that he terms 'systemic' violence. Systemic violence is in essence 'violence inherent in a system' (•i•ek 2008: 9). As opposed to what •i•ek terms 'subjective' violence, which is more observable and palpable in the physical, systemic violence is subtle and usually comes in the form of 'coercion that sustains relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence' (•i•ek 2008: 9). Subjective violence 'is performed by a clearly identifiable agent', and direct and physical violence would include 'mass murder, terror' and genocide (•i•ek 2008: 9).

•i•ek (2008: 10) underscores that ideological violence includes racism, incitement, discrimination on the basis of sex, and more specific to Zimbabwe, ethnic discrimination (•i•ek 2008: 14) and tribalism. What makes systemic violence sinister is that, as •i•ek would argue, 'the catch is that subjective violence and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint' (•i•ek 2008: 2). He further emphasizes that 'objective violence' is inherent to the 'normal' state of things. In other words, 'objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against, which one perceives something as subjectively violent' (•i•ek 2008: 2). The use of an analogy would bring the point home clearer, in other words objective violence is a glass without which one cannot observe the scenic green veld of subjective violence outside an auditorium. The glass is an informal sign that allows one to see through the window the

green veld outside the auditorium (building). It suffices to point out that all these forms of violence can be observed in the Zimbabwe political space. •i•ek further advances that 'symbolic violence... is embodied in language and its forms' (•i•ek 2008: 1), and particularly expressed in relations of social domination that are 'reproduced by the speech form' (•i•ek 2008: 1). 'Systemic violence is the catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of economic and political systems' (•i•ek 2008: 1). This form of violence is what is peculiar to Zimbabwe.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA

In the following section, this paper will demonstrate and distinguish that violence has long besieged Zimbabwe as early as the pre-colonial era. This section is also meant to historicize violence in Zimbabwe in order to indicate that violence in Zimbabwe is 'systemic'. There are two main ethnical populations indigenous to Zimbabwe, and they are namely the Shona and the Ndebele. These two generic ethnical groups can be sub-divided into smaller and various ethnical populations. In pursuit of the objectives of this study, they will be referred to as sub-groups. In the Shona group one finds sub-groups such as the *Torwa*, *Rozvi*, *Mutapa*, *Changamire* and *Toutswe*, among others (Beach 1984: 24; Cox 2014: 70; Msindo 2012: 35). Under the Ndebele ethnical group, one finds the *Kololo* and the *Gaza* sub-groups (Beach 1984: 24; Maddox 2006: 114-116; Okoth 2006: 38-39). Mudenge (1988: 134) argued that 'in pre-colonial times for a state to survive it required defensive [military] forces and to expand it needed offensive [military] forces', thereby confirming that violence was used in pursuit of sovereignty of the nation-states of Zimbabwe, further underscoring that violence was equally used to preserve and defend people's sovereignty (Nyere 2014: 99). In agreement and affirmation of the, observations Beach (1984: 24) argued that the Changamire and Ndebele states 'simply took over the states that existed there before [areas they conquered situated in present day Zimbabwe] including many of their personnel'. This suggests conquest. As such, this article observes that the conquests were essentially an aggressive taking over by brute force 'of one state by another' (Nyere 2014: 99).

Violence in the Shona States

Beach (1984: 24) advances the argument that the Great Zimbabwe State, also referred as the *Changamire* State, chronologically existed between the thirteenth and fifteenth century 1250 CE. Pikirayi (2002: 209) agrees with these dates. Beach (1984: 24) suggests that the Ndebele, *Changamire* and *Mutapa* were states born out of conquests, meaning they were created or founded out of a victory in a war. War is physically violent among other forms of violence. This suggests that war between the Shona sub-groups and inter-sub-groups of Shona and Ndebele occurred. Mudenge (1988: 37) agrees with both Beach (1984) and Pikirayi (2002) and attest that Prince Mutota who was also known as Nyatsimba Nemasengere founded the *Munhumutapa* empire out of conquest, thence making it a conquest (Nyere 2014: 99), and further augmenting the observation that violence was experienced and known in the Shona states prior to the arrival of British settlers. At this juncture, this article has established that violence, particularly physical political violence, was not alien to Shona cultural forms. As such, it can be argued that politically motivated violence was engrossed in the Shona ethnical sub-groups before the onset of colonialism.

Violence in the Ndebele States

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: iii) and Beach (1984: 54) converge that the Ndebele ethnical group 'originated from the Zulu state in Natal (present day South Africa) in the 1820s and can also be traced to *Ndwandwe* of *Zwide* states' that belong to the larger *Nguni* tribes (Nyere 2014: 100). Maddox (2006: 115) and Okoth (2006: 37) also affirm the fact that the *Kololo* and the *Gaza* states, that are sub-groups of the Ndebele ethnical group, originally came from the kingdom of the Zulu. The *Gaza* sub-group was comprised of mainly followers of Soshangane who was a fugitive fleeing Shaka⁸ and his Zulu regiment. Sebitwane founded the *Kololo* who were also fleeing the wrath of Shaka who was the then-leader of the Zulu (Okoth 2006: 38). Muiu and Martin (2009: 145) corroborate the idea that the *Gaza* and *Kololo* states were states formed out of the violence of war. They were fugitives running away from political and physical violence. The *Kololo* and *Gaza* states existed between 17th and

19th century (Beach 1984: 24) that are dates that correlate with the *Changamire* state's existence, as observed by Nyere (2014: 100). One can observe that because of the interactions emanating from a shared spatial, geographical and temporal space, these states shared the same resources, and inevitably they sought control of those resources leading to inter-state conflict and possibly violence. To this effect, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 143) argues that the Ndebele royalty, in the person of Lobengula, opened up 'full-scale raids on the Shona in the period 1890 to 1893', which is a position supported by Beach (1984: 54) and Nyere (2014: 100). It is evident from the above discussion that violence in the Ndebele ethnical grouping was not foreign. Not only did they come to occupy land in present day Zimbabwe fleeing from the violence of Shaka, they also used violence on the cultural forms they found already inhabiting the land, in pursuit of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 113) called the 'hegemonic project' of the Ndebele.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE DURING THE COLONIAL ERA

It is an established fact that colonialism in Africa in general, but particularly in Zimbabwe was through the barrel of the gun and therefore very violent. In the following section this study will highlight some noteworthy events that demonstrate and prove the violent nature of colonialism in Zimbabwe. The British appropriated Zimbabwean land and named it Rhodesia in 1895 after Cecil John Rhodes (Wood 2011: 4). Campbell (2003: 9) states that the political structures of Rhodesia were implanted in Zimbabwe after a military seizure between 1892 and 1897 (Nyere 2014: 101). The official date of British occupation of Zimbabwe is the 12th of September 1890, which is when the British raised the Union Jack (British Flag) at Fort Salisbury (now Harare) (Moorcroft and McLaughlin 2008: 22; Hill 2003: 42). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 119) in agreement with Campbell foregrounded the 1893 colonization of Matabeleland with help from Christian missionaries and underscored that the process of colonization, which was characterized by lawlessness and aggression.

Peter Godwin (in Hill 2003: 45) attests to the violence of colonialism and highlights the tyrannical character of Lobengula, the Ndebele royal, who was eager to shed blood and had

come as a colonist in the land occupied by the Shona. While Godwin's view departs from the fact that the British were violent and highlights the violence of intra-state wars between the Shona and Ndebele, it remains that violence championed by imperial powers was used to colonize Zimbabwe. What becomes evident is that violence was not foreign between ethnical groups in Zimbabwe, and neither was it foreign to British colonists. This article will now go on to cite and illustrate some conspicuous violent-laden events of colonialism.

Violence and the Rhodesian War

Colonialists expropriated indigenous people of Zimbabwe of their property, which included cattle and land. Amongst other strategies to forcefully subjugate Black people, colonialists imposed exorbitant grazing fees and cattle-dip taxes, forcibly removing African peasants from their arable land, and forced African peasants to work as laborers in aggressively appropriated commercial farms, now owned by White people (Bond and Manyanya 2002: 3; Moorcroft and McLaughlin 2008: 21). During this time, the Ndebele also referred to as *Matabele* regrouped in the *Matobo* hills, and their Shona counterparts gradually and incrementally got tense and uneasy of their loss of land (Hill 2003: 44).

A new wave of violence was experienced in Southern Rhodesia in 1960. African nationalists naturally resisted colonialists. The sort of brutality and aggression experienced in 1960 only equaled the sort of brutality and aggression last witnessed at the inception of colonialism in the 1890s. Both the African nationalists and Rhodesian forces emitted violence, one group on another (Ellert 1989: 1; Mlambo 2009: 86), leading to the banning of the National Democratic Party (NDP) by Rhodesian authorities in the person of Sir Edgar Whitehead. The banning of the NDP was based on the conviction that it was the force behind the disturbances in the country (Ellert 1989: 1; Mlambo 2009: 80). The banning of NDP in 1960 led to the birth of the Zimbabwe African People Union (ZAPU) in 1961 (Sibanda 2005: ix), from which the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) another rival party was to be born in August of 1963 (Zewde 2008: 186). The ZAPU/ZANU breakaway owed to differences of opinions, perceptions and views especially embodied by the leadership of ZAPU in the person of

Joshua Nkomo. Amongst the perceptions and views of Nkomo were, but not limited to, being pacifist and moderate in light of the ensuing armed conflict at the time (Bond and Manyanya 2002: 6). It is evident at this juncture that violence was a corollary of the colonial era.

Violence and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI)

In accordance with international protocols of the time, Britain, under Sir Edgar Whitehead sought to retain power at impending elections by committing to changing laws and facilitate indistinguishable involvement and engagement of native Africans in political and civil matters to that of their White counterparts (Hill 2003: 55). This development resulted in Britain bringing forward by a decade the undertaking of renouncing faculty to natives in its colonies (Nyere 2014: 104). This position was welcomed by many African nationalists, but opposed by some few White supremacists. The few that opposed this move were of the view that self-government and autonomy were to be accorded to countries that were deficient of expertise and prowess of self-rule. Wood (2011: 3) captured this position succinctly when he argued that the resistance emanated from fear that political power was to be 'handed to demagogues who' on gaining independence, sought to create 'one-party states'. Ian Smith together with Winston Field, in a desperate attempt to avert this move, founded a political outfit called the Rhodesian Front. The party sought to retain faculty in the hands of the White minority (Wood 2011: 3). This occurrence ushered in the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) with Ian Smith as the first Prime Minister under that dispensation. The UDI was declared in 1965, on the 11th of November (Ellert 1989: 1, 124; Bond and Manyanya 2002: 6, 15; Hill 2003: 60; Moorcroft and McLaughlin 2008: 15; Wood 2011: 9, 24). The UDI dispensation was equally violent. Military operations were used by the British colonists to crush the Black African nationalists' rising to power. Enumerated below are some of the operations that bear testimony to the violence of colonialism.

Operation Mardon was carried out in 1976 by the UDI dispensation and constituted a string of infantry assaults directed to camps belonging to the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA, ZANU's military wing)

camps in Mozambique (Baxter 2007: 46; Geldenhuys 2014: 161; Wood 2011: 2).

Operation Dingo was discharged by Rhodesian forces in 1977, again on ZANLA's camps in Mozambique. The operation was an air assault (Baxter 2014: 46; Wood 2011: 2; Binda and Crock 2007: 243).

Operation Uric/Bootlace was orchestrated by Rhodesian forces enlisting the help of South African forces to assault by air attacks, in September 1979, ZANLA's communication lines in Mozambique (Binda and Crooks 2007: 395; Salt 2015: 722; Wood 2011: 2).

The relinquishing of power by the British was not an easy and voluntary one. It was bloody and violent. The Rhodesians conceded to the rise of African nationalists at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979 ending UDI pact, which survived fifteen years (Bond and Manyanya 2002: 9; Ellert 1989: 24; Moorcroft and McLaughlin 2008: 27, 28). Zimbabwe's independence materialized after ninety years of violent colonial domination and quelling by Britain. This article has established thus far that violence not only was used as a tool for statecraft during Zimbabwe's pre-colonial era, it was vitiated to enforce oppression during colonialism, and violence was used to liberate Zimbabwe from the clutches of colonialism. The article will now go on to discuss and quantify some major violent incidences that have occurred in Zimbabwe under the watch of the incumbent government.

VIOLENCE IN THE ANTI-COLONIAL ERA

It should be highlighted at this juncture that while the British were advancing their colonial design and plan, the African nationalists by the same token, were planning and coordinating resistance to those colonial advances. As such, the dates that this article put forward in referring to the 'colonial era' may, at times, coincide with the dates that the article cite as the 'anti-colonial era'. This is so because while the British were advancing their colonial interest on African soil, the Africans planned counter measures to frustrate those efforts.

As stated earlier in this article, imperial violence in Zimbabwe was met by an equally violent attitude and vengeance from African nationalists. The Shona resisted colonial advances as far back as 1896. The earliest Shona figure that resisted British colonial subjugation is cit-

ed in Ellert (1989: 22) as *Mbuya Nehanda*⁹. In that resistance of 1896 that was to later turn into a revolution, the objective was to depose repression and subjection vented by the White minority (Lyons 2004: 30). The ascent and advance of the Shona against White minority rule in the 1890s was known as the first *Chimurenga*, and it referred to the opposition and defiance of the suppression and hegemonization of Blacks by Whites in Zimbabwe (Moorcroft and McLaughlin 2008: 20). Bond and Manyanya (2002: 3) converge that the first native uprisings against the White settler community in Zimbabwe were referred to as *Chimurenga* in the Shona language, and referred to as *Umvukela* in the Ndebele language. The *Chimurenga/Umvukela* uprisings were subdued by the White settler community only to reoccur at a more intense scale in the 1950s, a period that became known as '*Zhii*'¹⁰. According to Francis Nehwati, *Zhii* referred to an action that devastates and utterly wrecks and dismantles something to debris (in Ellert 1989: 2). Moorcroft and McLaughlin (2008: 26) accentuate that *Zhii* referred to an explosion of violence, out of desperation, incited by Africans targeting White-owned property, to frustrate and disrupt White privilege and comfort. In this sense violence was a tool to topple White domination and oppression of the Black Africans. Southern Rhodesia further witnessed episodes of brutality, cruelty and barbarity in 1960 around urban areas as well as in rural areas. That occurrence was not anticipated nor expected at the time. To keep the pressure mounting on British White settlers in Zimbabwe, the native leadership and authority established *Zhanda*¹¹ groups. These were designed to attack and paralyze 'White-owned farms and property' (Ellert 1989: 4), hacking down crops such as maize and tobacco, killing livestock for maximum damage. Much later in the armed struggle, in a similar fashion as the days of *Zhii* and *Zhanda* groups, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) guerrillas were to attack farms appropriated by the White-settler community along the Zambezi Valley precipice in December 1972. This period starting from December 21, 1972 is known as the second *Chimurenga*. The ZANU guerrilla attacks of 1972 prompted the formation of Operation Hurricane, a brain child of the Joint Operations Command (JOC) that belonged to the Rhodesian security forces as counter measures to the freedom fighters' assaults and advances (Ellert

1989: 23). Operation Hurricane (1970-1974) was a military counter attack by Rhodesian on African nationalists (Baxter 2014: 28; Cilliers 2015: 64; Geldenhuys 2014: 85; Binda and Crocks 2007: 141). Equally the freedom fighters returned fire with fire to assaults and advances made by the White-settler community of Rhodesia. The exchanges were bloody, brutal, aggressive and violent. The violence continued over the years and only ended at the ceasefire agreement brokered on 21st December 1979. This was following the Lancaster House peace talks that saw Zimbabwe gaining political independence from Britain (Campbell 2003: 23). It is evident that colonial resistance was not championed by violence initially. A violent war of resistance was therefore not the first option for African natives. The Africans only became violent to the British, the foreigners in their land, only when the British showed no respect for the Africans' property and land.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

The article so far has enumerated, explored and discussed political violence in the pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe and went on to interrogate violence in the colonial era and the anti-colonial era. Now the article will go on to show and demonstrate that political violence in Zimbabwe is not only episodic but also systemic. As it is the argument of this paper that violence was used, and continues to be used as a tool for statecraft in the known history of Zimbabwe, in this section the paper sets to prove, in the words of the columnist of the News Day (2016), that 'examples abound from the land reform program, Operation *Murambatsvina* and ultimately to the 2008 elections that Zimbabwe's history has been a tale of violence' (News Day 2016).

Violence in post-colonial Zimbabwe can be ascribed to differing ideologies of various people over the years. The differences can be accredited to the formations of political parties that represented the views and aspirations of the peoples of Zimbabwe, namely ZANU and ZAPU. At the formation of ZAPU in 1961, Joshua Nkomo became the leader. Mugabe, Sithole and Muzorewa were senior members of that caucus. In 1963 another party was formed, ZANU headed by Mugabe. ZANU broke away from ZAPU because the leaders did not agree on strategic

moves. The military wing of ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the military wing of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), the Zimbabwe Peoples' Union Army (ZIPRA) fought British colonial interests alongside, as comrades and allies, and this can be argued to be the common element that fostered cooperation and association between these organizations. The two formations had one enemy in common and their goal was to extricate Zimbabwe from subjugation (Elliott 1989: 3). In spite of the greater common cause that ZANU and ZAPU stood for, the liberation of Zimbabwe, their rivalry is still palpable today.

The Violence of *Gukurahundi*

Following the elections of the 14th, 27th, 28th and 29th of February 1980, Robert Mugabe appeared as the pristine figurehead of the new Zimbabwe following the first national democratic elections (Hill 2003: 69; Zimbabwe 1980: 143). At that time Zimbabwe was known as Southern Rhodesia, and it is at independence on the 18th of April 1980 that she officially assumed the name Zimbabwe (Bond and Manyanya 2002: 1).

Hill expostulates that, once Robert Mugabe assumed power in 1980, his dispensation sought to diminish the part that the 'Matabele' played in 'Zimbabwe's past and present' by annihilating and eliminating the Ndebele population, which saw 'between 10,000 to 30,000 Matabele slain by Mugabe's private army, the notorious Fifth Brigade' (2003: 35). The deployment of the Fifth brigade to Matabeleland and parts of Midlands is what is known as *Gukurahundi* (Hill 2003: 76; CCJP 1997: 14; Chatham House Meeting Summary 2007: 2). *Gukurahundi* was a typical military-style operation, which was brutal, vicious, aggressive, ferocious and fierce, executed between 1982 and 1987 (Hill 2003: 35; CCJP 1997: 5-7). Ordinarily *Gukurahundi* refers to 'the wind that blows away the chaff before the rains' (Hill 2003: 77). Similarly, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace [CCJP] (1997: 13) concedes that it refers to 'the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains'. It is precisely this meaning ascribed to operation *Gukurahundi* that is seen by some to mean the wiping out of ZAPU and the Ndebele population's contribution to Zimbabwe's liberation history.

The secrecy, with which *Gukurahundi* was handled and dealt, was so much such that there

is no real official acknowledgement of the massacre by the authorities and there is no official record of fatalities (CCJP 1997: 12, 15). This propounds to the speculation about what exactly transpired and how much causality was recorded, and it inevitably leaves room for speculation, rightly or wrongly. Joshua Nkomo estimated the figure of casualties to about 20,000, while alternative sources table as low a figure as 700 (CCJP 1997: 18). The News Day (2016: Online) estimates the number of people who were killed in the execution of this barbaric and inhumane military-style operation termed *Gukurahundi* at 20,000.

This attests to the violence in post-colonial Zimbabwe and the arrogance of the post-colonial regime when it quipped through one of its senior ministers, Nathan Shamuyarira, that ZANU PF had ‘many degrees in violence’ (Bond and Manyanya 2002: xiv). It also suggests a belief commonly held within ZANU PF that violence equates to statecraft. One of Zimbabwe’s formidable opposition forces, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), fell into the trap of politics of violence in 2001 and in that regard it is no better than its chief nemesis. The leader of MDC, Morgan Tsvangirai, made a call in 2001 to remove Mugabe and ZANU PF from the helm of the state ‘by violent means’, whatever those violent means are (Mhiripiri 2008: 162; Nyere 2014: 110). This call demonstrated the belief that violence and aggression could solve political problems in Zimbabwe. This article will now go to demonstrate further that post-colonial Zimbabwe is marred by violence.

Violence in Operation *Murambatsvina*

The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) initiated another military-style ‘clean up’ exercise it termed Operation *Murambatsvina* on 19th May 2005 without adequate prior notice to the public (Chari 2008:105; Mhiripiri 2008:149; Nyamanhindi 2008:118). In the execution of Operation *Murambatsvina*, the authorities bulldozed, razed and destroyed what were labeled ‘illegal structures’ that included, but not limited to, houses with ‘unapproved plans’ in residential areas, and ‘illegally’ demarcated market stalls where people sold their wares and engaged in commercial trade, sometimes informally. Indubitably, not all of the destroyed properties were in designated areas and not all met the required ‘structural quality’ and habitable standards (Nyere 2014: 113).

Operation *Murambatsvina* (OM) was defended and validated on the grounds that it was a statutory and genuine operation of government intimidating cleaning of litter and ‘dirt’. Ms. Sekesai Makwawarara, then the Chairperson of the Harare Town House, a position she was appointed to by the ZANU PF government, referred to operation *Murambatsvina* as meant to purge urban areas of ‘dirt’ (Nyamanhindi 2008: 119; Tibaijuka 2005: 12). Additionally, Operation *Murambatsvina* was explicated based on Zimbabwe’s sovereign rights that allowed the state to decide and regulate its course and direction regarding housing and commerce¹². The violent manner in which OM was carried out prompted the Minister of Information and a ZANU PF cadre himself (at the time this research was undertaken), Professor Jonathan, to admit the severity of OM arguing the operation was ‘an inhumane, barbaric demolition of properties belonging to the weak and poor in our society’ (Ncube et al. 2005: 8). One can infer from Moyo’s utterances, the brutality, aggression and fierceness of OM that was so intense and cruel, it invoked a sympathetic response even among Mugabe’s hard-hearted henchmen. It was however clear to some that ‘the reason for *Murambatsvina* was purely a punishment for the urbanites for rejecting ZANU-PF in the [2005] elections’ as expressed by Lovemore Matombo (in Bright 2008), the Secretary general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) at the time. At this juncture, it is evident that violence in Zimbabwe has always affected all known historical epochs.

Violence in the Zimbabwe 2008 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections

The year 2008 was a watershed moment for the political landscape in Zimbabwe. Not only did the country suffer the highest ever recorded inflation in the history of the world, but also experienced a total collapse of the economy. The ZANU-PF-led government emitted violence yet again on its own citizenry in a desperate attempt to frustrate voters that were believed to be favoring the then main contending opposition party the MDC in March 2008 and again close to the much disputed run-off presidential elections of June 2008 (Welz and Junk 2009: 185). This was also a violent state-sponsored operation that was codenamed ‘operation *mavhoterapi*?’ simply translated to mean ‘who did you vote

for?’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013: 168; Humanitarian News and Analysis: Online).

Before the March 2008 elections, state-led violence was rife and serious, admittedly, the violence and brutality was barely rigorous than anticipated. The MDC faction led by Tsvangirai, referred to as the MDC-T, emerged with 99 parliamentary seats in the lower house, while 97 seats were polled by ZANU-PF. 10 seats were won by the other faction of MDC known as MDC-M, led by Arthur Mutambara. These results made it impossible for ZANU-PF to retain majority required for legislative purposes. This scenario was novel in Zimbabwe’s 28 years of independence. ‘In the Senate, ZANU-PF took half of the 60 elected seats, but it also controlled the chamber’s 33 unelected seats. The MDC and its splinter faction won 24 and 6 Senate seats, respectively’ (Freedom House 2012: online).

The March 2008 poll results were finally released in May 2008, nearly 2 months after the polls were conducted by the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC). The GoZ of Zimbabwe justified the stalling of the release of the results on the basis of ‘meticulous verification’ of the results, although many believe the stalling was a way of delaying the inevitable embarrassment that ZANU-PF suffered at the loss of an election to MDC-T. The poll revealed that Morgan Tsvangirai was the people’s favorite with 47.9 percent, compared to Mugabe who polled 43.2 percent (Africa Files: Online). This situation necessitated a runoff between Mugabe and Tsvangirai. ‘The MDC accused the ZEC of fraud and claimed that Tsvangirai had won the election outright with 50.3 percent of the vote. As evidence, the party cited an extensive parallel vote count conducted by a network of civic groups’ (Freedom House 2012).

According to Freedom House (2012), following the March 2008 election, militias belonging to ZANU-PF and the Central Intelligence Officers (CIOs also referred to as state security forces) unleashed a vicious and barbaric terror campaign targeting and ‘flashing out’ MDC supporters. The terror campaign was physically carried out in society but also was fought in the press and online (Freedom House 2012). This observation is further consolidated by Welz and Junk (2009: 186) who submit that ‘the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections in Zimbabwe were overshadowed by a high level of political violence’. The severity and brutality of

the aggression and violence leading to the June Presidential elections compelled Tsvangirai to withdraw from the election race, making way for Mugabe to garner eighty-five percent of the votes. This result is because Mugabe was unopposed by any significant opposition force. Suffice to note that there was a very low voter turnout. It is believed that about 200 MDC activists were murdered in state-led election-related violence. While some 5000 MDC supporters were tortured, a further 10,000 required medical attention as a result of injuries (Africa Files: Online). This is the situation that necessitated the enacting of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), officially adopted and signed on the 15th of September 2008 with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as overseer (Coltart 2016: Online). It is at the GPA that the ZANU-PF-led government and the MDC reached a power-sharing agreement that allowed Mugabe to remain president (Freedom House 2012: online). It can be deduced that opposing views to those of ZANU-PF are not welcome in Zimbabwe. The violence of the 2008 election proves precisely that, that when faced with dissenting and opposing views, the ZANU-PF-led government resorts to violence. This reveals the political nature of violence in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Violence against Vendors (2015)

More recently, and at the time of writing this paper (May-August 2015), the GoZ Zimbabwe resorted yet again to the use of violence against vendors on the streets of Harare, the capital city, with other towns following this precedent, like Bulawayo and Mutare (News24 2015: Online; News Day 2015: Online; VOA, Zimbabwe 2015: Online). Given the ensuing economic crisis in Zimbabwe and the job crisis particularly, many people resorted to informal trading, a sore point given the violence that citizens of Zimbabwe endured 10 years earlier during operation *Murambatsvina*. This clearly demonstrates that the GoZ is unrelenting in its use of force against defenseless citizens. One would think that given the condemnation that came with Operation *Murambatsvina*, the government would be more careful and take precautionary measure in enforcing municipal bylaws as they consistently claim.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE OBSERVATIONS OF THE STUDY

The elites of Zimbabwe, under the explored historical epochs, displayed a propensity to use violence as a tool of statecraft. This preference to use violence is traceable to as far back as the early civilizations of the Ndebele and Shona cultural forms. They exhibited violent tendencies amongst themselves as paramount civilizations as well as between themselves as competing civilizations. The propensity to use violence in Zimbabwe to pursue political ends was equally at play during the colonial era and has continued persistently during the post-colonial era.

The Ambivalence of Violence

At the dawn of colonialism, ethnical groups in Zimbabwe understandably used violence to resist and defend their land and sovereignty. It could be argued that Zimbabwe's resistance, which was violent led to her independence. In that sense violence can be seen as ambivalent, not to say that violence is an accepted way of resolving conflicts, but in the case of Zimbabwe's independence it can be argued that it was used in Zimbabwe's self-defense. This is the point where Zimbabwe's leadership seems to be missing. The use of violence to achieve Zimbabwe's independence and sovereignty seemed to suggest that violence is an acceptable tool of statecraft. This raises critical and fundamental questions and issues like, does the end product justify the means used to attain or achieve it? If violence was justified as a necessary condition to attain Zimbabwe's independence, why is it then condemned when used to govern the same state that was born out of violence?

Implications for Governance

The state of Zimbabwe seemingly cannot stand opposition, as it does not tolerate dissenting views from within. It does not accept difference and this is the sore point that gives rise to violence. More often than not, the state inflicts violence on its citizenry when citizens demand accountability and transparency from their government. Opposition parties often are denied access to free and fair campaigning and denied access to the state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC). This

suggests a deliberate silencing of opposing views and a deliberate attempt to annihilate and eliminate difference in the Zimbabwean political sphere. Difference and opposition are surely a necessary component of keeping and sustaining a healthy democracy. But why then does the state of Zimbabwe resort to violently crushing dissenting views and opposing views to the status quo? This question is almost as old as the state of Zimbabwe itself and the response is to be found in the very creation of the state of Zimbabwe. If violence was used to achieve independence from colonialism, why is it wrong to use violence in the running of the same state born out of violence? This seems to be the rationale of the use of violence in the current Zimbabwean regime.

Does the End Justify the Means?

Post-independence, Zimbabwe's leadership consistently used military-style operations to deal with opposing views and dissent within Zimbabwe even on matters of policy, which did not warrant a violent response from the state, and Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa* and Operation *Murambatsvina* are cases in point. The real issues that underpinned the discharge of Operation *Murambatsvina* were economic rather than political. Instead of dealing with economic policies that restricted and deterred investor-ship, the leadership apportioned blame to innocent citizens who had turned to doing things for themselves and used the pretext of cleaning-up urban areas and arresting crime in squatter-like structures. This relates to what •i•ek (2008) termed 'subjective violence' as it was physical, palpable, coercive and domineering by a government on its own people. If the Zimbabwean government retaliated violently to the colonial government's use of violence, it suggested that the post-colonial government did not want to live in fear and the brutality of the colonial government. In other words, the post-colonial government of Zimbabwe sought to obliterate and liquidate violence. This means the principle they understood was that violence is evil and not necessary.

Edson Zvobgo, a former Parliamentary and Constitutional Affairs Minister in the Mugabe regime, is on record (in 1979: Online) stating the party's (ZANU) detest of violence. He noted that violence is exactly what they (the national-

ists) fought against. It was unacceptable for a government to use violence on its citizens then. What has drastically happened to change that principle today? Is it that the nationalists have achieved independence from colonial rule that makes violence an acceptable tool of statecraft to use on their own people? Why is it that it is opposing views and dissenting views from those of the status quo of ZANU PF that seems to be targeted and intended to be crushed violently in Zimbabwe today? The language of violence gives rise to the attitudes towards violence and subsequently, to violent action.

Language of Violence

The language that seems to extol and esteem the use of violence is problematic in Zimbabwe. There is need to cherish the history as Zimbabwe and history will always tell of the violence emitted on Zimbabwe by British settlers, but dwelling and glorifying such episodes could hinder progress and healing of a nation. Language that esteems violence in Zimbabwe is even embedded in the very constitution of the country. References such as, but not limited to, the 'liberation struggle', 'armed struggle', 'war of liberation', 'war of resistance' among others, seem to suggest that violence is esteemed and if necessary, it can be used. The problem with such language that condones violence is that it is divisive. It distinguishes difference and in the framework, which the government of Zimbabwe seems to operate in, difference should be eradicated, eliminated and obliterated. The division of the 'language of violence' emanates from the very person who utters the 'language of violence', as s/he alienates the self from others. Equally the one who hears, and in this case the intended victim of the language of violence, is vilified and innately feels vilified. It is as though one is almost forced to either belong with the 'ruling party' or the 'opposition party'. One is left thinking that they either belong or do not, and this position presents a false predicament because one can both belong in the so-called 'ruling party' and agree with the 'opposition party's' policies.

The language of violence leads to securitization of the state thereby perpetuating the separation of personhood, particularly between 'state' and 'citizen'. It is citizens who are building blocks of the state. One cannot distinguish

and separate a citizen from the state because the two are mutual defining. The usefulness of language is to communicate, but language can also be used to ex-communicate or de-communicate, as has been the case in Zimbabwe. The language of violence breeds divisiveness. This confirms the theory of 'symbolic violence' that •iek (2008) speaks about. It is suggested that the Zimbabwe government therefore perpetuates symbolic violence in the divisive and exclusionary language it continually chooses to use.

Form Versus Agency

Very often in the Zimbabwean political sphere references are made to the 'ruling party' as opposed to the 'opposition party', the 'government' as opposed to the 'governed', and simply put, the language of violence is divisive because it is bent on 'othering of others'. In other words, the language of violence blinds one to see only the 'form' of a person who opposes a particular view rather than the 'agency' of the person, the personhood of one who sees differently from another's point of view. This position speaks of dwelling on 'particular differences' rather than 'common purpose' and 'common reality', that of being people or persons and citizens first and foremost. It would seem to appear as though the current government in Zimbabwe places much importance on the vessel or container of the message, than the message or the content of the messenger. If division, difference and violence can be learned, surely commonality, magnanimity and peace can be learned too.

Accident Versus Substance

The language of violence in its divisiveness dwells on 'accident' rather than 'substance' of persons. It is the language of violence that seeks to label and categorize people as 'Shona' and 'Ndebele', 'Zimbabwean' and 'British', 'Black' and 'White'. This relates to, and confirms, what •iek (2008) termed 'ideological violence', as it inflames racism and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, tribe and skin pigmentation. While the differences that exist between the aforementioned groups, the Zimbabwean situation is different from European situations where states were formed organically. That is to say European states were formed based on kindred, African states in general, but the Zimba-

bwean state in particular was formed on arbitrary grounds and borders. The formation of the state of Zimbabwe on colonial borders should particularly inform political leaders on how to steer the country without inflaming these arbitrary differences to cause division. In order to form social cohesion, the language used particularly by a government with a history such as Zimbabwe, should reflect values of cooperation, commonality and progressive development. Should the language not be unifying and inclusive rather than divisive and exclusive? In all these forms of violence that are discussed in this paper, it can be concluded that the violent political episodes in Zimbabwe, frequent as they are, fit into the narration of what •iek (2008) termed 'systemic violence'. Hence, it can be concluded that indeed violence in Zimbabwe is ideological, objective, subjective, symbolic and above all systemic.

The Relevance of •iek's Theory of Systemic Violence to Zimbabwe

At this juncture, it suffices to note that while it can be observed that violence in Zimbabwe can be interpreted through all six strands of the theory of violence as enunciated by •iek, it is systemic violence that best describes the situation in Zimbabwe. The political muscle behind the frequent eruptions of violence in Zimbabwe validates the branding of political violence as inherently in the political system of Zimbabwe. As such, political violence in Zimbabwe is 'systemic'. This demonstrates that the problem in Zimbabwe's politics is the violence that has the backing of a political nature. This impedes progress in the whole system of Zimbabwe's politics. In addressing other related issues that come about as a result of this political system, such as governance crisis, economic challenges, maladministration and corruption to mention a few, one should focus on the very conditions that give rise to the venal system in the first place. A possible solution and definitely an alternative view will be proposed by this study under the sub-heading 'Recommendations'.

CONCLUSION

This paper argued that violence is a continuum that has existed in Zimbabwe before colonialism and has been a permanent feature dur-

ing colonialism, anti-colonialism and post-colonialism. Prior to colonialism, violence was utilized to control and execute power in Zimbabwe's nation-states. The paper also observed that violence was used as an instrument to colonize and administer the imposed power of the executive in Zimbabwe. The paper further observes that violence was again used as a mechanism to liberate Zimbabwe. If Zimbabwe's post-independence history is anything to go by, the utilization of violence as an instrument of controlling people and wielding political dominion and supremacy of the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) [ZANU (PF)] rule is likely to persist unabated. As such, it is the view of this paper that violence is seen as a legitimate tool of statecraft by the current GoZ. In essence, it is likely to continue to be used, as it is seemingly the only effective way of governing perceived, unless an alternative is proposed and explored. The GoZ has learned violence from its past experiences and do not seem to know of any alternative, but if violence can be learned, so too can peace and harmony. The section below proposes an alternative that is embedded in various African cultures, and certainly and most importantly, in Zimbabwean society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An alternative framework of politics is needed, one that does not seek to dominate or obliterate other forms of political arrangements, difference, dissimilarity, contrast and distinction as has been happening the history of Zimbabwe. Politics without ethics and values is indeed just baloney. Africa prides itself in the values and principles of *Hunhu-munhu munhu nokuda kwavanhu* (Shona version) or *Ubuntu-umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Ndebele/Zulu version) loosely translated to mean, 'I am because you are, and because you are, we are'. This philosophy esteems the person. The person is an end in them and never a means to something. In other words, personhood is constituted in the community and the individual. This kind of thinking recognizes difference of preference, civilization, opinion, political affiliation, being and epistemology. The paper invites political leadership in general, but political leadership in Zimbabwe particularly, to return to principles of *Hunhu/Ubuntu*. This is likely to ensure that the personhood of people is valued and

protected as opposed to upholding and protecting 'party' politics and agenda. It is simple as it sounds. Recognize difference and allow space for differing points of view in the political space. In other words, disagree agreeably.

NOTES

- 1 This article is a product of the author's Master's Dissertation entitled 'Sovereignty in international politics: An assessment of Zimbabwe's operation murambatsvina 2005'. MA. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- 2 First *Chimurenga* was the primary war of resisting colonialism by African nationalists (1896-1897).
- 3 Second *Chimurenga* is the liberation war that led to Zimbabwe's independence (1965-1980).
- 4 Operation *Chipo Chiroorwa* was forceful clamp down on women loitering the streets for presumed prostitution. *Chipo* is a common Shona name and, in this instance, it refers to women in general. The operation literally meant 'women get married' (2007).
- 5 *Gukurahundi* refers to the Matabeleland disturbances of 1983-1984 and it refers to 'the wind that blows away the chaff before the rains' (Hill 2003:77).
- 6 *Hondo Yeminda* means 'war for land' in the Shona language of Zimbabwe. It refers to the government's year 2000 Land Reform Programme.
- 7 Operation *Murambatsvina* was an urban clean-up campaign championed by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2005.
- 8 Operation *Mavhotera Papi?* was a government-led election-related violent period meant to flush out opposition supporters in the year 2008.
- 9 Shaka was the then-leader of the Zulu kingdom (Kunene 1979: 164)
- 10 *Mbuya Nehanda* was a spirit-medium who championed and led the 1896 Shona uprisings against British colonial advances in Zimbabwe (Ellert 1989: 22).
- 11 *Zhii* is a Shona word referring to 'devastating action which completely destroys or reduces to rubble' (Ellert 1989: 2).
- 12 *Zhanda* groups were vigilante groups formed by African nationalists to destabilize and make Rhodesia ungovernable.
- 13 This is inferred from the 26th Independence speech by President Mugabe on 18 April 2006. On that occasion, Mugabe argued that Operation *Murambatsvina* succeeded in its objectives.

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