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The 1987 Zimbabwe National Unity Accord and its Aftermath: A Case of Peace without Reconciliation?

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Introduction

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, socialism was dominant in the Third World and the ruling party embraced this doctrine as its governmental ideology. Socialism was viewed as the most appropriate method for achieving socio-economic equity, justice and prosperity. The recently ended war had caused massive destruction of infrastructure and the population had swelled beyond the capacity of the existing facilities. In the aftermath of the struggle for independence, the government had to move fast in dealing with the popular demands that informed the struggle. Anyang' Nyong'o (1987:18) aptly noted that:

It was observed that the appropriate response to popular demands was developed; that development could be planned for; that planning essentially involved the optimum utilisation of available domestic and foreign resources to achieve certain growth targets; and that for the majority of popular masses to benefit, these growth targets had to be in the rural areas, hence rural development.

All sections of society were to contribute to development under the tutelage of the socialist state. The immediate post-colonial era witnessed phenomenal growth. Many schools, clinics, veterinary and crop marketing facilities were constructed, uplifting the standard of living of the general populace. However, in the political arena, the dispensation that emerged had no room for diversity. Zeleza (1997:412-13) observed that:

With the attainment of *uburu* there was the institutionalisation of the independence contract in which all, the people, the masses, were supposed to pray at the altar of nation building and development, and the articulation of sectional class, social, community, ethnic and gender interests was frowned upon as selfish and subversive.

Herein lies the paradox of post-colonial governance: liberation movements, under whose banner independence was attained, fought for plurality of the political space, but upon assuming the portals of power, sought to obliterate difference. This chapter examines this dynamic in the case of Zimbabwe. In particular it focuses on the Matabeleland crisis and highlights the inadequacies of the Unity Accord established to end the violence. These have spilt over into the present tensions and contradictions within Zimbabwe.

The Matabeleland crisis: 1982–1987

Incapacity to tolerate political difference and/or the lack of tolerance to share political space by the ruling elite marred Africa's post-colonial nation building processes. Zimbabwe's civil war of 1982 to 1987 was an outcome of the homogenous conceptualisation and practice of nation-building in Africa. Close to twenty thousand people perished in what became known as the Matabeleland crisis (see the report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Alexander, McGregor and Ranger 2000 for a detailed critique on the history of violence in Matabeleland).

The war pitted the newly formed (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front, ZANU-PF) government against its liberation ally, Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front (ZAPU-PF). The war was a spill-over from the nationalist politics of the 1960s and 1970s. Nationalism had the ambiguity of being both exclusionary and all-embracing. It subsumed class, ethnic and religious differences, and, at the same time, tried to use these cleavages for its sustenance. Alexander observed that the escalation of violence after the end of the liberation war built on the two guerrilla armies' (Zanla for ZANU and Zipra for ZAPU) regional patterns of recruitment and operation during the 1970s, and the history of animosity and the distrust between the two armies and their political leaders (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger 2000: 181). These patterns left Zipra forces dominated by Ndebele speakers from Matabeleland, while Zanla was predominantly Shona-speaking. Operational areas maintained significance in terms of political loyalties: voting largely, though not completely, followed ethnic and regional divisions, creating the possibility of conflict along these lines (Cliffe, Mpofo and Munslow; cited in Alexander et al 2000: 181). Zipra's capacity for conventional warfare was also a source of friction. Following ZANU-PF's victory in the February 1980

elections, the possibility that the clearly surprised and disappointed ZAPU would use these forces, which were still largely based outside the country, to obtain victory by other means was a source of concern for ZANU-PF. These seeds of distrust and division fell on fertile ground in the early 1980s (Alexander et al 2000:181). When the war ended guerrillas were supposed to move into Assembly Points (APs) for disbanding, demobilisation or integration into the newly created Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). However, there were incessant, often violent, conflicts between Zanla and Zipra combatants caused by mutual suspicion. This resulted first in the demotion of the ZAPU leader, Joshua Nkomo, serving in the national unity government, from Minister of Home Affairs to Minister Without Portfolio (Alexander et al 2000:181). This angered ZAPU and Zipra cadres. The government secretly initiated the training of the notorious Fifth Brigade by 106 North Korean instructors. In February 1982 the government announced it had discovered vast amounts of arms on properties owned by the ZAPU Company, Nitram, and around Zipra APs. These allegations were used as grounds for confiscating the properties and sacking Nkomo and other ZAPU ministers. Many deserted the army due to fear of persecution and took up arms.

After February 1982, the room for political conciliation disappeared. Prime Minister Robert Mugabe treated the caches as definitive proof that ZAPU had always been planning a coup. It was said that it had held back forces and cached weapons to fight in a final struggle to overthrow a ZANU-PF government if it came to power (Alexander et al 2000:181). Subsequent attacks on the Prime Minister's residence were ascribed to Zipra guerrillas. Joshua Nkomo continued professing his innocence and that of his party, but to no avail.

South Africa, through its policy of destructive engagement with the frontline states, exacerbated the situation. It fomented guerrilla insurgency in the country. South Africa sabotaged Inkomo Barracks in August 1981, and nearly succeeded in liquidating the ZANU-PF leadership. The Zimbabwe Air force was decimated in an attack on the Thornhill airbase in July 1982. In August of the same year, three white soldiers of the South African Defence Forces (SADF) were killed in a clash inside Zimbabwe (Alexander et al 2000:181). At the end of 1982, South Africa launched 'Operation Drama', an effort, which involved recruiting, and arming a Zimbabwean insurgent group dubbed, Super ZAPU. The ZANU-PF government grew increasingly paranoid. All this resulted in ZANU being convinced that the crisis could only be resolved militarily. Former Zipra cadres were persecuted, especially those in the army. Some fled for dear life while those who remained in the army were often demoted. Alexander *et al* (2000:181) note that:

[T]he desertion in 1982 of thousands of armed former Zipras from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and their persecution at home led to a vast increase of dissident violence in Matabeleland. These dissidents were not the same as those of 1980. Their position was due to the deterioration of relations within the ZNA and targeting of former Zipras outside it, a situation that was to worsen dramatically with the deployment of the notorious Fifth Brigade to Matabeleland North in 1983.

The Fifth Brigade was unlike other units of the ZNA. It was accountable only to the then Prime Minister, and not to the normal military chain of command. It was specifically intended for what were termed 'internal defense purposes' (Alexander et al 2000:181). From its deployment in Matabeleland North in January 1983 until its withdrawal from Matabeleland South in late 1984, the brigade carried out a grotesquely violent campaign. It targeted party chairmen and civil servants, civilians at large, as well as former Zipra combatants, refugees, and anyone suspected of having crossed the border to Botswana in the course of the liberation war. Former Zipra combatants rarely survived encounters with this brigade. Its violence largely shaped the spread and character of dissidency (Alexander et al 2000). The operation to expunge the dissidents was code-named *Gukurahundi* (in Shona, this phrase means the first rains of the year that wash away rubbish). Although the government deployed many sectors of its security apparatus, the Fifth Brigade excelled in repression. Many people were tortured, raped, murdered, maimed in the pursuit of dissident quashing. Many people still bear the mental and physical scars of the war.

There are differing views on the civil war. Although ethnicity was a factor in the war, in terms of its spatial dimensions, expressions and victims, its course did not altogether follow ethnic lines. The dissidents did not enjoy civilian support. Areas that were predominantly Shona were also attacked if they were perceived to be amenable to the dissident cause, especially those that fell under the ZAPU spheres of influence during the liberation struggle. Such areas included Hurungwe and Gokwe. On the part of the former ZAPU cadres who joined dissident ranks, the war of the 1980s had no political leadership, had no civilian and party support, no hope of success but only of survival (Alexander et al 2000:181). No protagonists in the disturbances of the 1980s were immune to tribal animosities. The Fifth Brigade and other state security units targeted largely Ndebeles. On the other, the dissidents attacked Shona speakers, particularly those in the Midlands district of Mberengwa. The Matabeleland inferno ended after the signing of the Unity Accord on 22 December 1987 between Prime Minister Mugabe and the ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo, who had been persecuted by the ZANU government,

and had ultimately gone into exile. A blanket amnesty was given to the dissidents and many surrendered mostly after assurances from their leadership.

A critique of the 1987 Unity Accord

The best way to bring peace and reconciliation in communities is through truth telling and a shared willingness to reconcile by all the major actors in a war. Civil wars and systematic repression need to end and the keyword in post-conflict reconstruction is 'reconciliation'. The government, social organisations, the churches, and the entire population have to come to terms with the past in one way or the other.

All cultural and religious traditions have forms of reconciliation. Each of these traditions also puts forward certain requirements regarding reconciliation. For example, the truth is to be established 'officially', damages are to be paid, the guilty are to be recognised publicly, the victims are to be restored their honour, or the guilty persons are to be submitted to real or symbolic punishment (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2003). These are also manifest in international law. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, 'that it is of utmost importance that the human rights are protected by the supremacy of law'. A government is, therefore, obliged to investigate all accusations of violations of human rights, and report the violations from the past (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2003).

In Rwanda, the government built memorials to remember victims of the genocide and revived the traditional *gacaca* system of justice as a way of healing the nation in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. Helen Vesperini (2002: 20) noted that:

[T]he Rwandan government has revamped a traditional style of community justice known as the *gacaca* court system. The dual aim of the courts is to deal with the backlog of genocide suspects crammed into the country's prison, and heal the deep scars left by the 1994 genocide that killed at least half a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

The 1987 Unity Accord ended the war but did not bring peace and reconciliation. It was elitist and embodied a top-down approach to governance. Nkomo and Mugabe signed the Accord and then sold it to the people. The grassroots were never consulted in the peace-making process and no reconciliation efforts were made.

According to Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2003), the foundation of reconciliation is the recognition of suffering. This distinguishes reconciliation from a process which does not go beyond political negotiations and compromises. Recognition of individual suffering may be shaped by extensive official reports with a

great deal of attention to individual cases or by measures of compensation and redress which benefit the victims, by remembering the names of the victims, as in religious celebrations, on memorial stones, in literature, etc., or by lasting public recognition of the pain and grief the victims and dependents have to live with. Reconciliation is the first step towards a society which can give a lasting guarantee for dignity and justice. The 1987 Accord resulted in the cessation of hostilities but brought no peace and unity. Victims of the violence have not been compensated. Neither have those who perpetrated the violence been tried nor have they sought the forgiveness of their victims, at least through acknowledging their roles in the crisis. The Zimbabwean Unity Accord is viewed, perceived and analysed in personality terms rather than as a communal and national undertaking. Many saw the passing away of Nkomo, in July 1999, as the death knell of the Accord. Bulawayo Human Rights Lawyer David Coltart (2000) noted that:

[J]ust as the President Robert Mugabe is the cement that holds ZANU (PF) together, Nkomo was the cement that held PF ZAPU together and those former (PF) ZAPU members who are now ZANU PF. I think there is a possibility that his death will unleash some political battle to get his mantle. It could speed up the disintegration of the party in the region but much will depend on the public who respected him because of his history.

Former ZANU-PF Central Committee member, Norman Mabhena, who noted that after Nkomo the ruling party had no chance of dominating the Matabeleland region echoed the above sentiments by observing that 'there is no way ZANU-PF can rise again in Matabeleland. It won in the last elections (1995/6) because people respected Nkomo' (see *Sunday Mail*, 2 July 2000 and also the *Financial Gazette*, 13 March 2002).

The people of Matabeleland and the Midlands have survived two terrible civil wars in as many decades, and they have received no guarantee that it will not happen again. In spite of apparent state and dissident atrocities there has been no official apology. In fact, the war episode is spoken of in muffled voices by officialdom. The Ndebele ethnic communities in Matabeleland and the Midlands are still hostile towards the ruling ZANU-PF party and its government (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2003:2). This was indicated by their overwhelming votes for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2000 and 2002. Some of the weaknesses of the Unity Accord are that it was crafted in a *minimalist* way that did not go beyond a power-sharing formula between the leading political elites in ZAPU-PF and ZANU-PF. The dominant post-Unity Accord politics in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions revolved around

the issues of marginalisation, state accountability, and quest for an apology, as well as compensation for the victims of the state sanctioned violence of the 1980s. These demands proved that the Unity Accord had a poor post-conflict peace-building framework that encompassed the aspirations and demands of the grassroots (see Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2003:2).

The post-Unity Accord scenario in Zimbabwe did not embrace prerequisites for reconciliation and durable peace. Lasting peace can be established through a number of mechanisms which include some of the factors raised below.

1. The establishment of all-embracing political system through power-sharing arrangements between erstwhile protagonists. This was partly achieved in Zimbabwe because (PF) ZAPU assumed posts in government and Joshua Nkomo became one of the country's two Vice-Presidents, a post that he held until his death in July 1999. Democratic rebuilding involving eradication of fear among citizens, and enhancing accountability, transparency, legitimacy, human security, and social peace is also necessary.
2. Psychological rebuilding is imperative to communities that have survived the ravages of violence. The CCJP report noted that part of the process of psychological healing for any victim of abuse is being given the opportunity to recount that suffering to a supportive, non-judgmental audience. While the signing of the National Unity Accord was positive for reconciliation, there are many other experiences that the national leadership need to hear and take account of if they wish to prevent similar clashes. The process of opening up involves not just the victims but also the perpetrators of violence. They need an atmosphere of truth telling in order to purge themselves of their memories of events. National exorcism is imperative. In African cultures those who do injustice to others need to compensate their victims in order to avoid the wrath of avenging spirits. It is in this spirit that Truth Commissions have been set up in many parts of the world, notably South Africa and Rwanda.
3. The establishment of effective and impartial systems of justice is crucial to reconciliation. The state should also regard court verdicts in order to establish citizen confidence in the judicial system. In the context of the 1982-1987 crisis the government showed a pathetic disregard of the verdicts of the courts. In 1982, Zipra commanders Lookout Masuku, Dumiso Dabengwa and others were arraigned before the courts for treason and the evidence against them failed to convince a high court judge, but they remained in jail until 1986 (Alexander et al 2000:188).
4. Reconciliation also entails reconstruction and economic development. According to international treaties, victims have a right to material compensation.

Post-colonial Zimbabwe's development paradigm was rural-oriented, and Matabeleland and some parts of the Midlands Provinces did not benefit due to the ongoing disturbances. In this context, after the Unity Accord massive, infrastructural development and rehabilitation should have been undertaken. Unfortunately, not much was done and the people feel alienated from national development processes. This was confirmed in the 2000 Parliamentary elections in which the ruling ZANU-PF was trounced in all but two of the Matabeleland constituencies. One of the ex-Zipra luminaries, Dumiso Dabengwa, a losing ruling party candidate in the elections, observed that:

[T]he people have rejected us not only as candidates, but also as ruling party ZANU-PF now. The reason is that since the signing of the Unity Accord in December 1987, the people of Bulawayo feel they have not gained anything. The people have been saying what is the use of supporting ZANU-PF and its candidates and that is their message (*Sunday Mail*, 2 July 2000).

The Zimbabwean Unity Accord glossed over truth telling, an integral component of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, thereby downplaying its relevance to reconciliation (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2003:2). The Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice (1997:3) noted that:

[O]ne of the most painful aspects of the 1980s conflict for its victims is their perception that their plight is unacknowledged. Officially, the state continues to deny any serious culpability for events during that year, and refuses to allow open dialogue on the issue. In effect, there is a significant chunk of Zimbabwean history, which is largely unknown, except to those who experienced it first hand. All Zimbabweans, both present and future, should be allowed access to history.

Memory, history and contemporary politics: Putting the 1980s war into perspective

Zimbabwe is currently in a crisis. Its economy is in a state of paralysis. The political sphere is characterised by violent intolerance. Zimbabwe's deterioration began in 1995. From that point on, fiscal deficits, foreign currency shortages and fuel scarcity became the major characteristics of the Zimbabwean economy. Civic organisations increased in number and began to shape critically society's views. Of major interest in this regard was the emergence of a vibrant civil society, notably the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), in late 1997, which spearheaded the crusade for a new constitution to replace the anachronistic Lancaster House Constitution of 1979. The government responded by establishing the National Constitutional Commission (NCC). The NCC was mandated to seek people's views and,

consequently, formulate a homegrown constitution. However, the NCC's draft constitution was rejected by the people in the February 2000 Referendum. This outcome was due to the opposition campaign against the Commission's Constitution through both the electronic and print media.

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

[T]his party was an outcome of broad alliance politics, bringing together trade unionists, intellectuals, the urban middle class, rural producers, commercial farmers, and sections of the industrial class. The alliance—based on a widespread disillusionment with the government's economic mismanagement, the demand for constitutional, and criticism of a transparent land reform process—has brought together many seemingly contradictory interest groups into a conjectural alliance, which faces many tensions over future policies (2001:1).

All this pressure, linked to declining legitimacy, compelled the ruling party to revive its political fortunes through aggressive and violent means. Various interests groups were co-opted by the establishment in an attempt to win back lost political ground. Veterans of the liberation war and unemployed youths were used to aggressively mobilise and co-opt the disenchanted masses back to the ruling party fold. President Mugabe began to use radical rhetoric to condemn the West, the whites and the 'misguided opposition' for being responsible for the country's increasingly poor state. He capitalised on the peasantry's land hunger by attempting to generalise the struggle for land to a continental level and project it into the proposition that the struggle over land was the sole signifier of authentic, liberated nationhood (Raftopoulos 2001:3). With that claim, contradicted as it is by two decades of land reform failure, came something else: a memory of an anti-colonial struggle that only ZANU-PF can invoke, a memory of a time when the party was, in fact, a fish within the sea of the rural masses (Raftopoulos 2001:3).

This revived form of nationalism emerged largely because of the government's failure to improve the citizens' material reality in the 1990s. According to Sklar, 'any generation that fails to cope effectively with problems of society will seek solace in escapist, reactionary, and racist forms of nationalism, which obscure the cause of its failure and accomplish little lasting value' (cited in Falola 2002:xv). In the Zimbabwean social, political and economic conflagration, the country 'has been divided into two': the rural ZANU-PF-dominated and the urban MDC-dominated spheres. In the last

two elections, the parliamentary elections of 2000 and the presidential elections of 2002, this dichotomy emerged. However, the MDC is extremely popular in the rural provinces of Matabeleland and the Midlands. It scored emphatic victories in the two elections. This is quite different from other Shona-dominated constituencies where ZANU-PF has apparent hegemony. The popularity of the MDC in these rural areas is because of the people's memory of what the ZANU government did to them in the 1980s and its failure to develop their areas in the years after. This displeasure partly explains the emergence of sectarian and opportunistic parties that have emerged with the aim of riding on the crest of this antagonism. Among these are ZAPU (different from the nationalist one of the 1960s) and the Liberty Party of Zimbabwe, whose policies advocate a federal system of government. They hoped to divide Zimbabwe into five provinces with each having its own regional government, parliament and budget, but occasionally reporting to the central government.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean government is aware of the grievances of the people of Matabeleland and some parts of the Midlands but there is little it can do considering the poor state of the economy. Again, acknowledging the injustices of the past in the current harsh macroeconomic environment for which it is largely to blame, would further antagonise the people. This means that the culture of silence will continue for some time to come. The government is more concerned with keeping its hold on power than on any meaningful peace-building projects. The ruling party has co-opted many sections of society, youths, women's groups and intellectuals, into the political realm in the past five years in scenes analogous to the 1980s when ZANU-PF was still a hegemonic, commandist-cum-para-militaristic party, with no regard for dissenting ideas. Notably the participation of youth in the Zimbabwean body politic has been viewed with scepticism. Some have castigated the process for creating social and political banditry (see *The Daily News*, 6 September 2003). Youths have been involved in both pre- and post-election violence. Much of the violence in Zimbabwe's highly polarised political terrain is ascribed to the youths. Youths have contributed to the shrinkage of democratic space in the recent past. In an attempt to win support the ZANU-PF government revived the Youth Service programmes of the 1980s in the form of the National Youth Service. Ostensibly, the National Youth Service was introduced to reorient Zimbabwean youths into patriotic and self-reliant young men and women, but, in reality, was designed to woo the young back into the fold. The compulsory national service programme was introduced in early 2000. This

acute desire to keep power at all costs by the ruling party has resulted in violence, intolerance and the victimisation of truth. Such a scenario does not provide an enabling environment for what happened in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s to be heard.

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