

EXAMINING THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE'S POLITICS IN THE POST 2014 ZANU PF CONGRESS ERA

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ABSTRACT: *The article examines the period after the ZANU PF congress that was held in 2014 in Harare. The researchers contend that this congress was unprecedented in ZANU PF as it saw the sacking of the party's vice president and her perceived allies. The congress also saw a change in the constitution that gave appointing powers to the president to choose his assistants as vice presidents. The researchers attempted a discourse analysis of media discourses reporting on and after the congress to gauge whether there is a possibility of violence in Zimbabwe's politics after this unprecedented congress and in the run-up to elections in 2018. Comparisons are made between conditions in the country today and those associated with violence in the past. The study concludes tentatively noting that the possibility of violence is likely, given the prevailing conditions especially in ZANU PF; the potential for violence is however not outright certain as the violence has not yet taken place except for a few uncoordinated flashpoints. It remains to be seen if the conditions will remain like this as there is still a lot of time before the elections of 2018.*

KEYWORDS: Political Violence, Power Politics, Party-Factionalism.

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The ruling party in Zimbabwe ZANU PF held an elective congress in December 2014. The period leading to the congress was punctuated by a heightened verbal assault of Joice Mujuru who was then the second secretary of the party and vice president of the state. Mujuru was subsequently sacked from the post of second secretary and vice president and later from the party altogether. The leading role in the verbal assault was championed by Grace Mugabe, wife to the first secretary and president of the state, Robert Mugabe, who addressed nationwide rallies lambasting Mujuru and her perceived allies. Many of these allies were then purged from the party through staged votes-of-no-confidence. Grace Mugabe was also confirmed as the new secretary for women affairs by the congress and was subsequently appointed to the party's powerful politburo by the President. After the congress and in the following year, Grace Mugabe continued her nationwide, meet-the-people rallies and donated a lot of goods ranging from agricultural implements and rice. Grace Mugabe also became a big newsmaker as many print and electronic media outfits seldom passed a week without a screaming Grace Mugabe headline. These media discourses ranged from some linking her political rise to the succession issues in Zimbabwe (Mail and Guardian, 31 July 2014; The

Standard, 22 November 2015); some media quarters also likened her to Mao's last wife and widow Jiang Qing (Zimbabwe Independent, 29 August 2014). Yet some called her political rise a political-bedroom-coup (Zimbabwe Independent, 3 July 2015). Other media messages cast her as the one who was now calling the shots in Zimbabwe ahead of a perceived-as-ageing Robert Mugabe (Voice of America, 16 December 2015); whilst some lauded and some condemned her attainment of a supposedly superfast PhD degree (The Guardian, 15 September 2014). It is in this context that, using media discourses as primary sources of data, this article seeks to examine the potential for violence in the politics of Zimbabwe in the era after this said definitive congress. The potential for violence is assumed simply because the events leading to and those after the congress were simply unprecedented in the history of ZANU PF and that of the state of Zimbabwe. For example, Mujuru became the first vice president to be sacked and one of her alleged misdeeds was a plan to assassinate the president, itself a violent crime. It was also unprecedented in ZANU PF that a considerable number of party members would be sacked through similar votes-of-no-confidence in all provinces of the state. The potential for violence is also assumed because the sacked vice president Mujuru went on to establish her own political outfit dubbed People First in a move similar to that of Simba Makoni, another ousted ZANU PF member who had earlier formed his own party that contested the 2008 plebiscite that was seen as violent by some observers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kalyvas (2003) offers a definition of political violence and notes that, violence itself means the exercise of physical force to harm the welfare or physical integrity of the victim and 'political violence is the exercise of such force that is politically motivated and can be exercised by governmental or anti-governmental groups. Depending on its exact definition, political violence is regarded as an essential ingredient of the somewhat broader notion of political instability'. It is poignant to interrogate why political actors resort to this detestable instrument. A lot has been written by various scholars on the causes of violence in Africa. Staub (1999) offers some of these causes and it is likely that the situation that one observes today in Zimbabwe and ZANU PF politics can spawn violence:

Like individual violence, so group violence has instigators. Difficult conditions of life in a society, singly or in combination, are frequent instigators: severe economic problems, great political turmoil, great and rapid societal change. At times, when there are other potential instigators, difficult life conditions may activate them or magnify their instigating power

Here in the case of Zimbabwe a lot of supposed instigators can be pointed out. They include individuals calling for others to be expelled from political parties to factionalism that, although usually denied, has certainly rocked ZANU PF. There are psychological and social processes that can move people to violence, such as difficult life conditions that lead 'individuals to turn to the group for identity and connection; they lead to scapegoating, claiming that some other group is responsible for life problems (Staub, 1999). In Zimbabwe scapegoating has been rampant in the run-up and after the ZANU PF 2014 elective congress where a bunch of party members were labelled 'gamatox' and unwanted in the party. This takes one to another dimension that is very important in violence discourses; the use of language. Reckless language use, especially labelling and scapegoating has been known to cause violence elsewhere, for example in the Rwandan genocide. Mapara and Wasosa (2012)

examine the use of language in Zimbabwe's politics and contend that the language used by Zimbabwe's two major political parties, ZANU PF and MDC helps to fuel the hostility between them. The results are negative as everyone becomes polarized along party lines and ethnic and racial lines. In the end, this has seen the talk on the existence of democracy by both parties appear hypocritical as in reality they do not tolerate each other. There is need to improve on language use to ensure that there is behaviour change among the parties' supporters to avoid violence. In 2014 the use of negative language to describe political opponents was also seen in ZANU PF and it also remains to be seen whether this will result in violence or not.

Another cause of violence in Zimbabwe has been seen as a heritage of violence passed on from the time of the liberation struggle (Alexander and Miles-Tendi, 2008). This is a theory that contends that the blight of violence branded on the psyche of many Zimbabweans during the struggle has been hard to shake off, so whenever there is a political problem in contemporary times, violence becomes an easy solution. In fact Miles-Tendi and Alexander (2008) contend that Zimbabwe is a nation marked by violence:

Zimbabwe's politics are profoundly shaped by violence. Violence has motivated, divided and united each of Zimbabwe's political parties in distinctive ways, it has shaped their ability to mobilise, their constituencies and their ideology, it has marked successive electoral contests and it has been used to transform the state. The ruling Zanu(PF)'s 'third chimurenga', launched in 2000, is rooted in a historical narrative of violence that links the uprisings against conquest in the 1890s to the liberation war of the 1970s and the battle to reclaim the nation's white-owned farmland in 2000.

The above paragraph would seem to celebrate the use of violence in Zimbabwe, but the two writers are far from celebrating this blight as they note that, 'The Zimbabwean state has a convincing monopoly on violence but its continued abuse of that monopoly may sow the seeds for its future demise'. In other words this use of violence in the past is regrettable except only when it was used constructively and creatively in Fanonian terms to overthrow the racist government of Ian Smith. Violence done by ZANU PF after the liberation struggle has largely been targeted at opposition parties. Kriger (2005) notes that, 'Organized violence and intimidation of the opposition, albeit of varying intensity, has been a recurrent strategy of the ruling party before, during and often after elections to punish constituencies that dared oppose it'. It therefore remains to be seen whether the party will now not turn upon itself after the historic and game-changing congress of December 2014. Whenever the party has turned upon itself in the past, the result has always been a bloodbath, for example during the Nhari and Badza rebellion in the liberation struggle. Mazarire (2011) offers a concise summary of the events that transpired during this time:

The varied versions of the course of the rebellion show that Nhari initially attempted to engage the High Command by re-asserting the concept of broad-based dialogue. When that failed, he tried to force dialogue upon a captured audience.....He was the first to use execution as a means of eliminating those who disagreed with him, having shot or ordered the killing of nearly 70 guerrillas who refused to join him. Nhari and Badza were killed in the recapture of Chifombo by a ZANLA contingent from Tanzania.

The events described here have a strong resemblance to what is happening in the revolutionary party today where anyone who tries to air a divergent opinion in either

suspended or expelled from the party; Jabulani Sibanda and Christopher Mutsvangwa are quick examples who got burnt after expressing that the institution of marriage between president Mugabe and the first lady should not be conflated with that of the state. Today, however, no violence has yet been seen, and it remains to be seen if any shall be seen. The reasons for the use of violence by ZANU PF are obviously clear; violence during the liberation war was seen as legitimate by the peasants and it therefore managed to garner support for the revolutionary party. This is also true elsewhere as noted by Jaeger et al (2015) who contend that, 'Palestinian factions can effectively use violence to garner support from the Palestinian public, as measured through opinion polls. We find mixed support for this hypothesis. Permanent increases in violence by Fatah and Hamas appear to lead to increases in support for these factions, although not through reducing support for the other faction'. Violence after independence is however unrefreshing and it is not clear whether it also garners support for the party or whether it does the opposite. It is also not clear if the factions now within ZANU PF will resort to violence to seek support as in Palestinian case study outlined above.

METHODOLOGY

The research makes use of discourse analysis as an instrument of gathering data. The supposition in doing discourse analysis is that language, written or spoken is as performative as it is functional. It should never be treated as a 'neutral, transparent, means of communication' (Berger 1991). The implication is that language is constructive and constitutive of social, political, economic life including historical aspects of life. Here, language is viewed as a social performance or a social action – it is productive and constitutive (language both creates social phenomena and is representative of social phenomena). The method explores power relations from a critical standpoint in an attempt to make sense of the social world by providing new critical insights. The language of media discourses in Zimbabwe after the ZANU PF 2014 congress will therefore be examined with a specific aim to establish if violence can be a possibility in Zimbabwe's politics especially considering the beckoning 2018 elections.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Little pockets of violence within the ruling ZANU PF party have been reported in the media. These include: the *Daily News* of 12 May 2015 had the headline 'ZANU PF violence cause for concern' where it was reported that 'people in Hurungwe West were reportedly sending out an SOS signal to step up pressure on ZANU PF to cease and desist from violence. This was in the run-up to the by election in the constituency after the then member of parliament, Themba Mliswa had been expelled from ZANU PF as he was seen as a Joice Mujuru loyalist. The *Newsday* of 9 July 2015 reported that riot police had to be called in Goromonzi to control ZANU PF supporters who were fighting running battles during district elections. In another related story it was also reported that several ZANU PF members had been injured and rushed to hospital in Kadoma in district elections (*Newsday*, 27 October 2015). The *Herald* of 9 November also reported about tempers flaring at a Mutare ZANU PF meeting resulting in a cabinet minister's aide manhandling a youth provincial executive member. The following day there was news about a 'series of violent clashes pitting ZANU PF and MDC supporters' in

Hopley (*Newsday*, 10 November 2015). And *The Standard* of 15 November 2015 reported about two ZANU PF district members who were axed to death in Chitungwiza by another district member. Examples of media discourses reporting on political violence given here are a very few as listing all of them here would not be possible because of lack of space. Nevertheless a neutral reading through the few given here would be forgiven to assume that Zimbabwe is a nation ready to implode. The truth is that the nation is yet to implode although such pockets of violence continue to rear their ugly heads.

What is clear is that, what these pockets of violence contend for Zimbabwe's politics is not at all refreshing considering that widespread violence can be sparked by these small fires. ZANU PF as a party also has a history of violence, as already shown and also with its leader having once said that the party has degrees of violence. It is also clear that if there is a political party that is capable of really causing serious violence in Zimbabwe it is ZANU PF as it controls and has adherents in the top echelons on the police, army and intelligence services. And as already seen in the history of the party, it is clear that at one time party factionalism was resolved by massive violence in the case of the Nhari and Badza rebellion during the liberation war. In many instances worldwide, and as has been shown in the history of Zimbabwe, instances of violence are linked to past violence; in the case of Zimbabwe, peace has always been preceded by violence for example in 1980 after a liberation war and in 2009 after a violent election run-off. The factionalism in ZANU PF today as shown in the above cited media discourses also point to a scenario that is not very dissimilar to 2008. It is imperative at this point to take a look at some events that have occurred within ZANU PF that are unprecedented such that they will have certain consequences: the rallies held by the first lady have been seen by some observers as similar to rallies that are normally held by president Mugabe. This certainly has the potential to cause some friction in the party as it will be seen as if the first lady is exalted above all except the president himself. Even the women's league secretary replaced by Grace Mugabe, Oppah Muchinguri never held such big rallies. It remains to be seen whether this scenario will spawn hard violence or not; in whatever case it is clear from the commentaries of various observers that some level of psychological violence has already been caused. A picture of a dejected Christopher Mutsvangwa being chastised by President Mugabe made rounds on social media and caused people to have a laugh that they would regret if these events were to lead to violence in future.

The sacking of more than 20 members from ZANU PF does not also spell a very refreshing future picture for Zimbabwe politics. And the word that *The Herald* constantly uses 'booted out' itself has violent connotations for readers and those who indeed get 'booted out' of the party'. The only thing for the sacked members to do would be to form a new party and this is already on the cards if the so called People First is ever to become a full-fledged and established opposition party. If it becomes a big opposition party then one would not be faulted by not ruling out violence if the history of the country's politics is considered. When a seemingly big party, the MDC was formed in 1999, the elections that followed in 2000, 2002 and 2005 were often marred by scenes of horrid violence. And it will also be problematic because this time the opposition is to be led by someone once a vice president who could have sympathisers in the police, the army and intelligence services.

One person who deserves to be discussed at length is the first lady Dr Grace Mugabe. The amount of media attention that she got in the period after the congress and during her second set of rallies warrant that a close attention should be focused on her persona. The question regarding her here would be whether she has the potential to be an instigator for violence.

The Newsday of December 21 2015 points a big accusatory finger at her under the headline, 'Grace fuelled violence'. The story contends that Dr Grace is guilty 'of fuelling most intra and inter-party human rights violations, recorded in the country, particularly during her rallies last month, where the ruling party contributed about 93% of violence cases tabulated by the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP)'. The accusation points to observed pockets of violence during this period that have been alluded to earlier in this paper. It remains to be seen whether these flashpoints will lead to a full scale implosion. Another potential for violence resides in Dr Grace's relationship with the war veterans. Media discourses seem to point to a cat and mouse game between the two parties with the former veteran's chairman Jabulani Sibanda having accused Dr Grace of having carried out a bedroom coup and threatening to march to the state house to talk to President Mugabe about it. This marching, if it had been done would certainly had been a violent march, given the history and reputation of the veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Even president Mugabe responded by threatening more violence when he said Sibanda was foolish to want to pit himself against 'my soldiers'. Sentiments of a similar nature were later to be repeated by war veterans minister Christopher Mutsvangwa who also pointed out a 'crying poverty of institutional memory' in the party's commissariat department. Although a possibility of a rift between Dr Grace and the war veterans was to be denied by *The Herald's* columnist Nathaniel Manheru who said the first lady's beef was only with a few rogue veterans, these similar sentiments expressed by two leaders of the veterans seem to suggest that there is something being whispered in the war veterans' corridors. One hopes that whatever it is, it will not lead the nation to violence.

CONCLUSION

The paper has shown that conditions exist in contemporary Zimbabwean politics that can cause violence. The paper has shown this through a comparative analysis of the history of the nation from the liberation struggle, through various elections held and up to the present. The history of Zimbabwe's ruling party ZANU PF and its association with violence has also been examined at length. The paper also noted that unlike in the past where ZANU PF has been seen to be perpetrating violence against opposition parties, today conditions exist such that the ruling party would turn upon itself and tear self apart. The paper has however noted that even though these conditions exist, violence is yet to erupt in the country except for a few pockets of uncoordinated skirmishes. Such pockets of violence however require careful management so that a full-fledged implosion can be avoided in the young potential democracy that Zimbabwe is.

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