Introduction

Unreconciled Differences: The Limits of Reconciliation Politics in Zimbabwe

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In the 24 years since independence Zimbabwe has moved from being perceived as a model of racial reconciliation in a post-guerrilla-war context to receiving widespread condemnation as a result of the ruling party's repudiation of this reconciliatory politics. This period has been characterised by different phases, which will be set out briefly in this Introduction. The various chapters in this book will discuss the central issue that the book aims to address, namely the problems and challenges that have confronted the Zimbabwean polity in attempting to build a politics of reconciliation in the context of gross inequalities inherited from settler colonial rule, and within the constraints of particular international pressures. Many of the chapters also attempt to plot a way forward from what has generally come to be known as the Zimbabwean crisis, a particular configuration of political and economic processes that has engulfed the country and concentrated the attention of the region since 2000. Against the background of the emergence of an authoritarian nationalist state confronted with increasing internal dissent, the ruling party has since 2000 carried out a series of political and economic interventions, marked by the widespread use of violence (Redress Trust 2004) but conducted through the tropes of anti-colonial redress and an anti-imperialist critique that have found widespread resonance in the region and on the African continent (Hammar et al. 2003; Phimister and Raftopoulos 2004).

The outcome of this revived nationalist assault by the Zimbabwean ruling party has been a repudiation of the national policy of reconciliation that was enunciated by the newly independent state in 1980. As we will discuss below, this was a policy born of a compromise between the liberation movement, the former colonial power and the settler elite, and constructed within a particular set of international pressures. Confronted in 2000 with the first real challenge to its rule, Zanu PF, led by Robert Mugabe, radically restructured the terrain of Zimbabwean politics towards a politics of frontal assault that had as its major targets the former colonial power, Britain, the local white population, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, the civic

movement and in general the farm workers and urban populations, among whom the opposition had developed its major support. Against this broad array of 'enemies' and 'traitors', Mugabe and his party declared political war, in a confrontation whose contours have definitively changed the political landscape in Zimbabwe.

This book sets out to understand the limits of the politics of reconciliation that were attempted in Zimbabwe for most of the last 24 years, the years of Zimbabwe's independence. It also tracks the political responses that can emerge in a situation where a combination of unresolved long-term historical grievances and undemocratic post-colonial state practices produces a particular strain of authoritarian politics through the modality of a heightened racialised discourse. The legacy of this form of politics would be a new set of problems, not only those issues of economic redress that the Zimbabwean ruling party has purported to address, but also the continued deployment of ruling party violence to subdue the voices of dissent and the broadly constructed 'enemies of the people'. As a result of the particular forms of land occupation, the economic interventions based on a contested process of state patronage, the damage to the judiciary, the politicisation of the military and a virulent media campaign aimed at the demonisation of several 'others', enormous challenges await the development of new democratic structures and spaces in Zimbabwe. However, the crisis also presents new opportunities, for while living through the forms of extreme politics that have marked the Zimbabwean landscape over the last few years, many Zimbabweans have also developed a new legacy of civic co-operation defined by a respect for the politics of constitutionalism and democratic accountability.

Independence, the policy of reconciliation and the state

The Lancaster House agreement, which ended the liberation war in Zimbabwe in 1979, and the constitution that emerged from it, together embodied a series of compromises over minority rights, in particular on the future of land ownership in the country, and guaranteed white representation in parliament. In effect the constitution gave settler capital a decade-long period of consolidation, during which issues around the radical restructuring of the legacy of economic inequality were effectively put on hold. The Lancaster House settlement was determined by a series of national, regional

and economic forces that established the contours of the compromise that necessitated the policy of reconciliation announced by President Mugabe in 1980. These forces have been well described by Ibbo Mandaza:

> Mugabe would have to begin the delicate task of nation-building in an atmosphere of intense suspicion and even hostility on the part of those he had defeated at home; against the covert threats of military, political and economic destabilisation from South Africa; and with the pervasive threat of economic and political blackmail by the imperialist powers that had been the undertakers of the Lancaster House Agreement but were now seeking to keep the new state in line. (Mandaza 1986:42)

Mugabe's reconciliation speech itself clearly embodied this 'delicate task of nation-building' as it set out to allay the fears of both the white minority and the international community:

> Henceforth you and I must strive to adapt ourselves, intellectually and spiritually to the reality of our political change and relate to each other as brothers bound one to the other by a bond of comradeship. If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. Is it not folly, therefore, that in these circumstances anybody should seek to revive the wounds and grievances of the past? The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten. (Mugabe 1980)

Continuing, Mugabe proclaimed:

> It could never be a correct justification that because the Whites oppressed us
> yesterday when they had power, the Blacks must oppress them today
> because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practised by
> white against black or by black against white. Our majority rule would easily
> turn into inhuman rule if we oppressed, persecuted or harassed those who do
> not look or think like the majority of us. (Mugabe 1980)

The language of reconciliation thus set the tone for the period of state consolidation that was the major priority of the ruling party, Zanu PF, after 1980. For unlike the transition in South Africa in 1994 in which the neo-liberal economic policies of the ANC placed the issues of black economics on the agenda in the immediate post-liberation period (Southall 1990), the reconciliation policy of Zimbabwe's ruling party, constructed within a purported discourse of socialism, placed less emphasis on legitimised private accumulation than on the extended reach and interventionism of the state. The first two chapters, those by Sachikonye and Davies, describe both the slow progress made in the spheres of the land and the economy in the 1980s, and the state's major shift in the post-2000 period to carrying out a largely elite-centred redistribution process in the face of a growing loss of legitimacy of the ruling party, and the possibility of electoral defeat. Both chapters point to the disastrous economic costs of the political crisis in Zimbabwe, and indicate the major obstacles that confront a reconstruction programme in the country. Moreover, the chapters also point to the ways in which the politics of patronage proscribe the development of a dominant economic class with a national project of transformation (Berman 2004:48).

As the new ruling party set out to place its stamp on the Zimbabwean polity, it became clear early on in the post-independence period that its reconciliation policy would be based on the subordination and control both of other political parties and of civil society. The mid-1980s crisis in Matabeleland and the violent state response to it displayed a number of traits that would mark the authoritarian statism of the post-2000 period, namely the 'excesses of a strong state, itself in may ways a direct Rhodesian inheritance, and a particular interpretation of nationalism' (Alexander et al. 2000:6; see also CCJP/LRF 1997). The outcome of this conflict was the Unity Agreement in 1987, which, while it ended the atrocities in Matabeleland, effectively emasculated the major opposition party PF Zapu and confirmed the regional

subordination of Matabeleland. Thus, while the ruling party used the language of reconciliation to structure its relations with the white elite and international capital, it deployed the discourse of unity to control and subordinate the major opposition party and the incipient civic forces. (For an elaboration of this, see the chapter by Barnes in this volume.) Moreover, as with other African states, beneath the language of unity, political tribalism continued to operate, 'held together by tenuous coalitions of ethnic leaders based on promised divisions of the resources of the state' (Berman et al. 2004:8). The chapter by Eppel describes the horrors of the Gukurahundi in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the mid 1980s, and the unresolved legacy of the atrocities of this period. Eppel also describes the continuous use of violence by the state against its citizenry throughout the post-colonial period, and the culture of impunity that has accompanied it. Thus the state language of reconciliation and unity has been persistently shadowed by state violence and coercion.

One of the central problems of the state has been the issue of war veterans, and more particularly their role and terms of compensation in the independence dispensation. While there is a certain continuity in the ways that the ruling party has used the veterans to consolidate state power (Kriger 2003), the lack of a comprehensive approach to the integration of war veterans has created both a festering problem for the state, and a ready source for mobilisation of a state in crisis. As the ruling party faced a growing challenge from opposition forces from the late 1990s, the war veterans and the ideology of 'war veteranism' became an essential part of the armoury of the ruling party as it dropped its policy of reconciliation in favour of a selective authoritarian nationalism (Hammar et al. 2003). The chapter by Nyathi describes some of the major problems that have accompanied this development.

The chapters by Rupiya, Goredema and Chuma discuss the ways in which the armed forces, the law and the media have been used to consolidate the rule of Zanu PF. Rupiya describes the difficult task of reconciling the different armies that took part in the conflict during the liberation struggle and the many successes that were achieved. He also looks at the continental peacekeeping role of the Zimbabwean armed forces and the high esteem in which the professionalism of these forces is held at continental level. This has been a crucial aspect of the growth of Mugabe's stature in Africa and the solidarity he has received in the face of broader international condemnation.

However, Rupiya also points to the increasing politicisation of the armed forces since the late 1990s, their increasing commitment to the dominant party and the difficulties this is likely to pose for a future political dispensation. Under the present conditions it is unlikely that the armed forces would tolerate any government other than Zanu PF. Similarly Goredema's chapter analyses the ways in which the relative independence of the judiciary has been severely undermined since the onset of the political crisis. What was once an arena in which the unjust interventions of the executive could be challenged with a fair amount of success has been largely restructured to facilitate the particularist demands of the ruling party. Chuma's chapter charts the course of Zanu PF's increasing monopoly of the control of the media, which has radically narrowed a key public arena. In all three cases a development within a key state institutions has severely reduced the spaces for a national reconciliation process.

Official nationalism and contested identities

A particularly damaging feature of the ruling party's response to the crisis in Zimbabwe has been the state's overarching articulation of an intolerant, selective and racialised nationalist discourse. Through the deployment of what Ranger (2004) has called 'patriotic history' the ruling party has conducted a saturated ideological attack on a range of internal 'enemies' as part of a sustained project of delegitimising opposition politics (Raftopoulos 2003). The outcome has been a narrowing of a usable national past and the further loss of democratic space in which to conduct a critical national dialogue about both the colonial past and the post-colonial present. Instead, Zanu PF has set out to expunge any complex viewing of the past, preferring a monologue around the centrality of the ruling party itself, and the inherent 'outsider' status of any historical interventions which have not fed into this one-dimensional discourse.

The chapters by Barnes, Raftopoulos, Muponde, Muzondidya and Alexander deal in various ways with the discourses of history and nationalism that have been constructed by the ruling party in the post-independence era. The chapter by Barnes demonstrates that in the teaching of history in schools since 1980, the emphasis has been more on racial unity among the formerly oppressed groups than on racial

reconciliation between the major racial groupings. As Barnes summarises her argument:

> … in Zimbabwean nationalism and nationalist educational historiography, the concept of a bifurcated racial unity, although at times bitterly contested, has been more successful than that of racial reconciliation … [T]he success of unity was no accident, ... it was achieved at the direct expense of reconciliation.

Raftopoulos' chapter discusses the outcome of this dialectic, in the form of the authoritarian nationalism that has dominated the official nationalism of the state throughout the present crisis. The proscriptions on a more critical reading of the past and the essentialised constructions of race have created new blockages to the deepening of a politics of national reconciliation. It is true that there are many sources in the past for the construction of fixed and seemingly naturalised notions of racial identity, and that this remains a key reservoir for nationalist mobilisation in former settler states. Muponde's chapter discusses the ways in which Mugabe's rhetoric on the land and 'strangers' resonates in the Zimbabwean literary tradition and in the 'social and symbolic conditions that a singular experiencing of "history" has created'. Certainly there are examples in the literature that express common experiences of racial oppression. Shimmer Chinodya in his short story 'Among the Dead' describes his view of whites in the following terms:

> I shuffled in my chair. I was in no mood for nostalgia. I had never thought that whites could be lonely. In fact I had never thought about them at all, except as our oppressors. I wasn't ready to move away from the stereotypes. (Chinodya 1998:30)

However, while Muponde has emphasised the broader symbolic resonance of the Mugabe message in the literary imagination, others have pointed to a more differentiated literary response in which the land is the 'subject of a great debate, and … no simple answers are generated by struggle alone' (Chan and Primorac 2004:65). In a separate paper Muponde makes the important point that Mugabe's nationalism

also contains a particular rendition of manhood; as Mugabe often expresses it, it is a nationalism for '*amadoda sibili*', real men. As Muponde observes:

> In advancing a discourse that suggests the recuperation of manhood, solely underwritten by ZANU PF, Mugabe holds the promise of a Zimbabwean renaissance founded on patriarchal principles. He holds the promise of a new politics of maleness which in the Zimbabwean imagination was on the wane. (Muponde 2004:7)

This 'recuperation of manhood' that has accompanied Mugabe's authoritarian nationalism has also included a visceral anti-gay campaign by the President himself. This attack on homosexuality and reassertion of nationalist manhood is part of a longer historical response of the nationalist movement to the colonial process in which the 'discursive unmanning of African men by whites was progressively abetted by the destruction of the material base of traditional African masculinity' (Epprecht 1998:641). Such conceptions of manhood have also been deployed to maintain so-called 'traditional' notions of womanhood. Describing the struggles of the women's movement in Zimbabwe, McFadden has observed that:

> Faced with the demands and threats of African men that they conform to an outdated notion of womanhood upon which the imaginary authentic African identity is premised and that they do not disrupt the cultural and social base of male rule in the public and private spheres middle class women are defiantly re-defining themselves as citizens who make choices increasingly as individuals, based on their access to and control over critical social and material resources within their respective societies. (McFadden 2002:5)[1]

While the revived nationalism of the ruling party has been constructing a series of exclusions, the racial minorities in the country have faced severe difficulties in attempting to negotiate a place in the post-independence dispensation. These difficulties stem both from the legacies of identity construction under colonial rule

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[1] In response to the appointment of a woman, Joyce Mujuru, as Vice-President of Zanu PF in December 2004, Zimbabwean feminist Everjoice Win has written that: 'Women have entered the political arena in Southern Africa in increasing numbers. We have learnt that unless we are present and participate equally at decision-making tables, our needs will not be adequately met' (Mail and Guardian 24.12.04–06.01.05).

and also from the limits and increasingly intolerant protocols of nation-building in the post-colonial period. In her chapter Alexander attempts to understand the constituent elements of white identity in Zimbabwe, both by tracing some of the major contours of its historical lineage, and by unravelling its post-colonial features. Alexander traces what she views as:

> … the formation of a white community unified by race, over and above ethnicity or class, whose national identity was founded on racialism and an idea of nation that excluded the majority of its inhabitants.

However, it is important to note that notwithstanding the seeming unity of race in definitive periods of Zimbabwe's history, the white community was also a divided entity. As Mlambo has written in one of a series of excellent articles on white immigration in Rhodesia:

> … despite the outward semblance of unity, the white Rhodesian community was deeply divided by, among other factors, racism and cultural chauvinism which emanated mostly from the settlers of British stock, evoking starkly strong reactions from other white groups in the country such as Afrikaners. (Mlambo 2000:140)

Mlambo also notes that the demography of white Rhodesians revealed them to be a 'society of immigrants and transients, most of whom did not stay long enough to establish roots in the country' (1998:124). This particular feature has been used by the Zimbabwean ruling party to great effect in characterising whites as effectively British and therefore without genuine claims to Zimbabwean nationhood.

Alexander describes the particularity of 'raced' white identity and its exclusionary notion of culture, which has served to justify positions of political and economic dominance in the colonial and post-colonial periods respectively. In the colonial period this notion of culture had as one of its central features a certain 'etiquette of whiteness', to use Allison Schute's phrase. Schute provides a very useful account of the place of such racial etiquette in settler identity. She writes that becoming Rhodesian

… was not simply a matter of assuming a racially superior mode vis-à-vis the subordinate African peoples. Crude racism could not be defended and therefore newcomers had to be taught the nuanced world of racial etiquette.' (Schute 2004:6)

An important feature of such racial etiquette was that 'inter-racial familiarity undermined whites' custom of social distance with Blacks, which in turn threatened white solidarity' (2004:6). Additionally, for the majority of the white population there has been little understanding of the history of black Zimbabweans, except as told through white narratives. This problem has been exacerbated in the last few years by a deluge of official 'nationalist history' that has grossly narrowed the focus of national history. One of the long-term results of this historical process has been what Alexander refers to as the 'schizophrenia of whiteness', which is a 'result of white lives being lived separate from and yet dependent on a majority that most do not know or understand beyond the level of appearances'.

Given such historical constraints, the policy of reconciliation remained merely a formal political hope, especially given the continuing legacy of structural inequality in the sphere of the economy. One consequence of this limited vision has been the eagerness of the ruling party to celebrate the exceptional in white achievements while at the same time carrying out a more general denigration of this particular minority. The case of white Zimbabwean swimmer, Kirsty Coventry, a triple medallist at the Athens Olympics in 2004, is illustrative of this process. As a reward for her achievement the Zimbabwean state presented her with a diplomatic passport and US$50 000. Mugabe was at the forefront in praising her, stressing her inclusion in the national project as 'our Gold Girl', and reassuring her with the words 'you are our future … you are one with us, we are together'. In this discourse the stabilised white icon can easily be incorporated into the essentialised nationalism of contemporary Zimbabwe. It is not disruptive of a more general process of exclusion of the white minority and, because of its exceptionality and singularity, it does not transgress the bounded notions of black–white relations currently propagated by the state. The result of this process was the creation of a particular icon, draped in the national flag, cocooned from the lived realities of nationalist coercion and contained by the puerile

homilies of selective reconciliation – a genuine national heroine manipulated by a crude party trick.

Continuing the discussion of minorities, Muzondidya's chapter deals with what he calls the 'invisible minorities' in Zimbabwe, namely Coloureds and descendents of immigrants from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique. These groups have suffered differing levels of discrimination by both the colonial and post-colonial states. Drawing on the work of Mamdani, Muzondidya refers to Coloureds as 'subject races' who were regarded as inferior to whites, but because of their long history of contact and racial affinity with whites were ranked at the intermediate level in the racial hierarchy. The descendents of immigrants from neighbouring countries were regarded as non-indigenous and therefore not entitled to land. In both these cases the post-colonial state has displayed either continued ambivalence or outright hostility in terms of including the members of these groups as citizens and giving them access to resources in both the land reform process and the indigenisation process more generally. As Muzondidya observes, the category of African/Zimbabwean in independent Zimbabwe has been restricted to include

> … only ancestral Zimbabweans (groups which were on Zimbabwean soil before the imposition of colonial rule) … leaving the subject minorities of the country in an anomalous position where they are, depending on the context, regarded as either not indigenous at all or 'not the right kind of indigenous'.

Muzondidya thus concludes that in Zimbabwe race 'has remained the main basis for inclusion and exclusion'.

Attempting to break the deadlock

Since the late 1990s there have been several attempts, both internally and externally, to reach a breakthrough in the Zimbabwean crisis. Between 1998 and 2000, a major constitutional debate took place in the country, which for the first time since 1980 involved a popular national process of discussion. As it turned out, this debate was as much about the performance of the ruling party as it was about the substantive issues in the proposed constitution. Thus a process that began with the potential to move

towards a new constitutional dispensation ended in a politics of bitter division, with the ruling party using its defeat in the 2000 constitutional referendum to impose a new authoritarian politics on the Zimbabwean citizenry. Kagoro's chapter traces some of the major features of this process, outlining both the progress and the pitfalls of the debate. Kagoro ends on a note of hope that a renewed constitutional process could still present the country 'with an opportunity to build national consensus and define new institutions'.

Muchena's chapter looks at the role of the church in attempting to serve as a modality for reconciliation between the major contending parties in Zimbabwe. The chapter provides an overview of the various attempts at national and regional level to involve the church in a mediating role, and the continued obstacles that have confronted this process. At every stage the ruling party has shown itself to be obstructive of the churches' efforts, often vilifying those church representatives that it has considered 'opposition politicians'. The result has been a continually stalled process of attempted mediation. Muchena concludes pessimistically that while the church could play a critical role 'in the transition of Zimbabwe to a greater and respected democracy', this task at present looks like a 'mission impossible'.

South Africa and the Zimbabwe crisis

As the Zimbabwean crisis has deepened, the role of South African diplomacy in attempting to find a way forward out of the impasse has come under increasing scrutiny. In its attempt to avoid isolation from the liberation legacy in Southern Africa while at the same time pursing its goal of continental leadership of Nepad, the South African government has constructed a policy of 'quiet diplomacy' on the Zimbabwe question. Unable to escape the resonance of Mugabe's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist onslaught, the Mbeki government has at the same time been unable to construct its own vision of the relationship between sovereignty and democracy to counter Mugabe's strong political position in the region. The result has been a South African policy position that has continually trailed Mugabe's interventions and resulted, by virtually all accounts, in a certain complicity on the part of the Mbeki government. Phimister's chapter provides a discussion of South Africa's diplomatic

position on the Zimbabwe question and concludes with an indictment of the region's position on the Mugabe regime:

> While Southern Africa's governing elites are hypersensitive to Western hypocrisy, they are oblivious to tyranny in their midst. Those who continue to hope that the South African government will bring Harare to heel are therefore likely to be disappointed.

Conclusion

In former settler societies in which race has been a central signifier of political and social identity, compounded by a global environment in which this category has been hardened, race 'and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not likely to be lightly or prematurely given up' (Gilroy 2000:12). In Zimbabwe the crises over the legacies of colonial rule and post-colonial legitimacy have certainly hardened state politics around the race question. The result has been an extraordinarily prohibitive conception of national belonging and a severe closing down of spaces for a more open discussion of citizenship, economic transformation and democratisation. While the Zimbabwean ruling party has underlined the centrality of race in Zimbabwe's history, its own vision has become trapped in the confines of this category. The challenge, as Erasmus rightly points out, 'is to find ways of recognising race and its continued effects on people's everyday lives, in an attempt to work against racial equality, while at the same time working against practices that perpetuate race thinking' (Erasmus 2004:30).

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