

# HANDING DOWN THE POISONED CHALICE: INSTITUTIONALISATION OF PARTISANSHIP, COERCION AND SOLIPSISM IN MLALAZI'S "THEY ARE COMING" (2014)

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## **Abstract**

*The seizure and maintenance of power does not merely involve physical violence or force. In most instances, it is a combination of force through coercive state institutions that are used as props of self-legitimizing and/or the creation of self-authenticating narratives that are often unquestioned and seemingly 'logical.' This paper argues that Zimbabwe, like Rhodesia, depended on the institutionalisation of partisanship and force, in order to sustain the elite's tenacious hold on power. This involves the blurring of the distinction between party and state so that in the context of this paper, ZANU-PF became a party and the state, and vice-versa. In this way all state institutions and organs invariably became party organs. The paper uses Mlalazi's short story "They Are Coming" to problematise the ways in which the ruling elite have sought to shut out the possibilities for change through the ballot and, instead, show how violence has muddied the Zimbabwean political culture such that the vistas for democracy and consensus-building have become remote. The paper concludes by arguing that the culture of militarising elections and youths, and the counter violence of the opposition, amounts to handing a poisoned chalice to successive generations.*

## **Introduction**

### **Narratives and strategies of self-validation and self-perpetuation**

Works of art offer alternative imaginaries through which nations and the process of nation-creation can either be legitimated, delegitimised, contested or rehearsed. Nations and the processes of their creation involve narrative and ideological strategies that are necessarily subjective, self-legitimizing and self-propping (Bhabha, 1990). As mental construct (Anderson, 1991), narration-creation entails occlusions, inclusions, distortions and elisions in the form of what Mbembe (1991, 2001) calls master fictions. These

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are discursive and self-validating narratives that masquerade as the national logic or incontestable historical 'truths' that seek to govern the subjected people's relations with those in power. Such narratives seek to "manufacture, codify and help reproduce group identities related to race and nation" (Mbembe 2001, p. 203). These master fictions mask themselves as commonsensical, so as to create a situation where the ruled define themselves either through, by or against them. Rhodesia created such metanarratives based on the superiority of the British race and the altruistic and civilisational nature of colonialism. This formed the basis of Rhodesian nationalism with its exclusion and 'thingification' of blacks and the fear of regression through black independence. So, in order to defer black independence and fortify their racist rule, the Rhodesian whites created those self-legitimizing narratives whose logic was to make the ruled accept their subjected positions. Where this seemed to fail, they fashioned out social, political and legal institutions that either buttressed or rendered a challenge to the status quo dangerous. By weaving a narrative of black savagery and white superiority, they hoped to immortalise white rule even as they created prisons and the police force.

Spencer and Wollman (1999) argue that narratives of the nation re-appropriate the past to lend legitimacy to their preferred configurations of national identity. The nation becomes "a hegemonic site of ideological contestation (and) selectively authorises particular formulations of national memory within certain codified rules of inclusion and exclusion" (Spencer & Wollman, 1999, p. 37). In the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) construction of the Zimbabwean nation, whites homogeneously constitute a disease that needs a total cure. They represent everything that has gone wrong in Zimbabwe; they are symbolic of the 'goblins' that work tirelessly to defer or at least delay the arrival of a fully decolonised and prosperous nation. In this narrative of the nation, they are invented as the ultimate enemies who wisely use their puppets to destabilise the nation. The nation constitutes its liberators and defenders who are those that subscribe to ZANU-PF and "Mugabeist" philosophy of the "us" and "them". This brand of politics "is fundamentally predicated upon the existence of friends and enemies, 'us' and 'them'". (Mouffe, 1994, p. 100, as cited in Spencer & Wollman, 1999) The construction of such binaries involves a certain level of gate-keeping in terms of what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten. What is scaffolded is what helps in the propping up of the ruling oligarchy – in this case the heroic exploits of the dear leader and his party and that the people should be forever grateful for his exploits (Fanon, 1963). It is a brand of poisoned nationalism copied from colonialism. This is why Primorac (2010, p. 203) argues that the "Mugabeist" construction of the nation is "both polemical and parasitic" in that in seeking to rhetorically distance itself from the colonial brand of nationalism, it, ironi-

cally, rehashes the same. The Rhodesian metanarrative was predicated on the existence of the native, inferior 'Other' and the presence of enemies in the form of Communism and later the traitorous and fickle Britain out there. Internally, there existed the terrorists led by the ungrateful nationalists who wanted to undo the good the whites had brought to Rhodesia.

The ZANU-PF conception of nation-creation and consolidation involves the use of what Ranger (2005) figures as patriotic history and what Primorac (2010) frames as the "Mugabeist patriotic" nationalist narrative. This brand of politics is narrow, exclusionary, partisan and violently racist like its colonial predecessor. It is not necessarily nationalist, but partisan in the sense it is used in the service of ZANU-PF and the justification of the Mugabe personality cult. Bull-Christiansen (2004, pp. 6-8) refers to it as "a mindless wrecking open of the archives and putting the suffering of the Zimbabwean people on display as propaganda." The metanarratives used by ZANU-PF are intended to create the impression of a nation under siege from external and internal forces bent on ousting black rule. This becomes a justification for resorting to what Fanon (1963) calls 'ultra-nationalism', where violence against perceived and invented enemies becomes a revolutionary urgency. Like the colonial narratives, the patriotism of post-independence conjured up external enemies in the form of Western countries, in particular Britain, bent on re-colonising the country. And like "Rhodesianism", the Zimbabwean patriotic narrative created internal enemies who had to be crushed if the final decolonisation (Third Chimurenga) was to be achieved. There is, in the Zimbabwean master fiction, therefore, a sense of the *déjàvu*.

Sachikonye (2011) points out that violence has been a systemic part of the ZANU-PF ideology of seizing, exercising and maintaining power since its inception in the 1960s onwards (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 43). Framed in the language of sell-out politics, stooges, puppets and Trojan horses of the liberation period, the narrative of post-independence becomes based on "new, essentialized categories of authenticity, attachment, loyalty and entitlement" which produced particular matrices of violence (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 43). That the patriotic narrative is framed as decidedly anti-imperialistic and easily Pan-Africanist is meant to establish continuities with the war of liberation and therefore diminish the violent clampdown on dissent and opposition politics; after all, war is violence. Such intolerance and validation of the ZANU-PF government becomes a strategy that helps blur the distinction between the party and its ideology with the state in order to scaffold a *de facto* one party state. In the early 1980s, the ruling party descended heavily on the opposition Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) party in an attempt to crush it. The same fate visited the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) when it dared to challenge ZANU-PF and most recently the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). ZANU-PF has always

advocated an unmolested one-party state in which the party made state decisions. By its very nature, a party-state privileges party organs over those of the state so that state institutions are subordinated to the whims of the party. In this way state organs are invariably privatised so that they pander to the interests of the party. Joshua Nkomo, in his book *The Story of my Life* (2000), observes that in the ZANU-PF scheme of things, the party organs are more important than those of the state and he finds this an aberration. For example, in situations where Cabinet meetings clash with Politburo meetings (ZANU-PF), ministers invariably attend their Politburo (ZANU-PF's highest decision-making party organ) meetings instead of Cabinet (ministerial meetings that give direction to government policies) ones.

State organs such as the police, the army, Central Intelligence organisations and the National Youth Service become institutions mobilised and deployed to do the party's bidding, especially violence, intimidation and coercion. In the 2008 presidential rerun, the army was used to unleash violence on the electorate so that they vote for Robert Mugabe in Operation *Mavhotera Papi* (Operation who did you vote for). It was a masochistic and sadistic dramatisation of the reasoning that the bullet preponderates over the ballot. These were the vestiges of war time politics in which violence is framed as the quintessence of political gamesmanship. The police, supposed to be impartial and non-partisan, became implicated in partisan politics because they criminalised opposition political activities whilst turning a blind eye to the ruling party's violent politics. According to Box (1983, p. 7), the police and the youth militia and other state organs are "used to criminalize, demoralize, incapacitate, fracture and sometimes eliminate (those elements) perceived by the powerful to be potentially or actually threatening the existing distribution of power, wealth and privilege". Such partialisation of the police force destabilises the concept of the rule of law because it becomes the rule of ZANU-PF. Some of the police officers are either war veterans or brainwashed and mentally crippled graduates from the National Youth Service or received training from ideologically 'Zanufied' cadres who gave them to understand that since ZANU-PF is the one in government, it is the one paying their salaries and therefore every police officer supports it on pain of dismissal. Apropos of this, Sachikonye (2011, p. 19) points out that "... state institutions conducted acts of commission (harassment and arrests) and omission (refusal to prosecute in cases brought to them by opposition parties." This amounts to condoning the systemic travesty of justice in a country that claims to subscribe to constitutionalism.

The National Youth Service was formed in the 2000s, ostensibly to inculcate patriotic values in the youth because the parents had abdicated that responsibility. The Youth militia, also called the "Green Bombers" or "The Border Gezi", saw the increasing militarisation of the unemployed and often unemploya-

ble youths whose numbers “swelled to over 50 000 by 2008” (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 48). The lecturers in these youth camps were largely war veterans and card-carrying members themselves fed on a heavy dosage of ZANU-PF propaganda and violence. Their lectures hammered on the politics of blood, sacrifice, hate speeches and, most egregiously, the discourse of cadavers. The greater the danger to ZANU-PF, the greater is always the need for such partisan bodies to mete out violence to those that threaten the ruling party’s stranglehold on power. In the early 1980s, there was the creation of the Youth Brigade used exclusively in Matebeleland for ZANU-PF coercive political mobilisation. The militia used the Zimbabwean colours and the Zimbabwean flag, but sang ZANU-PF revolutionary songs and “some of the most brutal forms of political violence were perpetrated by this militia” (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 48).

This paper argues that the ruling party, dating back from the liberation war, has embarked on a process of “inventing traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), that is, traditions of violence, partisanship, cult of personalism and a peculiar brand of political narcissism that equates Zimbabwe to Mugabe’s ZANU-PF and vice-versa. When the party nationalises the song ‘*ZANU ndeyeropa*’ (ZANU-PF represents blood sacrifice), it shows that “violence has been a tool of choice if and when opposition parties threaten to erode the ruling party’s support base (Sachikonye, 2011, p.19) and, as in all authoritarian regimes, state symbols, rituals and occasions are used as validating stamps for the rule of ZANU-PF and the exclusion of the insignificant others who are seen as beyond the pale of protection under the law (Bull-Christiansen, 2004). The paper uses Christopher Mlalazi’s novel *They Are Coming* to problematise the foregoing issues. It contends that the evolution of Zimbabwe has been, is, and looks set to be, a continuous odyssey of exclusions, inclusions and self-legitimation.

### **Politicizing the police and policing politics in the novel**

Totalitarian regimes often institutionalise partisanship and instruments of coercion in order to defy change (Primorac, 2010). In this novel, Mlalazi zooms in particularly on the perceptions and representations of Zimbabwean police in politically fraught times. The paper argues that the Rhodesian construction and validation of its police force crassly influenced what came after it. The Rhodesian police was a tool created to enforce racist laws that were meant to entrench white privilege against what was seen as black danger or threat. The police force was therefore manifestly partisan and violently anti-Black. That was to be expected, given the violent conquest, dispossession and equally violent maintenance of their rule. The period after independence, especially after 2000, borrows heavily, if uncritically, from its predecessor. Mbembe (2001) and Fanon (1963) theorise this apemanship when they talk about post-

independence as an “entanglement” and a case of “invading” houses formerly occupied by whites without any changes for the better. Primorac (2010, p. 203) has argued that the “Mugabeist” patriotic ideology “has foregrounded precisely the discourse which it purports to be battling against.... In that sense, the twenty-first century Zimbabwean ‘patriotic’ discourse is both polemical and parasitic.... This means that the poisoned colonial structures of exclusion and entitlement cascaded down to the independence period in the process forming what Bratton and Masunungure call ‘a militarized form of electoral authoritarianism’.”

The constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20, No.1, 2013 outlines the duties of the police to include “detecting, preventing crime, securing and protecting the lives and property of the people and enforcing the law without fear or favour. They must be non-partisan, national in character.” Although Mlalazi does not seem to be condemning the generality of the police, he nevertheless touches on the controversial partialisation of the police in Zimbabwe to serve the interests of ZANU-PF. Like the Rhodesian police force, the Zimbabwe Republic Police has been turned into an instrument to defend President Mugabe’s regime. Since most Afro-radicalists always invent enemies to justify crackdown, the ZANU-PF government invents enemies within and enemies without in order to whip up patriotic sentiments that justify antagonisms and polarisations even in institutions like the police. Box (1983, p. 5) observes that the police use “methodological suspicion” which entails “routinely suspecting only a limited proportion of the population.” In certain instances the police employ “(J)udicious judicial decisions which take as much notice of who you are (a member of ZANU-PF) as they do of what you have apparently done”.

This means that a politicised police force will only police members of the opposition in so far as they are the only ones under surveillance. They are a segment of society considered generally guilty even before a case has been brought to them. Ruling party cadres are an exception to the strict application of the law. The literary condemnation of propping up a party and not protecting the generality of the Zimbabwean people is the subject of Mlalazi’s pungent humour.

In the novel, the crude polarisations are told from the viewpoint of Ambition (the child narrator in Mlalazi’s novel) who witnesses the violent and brutal nature of the police force. They connive and conspire with members of the Youth Militia to beat up members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Far from patrolling the streets of Lobengula Township to prevent violence, they become part of the menace that comes before elections. They are hated, distrusted and feared, and they are not impartial. Ngwenya, Ambition’s father registers this when he says: “Do you need to have done anything

wrong to be chased by our police these days?” The wife goes further to say: “I know our police force can no longer be trusted, but resisting arrest, for what?” (p. 60) What the writer is implying is that the police force in Zimbabwe have been habituated to coercion and force especially during election times such that they have come to believe policing is attacking opposition members. Their discretionary powers are so wide that the tag ‘resisting arrest’ becomes enough justification to incarcerate people willy-nilly. In most cases in the novel the victims of violence become the offenders. The narrator paints a graphic picture of police brutality when he says (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 12):

One of the police officers blocks the path of a man running towards him, wiping his eyes. The man stops running and raises his hands in surrender... Ignoring his gesture, the policeman trips up his victim and lays into him with his truncheon; the man is screaming and rolling on the ground as he tries to evade the weapon, which descends on him again and again.

This kind of violence has become common in Zimbabwe especially after 2000. It is as if the writer is wondering if there is rights-based policing in Zimbabwe or that in a violent political, social and economic environment, violence is the only language known and the only constant in people’s political contact.

One is reminded of the brutal beating of Morgan Tsvangirai (opposition leader), Tendai Biti (the then secretary-general of the opposition), and Lovemore Madhuku at a national prayer meeting in mid-2000. They were so beaten that they had to be hospitalised. In the same week President Robert Mugabe came out justifying the police brutality, arguing that breaking police orders should be dealt with through beating (*Kudhashura*, in Mugabe’s words). Box (1983, p. 6) avers that the process of law enforcement is “highly selective, serving to conceal (violence) of the powerful and hence shore up their interests (and strengthening) their control agencies so that their ability to survey, harass, deter, both specifically and generally, actual and potential resisters to political authority is enhanced.” The validity of Box’s view finds expression in constant upgrading of army and police capabilities to cow the people through water cannons, tear-gas, and arms when in most instances, people can hardly put food on the table and service delivery has grounded to a halt, as is the case in *They are Coming*.

In certain circumstances the police side with the aggressors against the victims. The fight between Mbambo, a ZANU-PF activist, and Peace, the milkman, takes on a political hue when Mbambo lies that his opponent insulted the president, which is unacceptable to the police because “an insult to the President is an insult to us” (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 123). Mr Peace gets arrested without so much as a shred of evidence. The tragedy that the writer is bringing out is that in a politically fraught Zimbabwe, the President is beyond reproach, so that even the mere fact of wearing a T-shirt with his image inside-out becomes a

crime, or the tearing of a T-shirt with his image becomes an actionable crime as shown by Mbambo's statement. Mbambo, knowing the predilection of the police force to their loyalty to the President and not the State, says that he will tell the police that his adversary has torn the portrait of the President and they (the police) fall for the lie hook, line and sinker, and get angry on behalf of Robert Mugabe. Through the fight between Peace and Mbambo, the writer seeks to show that Zimbabwean politics has become frivolous, trivial, vindictive and vendetta-driven. The ordinary and mundane conflict between the two characters is politicised and the police take the side of the ruling party cadre. The writer is mockingly arguing that a nation that pitches its politics at such low levels cannot be expected to come out of its self-made quagmire.

The paradox that the writer is bringing out is that the ZANU-PF government has drawn a line between what they consider as no go areas for the police force – the political, especially if it threatens to disadvantage them, and what they decide is 'legal' in matters. In the novel they are swift to arrest ordinary thieves trying to eke out a living under difficult, government induced, crisis times. Indeed there are no jobs, cash is scarce, inflation is high, and yet the urgencies of living and surviving are clear to everyone. Though immoral, desperate citizens resort to stealing under desperate economic times. Going to the Diaspora involves queuing endlessly for the hard-to-come-by passport. Even then, those who move to the Diaspora are stigmatised as 'sell-outs' in the ZANU-PF parlance. Yet the ZANU-PF militias, loyalists and war veterans who pose a real and present threat to people's property, lives and rights are given succour by the very people supposed to protect them from such elements. This forces Ambition, the child narrator, to question the perverted policing philosophy when he says (Mlalazi, 2014, p.140):

When the Green Bombers beat people up, the police don't do anything;  
when they break people's windows, they don't do anything either,  
but now they arrest a thief. What's important, the lives of the people or TVs.

Ambition is interrogating the poisoned culture of impunity and violence as a tool in Zimbabwe. Though elections can never be a real measure of democracy, as they merely reflect electoral democracy (a nation can vote every month and still remain undemocratic), they nevertheless offer an opportunity for people to engage in reasoned debate over whom to choose as their representatives. They afford the electorate the right to exercise their power to call those they voted into power in order to show them the extent to which they have betrayed their mandate or how they have stood with, by or against them (their electorate). But the novel shows a society turned upside down, where the electorate has to be shown who calls the shots and not the other way round. Violence becomes a way of reminding the people



of the reality of necropolitics in Zimbabwe; of the right to decide who lives and who dies during election times (Mbembe, 2001). Electoral violence becomes self-perpetuating, since every election in Zimbabwe has had varying degrees of violence. In all these, the police often stood *akimbo*. Do the police control even politics or it is politics from above that controls them? This is the rhetorical question that the writer is bringing out in *They Are Coming*.

But in the poisoned chalice of police partisanship and brutality, the writer seems to be suggesting that there are some officers whose execution of duty is embedded in justice. The police uniform ought not to strike fear in the heart of the ordinary person. They should be helpers providing succour to society. Mr Tshabalala, whose war name is Never-Say-Never, personifies the refusal to be abused in the name of election politics. He tells his boss that he cannot beat his neighbours because there is an election coming. He rightfully points out that he will continue living with his neighbours long after the elections have come and gone and therefore he cannot violate them. Maybe the writer wants to argue that there are some people (former fighters) still grounded in the liberation ideals that have largely been discarded after independence. The love for the country, a geographic entity, and the politics of sovereignty cannot supersede the love of people you know, can talk to, touch and help. The tragedy with the ZANU-PF narrative is that it is grounded on the love for the country (a constructed entity which is nebulous and imagined) rather than the people that populate it. Through Never-Say-Never, the writer brings out the contrast between the professed goals of independence through the flashbacks of him as a guerrilla and the reality of post-independence Zimbabwe. The juxtaposition brings out betrayal, bad governance, tyranny and violence as the lot of post-independence Zimbabwe under the only president Zimbabwe has ever known. We argue that Never-Say-Never is emblematic of what could have been, but never was.

### **Catching them young: The militarisation of youths in Zimbabwe**

The paper has argued in the introduction that violence has been a political tool in ZANU-PF armoury since the days of the 1960s. In fact, youths were mobilised and deployed to fight against rival nationalist groups similarly to how they were used against colonialism (Sachikonye, 2011). The expectation was that liberation politics would transmogrify into governing politics with all the values to do with tolerance, consensus-building, persuasion and convincing the electorate so that the voter can choose whoever has the best manifesto. Along with that was politics shorn of incendiary, hate-filled speeches, violence and politics of selective justice and cadavers. In the novel *They Are Coming*, Mlalazi examines the ways in which the politics of *Pasi n...* (Down with...) has been passed onto the youths and, in the process, poi-

soned the present and future of the country. There is something pathological about a government obsessed with creating violent youths. In the 1980s, the government created what was called the Youth Brigade, ostensibly for developmental purposes, but in reality (at least in the Midlands region) to terrorise and coerce ZAPU supporters into ZANU-PF meetings and programmes.

In the period after 2000 moving forward, the government of Zimbabwe created the National Youth Service. Although Mlalazi (2014) talks and situates this programme in the urban space, their real hunting ground was in rural areas outside the glare of reporters and cameras. It is arguable if the government in Zimbabwe does not create poverty in order to tap on desperate, destitute and malleable youths who "are easily 'rented' for promises of jobs and adventure, cash and alcohol ... during election campaigns" (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 98). Youths, as leaders of the future, should be socialised into nation-building and not destruction, thuggery, and hooliganism. The youths, as tomorrow's people (Baya, 2009), are the future leaders. A nation that does not invest in its future generation is doomed. Yet ZANU-PF created the National Youth Service not as a way of investing in future human capital, but as part of its bio-politics, the factoring in of political short termism by using the lives of the ordinary people to ensure political survival.

The novel *They Are Coming* opens with an atmosphere of adversarialism and bloody confrontation. The mood of hovering danger is dramatised by the repetition of the words "they are coming", and later "they are behind me" (p. 2), and the flight that ensues. The next thing that we are introduced to as the reader, is Mr Nkani (whose name in isiNdebele means the stubborn one) with "... blood ... flowing down the left side of his face. It stained his shirt as if somebody has sprayed him with raspberry juice" (p. 2). This is the context in which we are introduced to the youth militia visiting violence on members of the opposition, here represented by the Movement for Democratic Change. The writer points out:

A man and a woman (were) wearing MDC T-shirts....The couple had been caught in front of their (Ambition and friends) eyes and had been kicked and stamped on until, covered in blood, they lay on the ground as if dead. (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 3)

Later we are told: "The Green Bombers yell and stones start flying, (and)... the masses behind them ... respond fiercely. Flying stones fill the air." (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 5) This is an indictment to the post 2000 Zimbabwean society in which political short-termism and survival imperatives blighted the nation and the future of youths.

The National Youth Service, as evidenced by the above activities, does not serve the nation. Rather the programme fractures, bifurcates and fragments. Ranger (2004, pp. 215-234) perishes the myth that the Green Bombers were of national use when he avers that the youth “became a militia available to discipline their own parents; to attack the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters; and to intimidate teachers and other educated civil servants...” In the rural areas, teachers in particular were targeted for violence by this militia who often worked in cahoots with the police and other state agents. Hove (2003) hazards the view that this was because the teachers were seen as the bringers of ideas that threatened the status quo, ideas that unsettled the frozen, anachronistic and commandist approach of the ruling elite. Thus, in order to counter its apparent irrelevance and loss of ‘popular’ appeal (Ranger, 2004), the ruling party resorted to using the youths as their foot soldiers just like what Hitler did during the Weimar Germany.

Thus the use of the youths to mete out violence on opposition supporters under the guise of “affording young Zimbabweans a revolutionary awareness” (Bull-Christiansen, 2004, p. 68) was strategic. It was meant to naturalise and normalise the ZANU-PF rule. Schmidt (2013, p. 11) has observed that “violence aims at silencing the attacked and thus at producing a victim, someone robbed of agency and personhood.” In Zimbabwe during this time, it was meant to dramatise that “politics was a dangerous game... and everyone knows that you didn’t play around with ZANU-PF” (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 11), by opposing it. The ZANU-PF narrative of admonishing people to leave politics to politicians in Zimbabwe is a veiled threat that one should not be a stumbling block to the party’s retention of power. Youthful violence as a strategic political tool has been the subject of many literary artists. Baya’s (2009) *Tomorrow’s people and other plays* and Julius Chingono’s (2006) short story *Are we Together* problematise the ways in which violence and animosity become ingrained into the psyche of the youths, crippling their sense of cohesion and how to deal with difference in society. Violence and counter violence become mutually reinforcing as rival political youths slug it out to such an extent that it becomes difficult to imagine politics and elections without violence. During the colonial times, the nationalists argued that violence was needed to end oppression, but surprisingly, they maintained it after independence. The opposition reasonably argues that they cannot be perpetual victims and therefore resort to defensive violence and there is a real danger that, if they win, they will invariably appropriate it as a method of choice. We argue that in the true spirit of *ubuntu* to which Zimbabwe is no stranger, a society is measured by the ways and extent to which they palaver-engage in reasoned contestation as a way of narrowing differences in order to arrive at a consensus. Violence tends to boomerang more often than not, and cannot inaugu-

rate a healthy society that respects others' rights. It creates animosities and grudges that have been the bane of the country's developmental and healing trajectories.

There is a sense in which the writer is arguing that the youths are being immersed in the politics of gangsterism and thuggery. The portrayal of Green Bomber violence in the context of 3pac (who is their trainer in the Lobengula Hall) playing gangster music associated with the American Rapper Tupac, is instructive. It shows that the political father figures have abdicated their responsibilities of national parenting. They nurture youths into the politics of iconoclasm, amorality and the end justifying the means. Thus we find the politics of "a house is on fire" (p. 19), and petrol bombing. During election periods before 2013, there was talk of these youths administering "short sleeves" and "long sleeves" – a situation where the victims had to choose where to have their arms axed as punishment for dabbling in opposition politics. Despite the chilling violence that the reader witnesses in the novel and the empirical world, Sachikonye (2011, p. 98) argues that, "... while they (youths) have featured prominently as stone-throwers, arsonists, petrol-bomb users, torturers and rapists, they have not been the original 'brainchild' of these activities." While this may be true, the damage done to the present and future social fabrics in terms of general catholicity is incalculable.

There is something egregiously wrong about this fictive and empirical Zimbabwe. The Lobengula Hall was originally meant to cater for youths by giving them life-skills and entertainment that keeps them away from delinquency. That the Hall has been closed may be figured as a statement about the level of deterioration and dereliction of social services, misplaced priorities or, most importantly, that the government creates conditions for anarchy in order to take advantage thereof for its own political ends. The Lobengula Hall has been turned into a 'base' (a word that has echoes of liberation war operations by the guerrillas) where lessons on terror, hooliganism and disrespect masquerade as national service, complete with the national anthem, flag, colours and revolutionary songs of revived anti-colonialism and nativism. The 'national' duty of the youths ceases to be preparation for a secure country that offers a secure future for them but to defend an 'exhausted nationalism' (Bond & Manyanya, 2002) that offers ideology but not food on the national table. This is a manifestation of what Gramsci (1971) frames as morbid symptoms of the state.

In the story, the Green Bombers are under the tutelage of comrade Tshisa and they are "... instructed how to beat people up with a mixture of fist fighting, stone throwing and so-called karate. Mostly they just flail their arms and grunt." (Mlalazi, 2014, p. 102)

The oral lessons are conducted by the war veteran Mrs Gumbo, whose grasp of national issues outside the patriotic discourse is limited to slogans and an unproblematised jargon of national sovereignty uncritically plucked from President Robert Mugabe's speeches in *Inside the Third Chimurenga* (2001). The lessons harp on the continuity of a war mode and resistance begun in the 1890s, taken up by the nationalists in the 1970s under the guidance of the 'prophetess' of war, Mbuya Nehanda, and whose heroic resolution is in the period after 2000, under the 'defender' of the nation, the President himself. In such a narrative of the nation, "blood, sacrifice and defence of 'our' heritage" justifies a jingoistic and brutal brand of nationalism. Mrs Gumbo's oral lessons to the youths use the President's speeches to defend him and his unpopular government. Characteristically, they zero in on hate speeches designed to denigrate opponents such as Mr Nkani, and invented national enemies such as the West and internal 'stooges' and 'puppets' and the creation of sanitised, carefully selected chunks of historical detail. This is in line with Gatsheni-Ndlovu's (2009, p. 70) reasoning that these "steps ... taken to forcibly inculcate liberation struggle history ... to produce 'a patriotic citizenry.'" In short, the National Youth Service sought to produce a deformed and crippled mind that did not problematise historical issues but parochially and slavishly regurgitated narrow, exclusionary, self-serving and hate-filled aspects of history.

Mrs Gumbo, like the national leaders at rallies and state funerals, uses the technique of arguing against the person and not their ideas: instead of presenting before the youths in what ways Mr Nkani's worldview is limited, she launches herself into speculating about the size of his penis, his teaching and general lack of aggression. Far from telling the youths the cause of the Zimbabwean crisis, the youths are subjected to an avalanche of insults about Morgan Tsvangirai's fat cheeks, Blair (B-liar) and his 'gay gangsters'. The national invented enemies become the enemies of all citizens and insults replace logic and policy clarification. The heritage and legacy of this kind is too poisoned to be handed down to posterity.

## **Conclusion**

Looking at the issues raised above, the paper has argued that the evolution of the nation has been a tale of hit-and-miss approach in which wrong lessons of nation-building have pervaded the structures of Zimbabwean political and law-enforcement conduct. There is therefore a need for a paradigm shift in which the youths are harnessed as building blocks for the future in a tolerant, stable, moral and violence-free society. The politics of self-preservation cannot and does not mean leaving behind a shamolic society. We argue that the institutionalised nature of ZANU-PF partisanship and violent machinery may be difficult to eradicate given that counter violence is, by its nature, violent, and breeds its own lo-

gic, and any transition that happens will have to grapple with this monster. This is particularly true of the police force, army, and youths, and within the opposition. The novel also helps us interrogate issues, such as the significance of elections, and when leaders ought to quit. In what ways can the past be used productively so that it does not imprison us? How do people confront their differences in Zimbabwe? Whilst the book does not seek to provide answers, it nevertheless exercises the mind of the reader about the politically fraught crisis of 2000 onwards. One gets the impression that the writer is arguing that elections are meant to give the citizens the opportunity to exercise their right to choose leaders of their choice. Why then should country waste resources in an election when the rulers already know which party should be and remain in power? Or is it for purposes of propitiating the international community hell-bent on issues of democracy, human rights and freedom of choice in a globalized world? Whatever the motive, the writer contends that violence in an election is counter-productive because it installs feelings of hate animosity, vendettas and the will to revenge at some opportune and convenient time. Besides, political differences do not mean the establishment of enmity. Rather these differences should be used as building blocks to create a better society, to transform antagonism into agonism. The writer also argues that the youths should represent an inclusive, tolerant and peaceful future and that they should therefore be socialised into nation-building rather than handing down a poisoned tomorrow. They cannot be destroyers of today and yet become builders of tomorrow! The political imperatives of political survival of the leaders ought not to transform them into monsters at the beck and call of a given political party that uses poverty as a political tool of manipulation. Most importantly, the party and the state should be differentiated in Zimbabwe. For as long as a country is a party-state, it tends to scaffold the party over state institutions and will use methods fair and foul to ensure the survival of the party, even if it means destroying the whole country.

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