Political Violence in Zimbabwe's National Youth Service, 2001–2007

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Introduction

This chapter is about Zimbabwean youths and their relationship with the state. It examines how the Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front (ZANU (PF)) party / state coerced youths into participating in agendas that enhanced the political party's stranglehold on power. The study argues that some youth participation in Zimbabwean politics, though active, was sometimes involuntary largely because economic and social developments constrained them to cyclical poverty and predisposed them to manipulation by those in positions of power. Political leadership played a subversive role in manipulating youths to further its political objectives through violence.

I will argue in this chapter that the National Youth Service (NYS), a state-run programme introduced in 2001, was little more than a ZANU (PF) party instrument for mobilizing and channelling youthful political participation. The Zimbabwe NYS became a potent tool of violence and brutality which was used against the governing party's opponents. However, existing literature is unmindful of the fact that NYS youths were also victims of a party / state system that manipulated their economic vulnerability and inadequate life chances.

The NYS was introduced at a time when Zimbabwe was, arguably, experiencing its worst socio-economic crises since independence in 1980. Ironically, the state used the NYS programme as a de facto 'rite of passage' for youth access to tertiary education, jobs in the civil service and state funded youth economic empowerment programmes; it became a vital cog in ZANU (PF) politics of patronage whereby young people were rewarded for toeing the party line, while in the media and other literature these youths were presented as willing agents and perpetrators of violence, mobilized as part of repressive state machinery. This chapter nuances this picture by analysing the unequal power relations between youths, the state and other social groups, and examines how the young people endeavoured to navigate economic and political constraints.

It must be highlighted at this point that political patronage, youth violence and state attempts at institutionalizing or indoctrinating youths in Zimbabwe

were not peculiar to the new millennium. Youth violence was a fundamental instrument for nationalist movements in mobilizing for the war effort during the liberation struggle against British colonialism in the 1960s and 1970s. Post-independence presidential and parliamentary elections have witnessed varying degrees of violence, largely perpetrated by youths. Three key elements emerged regarding ZANU (PF)'s treatment of youths and its political opponents and these became firmly established during the 1980s. First, party leaders expected total youth allegiance, loyalty and a strict adherence to instruction. A hierarchical leadership style was adopted. Secondly, in enforcing loyalty among the youths, ZANU (PF) operated politics of patronage. Government loans and other empowerment programmes were prerogatives of these youths and served as reward for allegiance to the party (Madondo 2008). Thirdly, ZANU (PF) regarded political opposition with open hostility and young people have consistently been used as tools for political violence. In the same manner in which this revolutionary party demanded cooperation from the masses during the liberation struggle in the 1960 and 1970s, any opinions diverging from its agendas after independence were viewed with intolerance. However, I acknowledge that the magnitude of pre-election violence worsened after 2000.

The NYS was first authorized in 1979 by the National Service Act, passed by the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia government. The 2001 National Youth Service was a sequel to the Youth Brigades' movement of the 1980s where ZANU (PF) increasingly institutionalized and controlled the aspirations of euphoric and potentially dangerous young people soon after the war. Brigades were involved in mobilizing meetings for the ZANU party and committed acts of violence in the 1985 election. In the Matabeleland massacres some 20,000 people were killed and 30,000 were injured or displaced by 1988 (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace 1997). Muzondidya notes that the post-colonial Zimbabwean state was authoritarian and repressive and it used both violence and a hegemonic discourse of unity on its official opposition, workers, students and youth groups (Muzondidya 2009, 177–198).

Methodology

The research project presented in this chapter adopted the mixed methods approach in generating data. It involved textual and content analysis of documents on the NYS produced and disseminated in professional, political and public circles in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2009. The material included policy documents, government reports and non-governmental organizations' reports. In addition, I consulted newspaper articles which showed both broad public opinion and professional positions on youth, and the NYS programme

in particular. In line with Hooder (2000, 704), I examined the social construction of youth within these documents and analysed them in the context of their conditions of production. I also used interpretive analysis (Atkinson and Hammersley 1998; Riessman 1993) to detect the sources and the nature of the framing of youth and policy. In addition to textual analysis, I explored how the framing of youth by the state has influenced youth policy in the post-2000 period.

I also generated data through in-depth interviews between January and August 2014 with six former NYS members (three females and three males) on their lived experiences. All my respondents were below the age of 30 and lived in rural and farming areas at the time of joining the NYS. Initially, my sample size was 12 but after the first six I realized that I was getting almost identical narratives from my respondents notwithstanding the fact that they trained at different centres. I also interviewed four victims of NYS brutality (two males and two females). The sample size for victims was small because numerous non-governmental organizations (NGO) reports have already documented injuries and other statistics. However, the use of interviews had limitations. Zimbabwe is a highly polarized political environment which also impacted on the interviews and people's willingness to participate. In my case, once I was able to interview a couple of individuals, I was able to connect to a wider network. It is impossible to know if people answered truthfully, or if those who chose not to respond to certain questions were more prone to violence than those who responded in full. Ethical considerations of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and rights of withdrawal were shared with all research participants and I have employed the use of pseudonyms to protect the identities of my participants. This chapter uses the past tense consistently in the entire text, but this does not suggest that all of the features of Zimbabwean society I describe are confined to history. However, the data I used cannot make claims about the contemporary situation even if some descriptions may still be accurate.

Agency, Youth and the Zimbabwe NYS

Analysis of youth political engagements in Zimbabwe under the NYS programme offers perspectives on fundamental questions regarding the role of youth in contemporary African democracies. From the colonial to the post-colonial political dispensations, young people have figured prominently with their energies being harnessed by political bodies to advance different agendas. Progressively, African governments have failed to meet their growing

populations' needs for social services such as youth employment, health and education. This study explores the extent to which poverty and unemployment amongst the youths are political tools of state coercion in contemporary African societies. The findings suggest that the ruling elite use state institutions to manipulate vulnerable youths to achieve political goals that do not benefit the nation.

The Zimbabwean case demonstrates the permeability of notions of victim and perpetrator in youths' lived experiences. While I acknowledge that participants of the NYS were part of the rank and file of a violent, coercive and authoritarian regime (which included the police, army, Central Intelligence Organization, war veterans and the ZANU (PF) youth wing), I also postulate that the youths were an appropriated tool who occupied an interstitial position between victim and perpetrator (Honwana and De Boeck 2005). Given their circumstances of poverty and vulnerability some of these youths were simultaneously unwilling but active participants in state-sponsored violence. Furthermore, the study attempts to highlight the peculiarities of the Zimbabwean version of national youth service compared with those that exist elsewhere in Africa and how it may have deviated from the norm.

Little academic attention has been paid to the ambiguities inherent in NYS graduates' lived experiences, and the Zimbabwe NYS has largely been documented by NGOs working on the political and human rights situation in Zimbabwe (The Solidarity Peace Trust 2003; Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2009). Following Zimbabwe's economic and social crisis, which began around 1998 and intensified post-2000, the country's political situation also came under closer international scrutiny over governance and human rights concerns (Raftopoulos 2009). For example, its human rights record was criticized by organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and The United Nations Refugee Agency, among others. These organizations compiled statistics of rights abuses, the nature of abuses and the magnitude of the political and social crises in Zimbabwe. Beyond NGO reports, local and international private media documented state-sponsored violence. These reports reflect how the NYS youths were violators of human rights in Zimbabwe (*Daily News*, 30 January 2002; *Zimbabwe Independent*, 02 August 2001).

State terror was a multi-layered system but no meaningful analysis has so far been made of the power relations between and amongst the groups involved, ultimately giving the impression of a cohesive monolith whose elements, though not having equal claim to power, embraced the same world view and ideologies. To a large measure, reports overlooked the perpetual underlying tensions and vulnerabilities which may have held the system together. This analytical weakness is partly underpinned by the fact that the reports mainly

focused on the activities of the youths after their NYS training in order to expose the political crisis in Zimbabwe and attract the attention of the international community. At the other extreme, state-controlled media reports presented the NYS as the ideal model of progressive youth.

This study shows that the graduates of the NYS programme exercised limited agency in their violent actions against ZANU (PF) party opponents. Giddens defines agency as:

the capability of doing something rather than the intention to do something. Agency concerns events which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in the given sequence of events have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened.

GIDDENS 1984, 42

This definition offers the basis for the vilification of acts of violence by national service youth, underlining their role as active perpetrators of atrocities. This is largely because acts of violence are taken as events without determining the social processes informing them.

However, I suggest here that the analytical gaze should go beyond these seemingly voluntary acts of violence and also view the power relations that influence youth involvement in politics. Measuring agency through actions alone assumes that social groups have equal power in any political establishment; however, although the youths were 'agents' of state power they occupied the lower ranks in the power hierarchy. Young people generally hold less power in any political system than adults or elders. For example, disaffected youth spearheaded protests and the overthrow of regimes in Egypt and Tunisia but the more established parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood had the leadership and experienced political machinery to co-opt the process of state-building for their own goals (Schwartz 2011).

African Youth and Political Violence

Academic and popular interest in youth as a category is growing worldwide. In demographical estimations, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15–24 globally, of which 19% live on the African continent (UN 2015). In Africa, youth has increasingly become a subject of social inquiry particularly in political conflicts for democratization (Seekings 1993; Glaser 2000; Marks 2001) and armed

conflicts (Richards 1995; Abdullah and Bangura 1997; Vigh 2006; Honwana 2006). The Youth Bulge theory is also used to explain youthful social turbulence (Urdal 2012). More recently, youths have been identified as catalysts of protest and violence in the Arab Spring (Schwartz 2011), as well as agents of change and reconstruction (Schwartz 2010). Young people are seen as critical players whose economic demands and social influences have impact on local societies as well as on global trends. In particular, young people have reconfigured the "geographies of exclusion and inclusion" (Honwana and De Boeck 2005, 1), putting new focus on their endeavours to negotiate confining structures and navigate economic, social and political problems.

However, Coulter (1998) notes that the emergent influence of the young stands side by side with their limited role under unrelenting state political power. In this regard, they are subjected to the whims of the state in discourses of social control in many different contexts. In this theme, young people's participation in political and electoral violence has been presented as a major effect of their political, economic and social exclusion (UNDP 2006; Nordic Africa Institute 2012). Increasingly, political violence by the young has emerged as a tool in monopolizing state power in sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that although opinions vary on why youths engage in political violence, rational economic opportunity and greed play a significant part (Mutto 2007).

The Zimbabwe NYS and the Socio-political Context

To get a grasp of the attraction of the Zimbabwe National Youth Service, it is necessary to understand who the participating youths were. Zimbabwean youths are a heterogeneous category and the socio-economic crisis of the post 2000 period exacerbated their political, socio-economic and geographical differences. Participants in the NYS were unemployed males and females aged between 15 and 30 years mainly from embattled rural peasant homesteads and households, and resettled farming communities. These young people had diverse educational backgrounds and comprised school leavers, school drop-outs, the underqualified and the semi-literate. At the time of my interviews, all my respondents were residing in urban areas because of work commitments. Although none of my respondents were over 30 years of age, I do not suggest that those over 30 years did not participate in the programme. The ZANU (PF) party operated on the basis of a curious discursive construction of youth where the policy limit was 30 years (National Youth Policy 2000) and yet the

political party's National Youth Secretary, Absolom Sikhosana, was 64 years old when he was eventually replaced in 2014 after being at the helm for 15 years. In addition, it was not uncommon to find 40 and 50-year-olds holding positions in party youth structures (*The Financial Gazette*, 21 August 2014).

Zimbabwe is in sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated population of 15.7 million (Government of Zimbabwe Central Statistics Report 2016), and a speculative 4 million in the diaspora. In the post-2000 period Zimbabwe's poor economic performance and the concomitant social strife characterized by poor service delivery and unemployment created an increasingly restive society. By 2008 Zimbabwe's hyperinflation reached a record 230 million per cent and the 2006 GDP per capita was 47 per cent lower than 1980 levels (Raftopoulos 2009). By 2008 unemployment figures were above the 80 percent mark. Opposition to the ruling ZANU (PF) party was growing and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, formed in 1999, won 57 of the 120 contested seats in the 2000 parliamentary elections, a factor which made the 2002 presidential elections difficult to predict (Raftopoulos 2009, 215). During the entire 2000s the MDC was a serious threat to ZANU (PF) political power.

School leavers and college graduates without jobs formed the bulk of the opposition support base. Zimbabwe churns out some 300,000 school leavers annually. As a percentage of the population the 15–35 age group is at 50 percent of the population (Government of Zimbabwe Census Report 2013). It was for this age group that the NYS was intended because their demographic composition was a critical factor in democratic elections. The potential for political change lay with the young (Marks 1992). Ironically, the NYS was started some months before the 2002 presidential elections. The NYS programme largely recruited from rural and farming areas where ZANU (PF) traditionally enjoyed large support. In contrast, the MDC, because of its alliance with labour unions, was seen as an 'urban' party with a large support base in cities.

The governing party harnessed the energies of young people and channelled them into an NYS programme in order to stem the swelling opposition party base from gaining ground in rural areas and to forestall the trajectory of change threatening its policies. The NYS became an instrument of social control that benefitted the party. Its curriculum was generated from within party structures and was never tabled before parliament. This increased the possibility of youth political indoctrination for single party ends. Effectively, the NYS became a parallel state structure. Raftopoulos (2013, 16) argues that "over the last three decades of post-colonial rule in Zimbabwe, ZANU (PF) has steadily conflated its existence with that of the state leading to its current incarnation into a party / state". This is not a recent development as the 1980s have also been characterized as a time of a de facto one party state (Sithole and Makumbe 1997, 122–123).

NYS graduates became notorious for violence, terrorizing the nation with murder, rape, beatings, abductions, looting, torture and arson. They rehearsed the ZANU (PF) rhetoric of defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Zimbabwe against 'Western sponsored elements', meaning opposition political parties and any dissenting voice. To further buttress this position, ZANU (PF) castigated opposition parties and civil society as surrogates of Western governments which desired to reverse the gains of independence such as the land reform of 2000 (Raftopoulos 2009). Opposition to the NYS highlighted that the programme was not serving national but parochial political party interests as youths were indoctrinated into believing that ZANU (PF), as one of the leading liberation movements, was the custodian of the country's independence, with the only right to rule. As part of these ideologies, the definitions of party and state were blurred and any opposition to ZANU (PF) was considered the work of 'enemies of the state'. In this context, national service youths were conceptualized as progenitors of state power, being mobilized in the context of a repressive state.

Initially the NYS programme was supposed to be voluntary and small scale, with its principal aims focusing on skills enhancement and moral education. Shortly after its inception, however, ZANU (PF) unilaterally decided to make the NYS a large-scale programme which also included paramilitary training. The state as the main duty bearer for youth social protection ostensibly wanted to use the NYS to empower the youths through skills training and values like patriotism and discipline. However, the merits of the NYS were never tabled before parliament although the ZANU (PF) cabinet approved its curriculum and allocated it a budget (Madondo 2008). ZANU (PF) obscurantism with regards inquiry into the details of the programme increased opposition and suspicion.

Although officially the state only encouraged those aged 15–30 to go through the NYS before enrolling in tertiary education or joining the public service (*The Chronicle*, 23 February 2003), this was tantamount to forcing them because the NYS certificate became a de facto requirement for entry into tertiary education and the public service job market. In Zimbabwe's harsh economic environment, characterized by rampant corruption and poverty, for some youths the NYS presented the only avenue for social and economic mobility. Herein lay one of the unique features of the Zimbabwean NYS and the centre-piece of state manipulation and coercion. To make a comparison: in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Egypt, for example, national youth service is mandatory, but one can take up the programme after acquiring a tertiary education. As Obadare argues, national youth service as a government mandated programme is open to misuse and exploitation by governing bodies (Obadare 2010, 27). The Zimbabwean case represented a scenario where state resources and institutions were used to drive party political agendas.

Recruitment for the NYS

Launched in August 2001 with 1,000 youths at the Border Gezi Training Centre in Mt Darwin, by January 2002 training was provided in eight provinces. By the end of 2004, it is estimated that around 22,000 youths had passed through formal training in the five main camps, with more trained at district level (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2009). By 2007 some 50,000 had passed through these camps but it remains unclear how many youths were trained (Madondo 2008). Compared to national youth service programmes elsewhere in Africa which sought to mould an all-round citizen and transcend social class boundaries (Obadare 2010), the Zimbabwean version was unique in the sense that it was designed to capture the vulnerable groups. Despite all the government rhetoric championing the programme as one aimed at all youths, in April 2001 the newly appointed Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment Creation emphasized that NYS recruits would “include unemployed youths, orphans, single mothers and street kids”. In October 2000, *The Herald*, the state-run newspaper, claimed that the NYS was “capable of curbing youth delinquency” (*The Herald*, 13 October 2000).

Geographically, all the youth training centres were located in the rural areas. Two reasons may explain this disparity between town and country: first, over 60 percent of Zimbabweans lived in the countryside (Government of Zimbabwe Census Report 2013) and the location of the youth centres was convenient for rural youths; second, and perhaps more importantly, the countryside was traditionally the heart of the governing party's support base and recruiting rural youths was critical in mobilizing it.

Unemployed rural youth were more likely to join the NYS programme compared to their urban counterparts. Edith Munhande, a 35-year-old female, born and raised in a rural district in Southern Zimbabwe, joined the programme in 2003 at the age of 24 because of her social and economic circumstances.

I spend 4 years looking for a job after successfully completing my ordinary level education. I was getting tired of it and decided to join NYS as a last resort because people were doing it with the promise of getting employment in the civil service. I was the eldest of three children and was under pressure to marry and also support my parents with my other two siblings' school fees. There was nothing else I could do; my parents were just peasant farmers. (Interview with Edith Munhande [female], 12/06/2014)

In the above case, the gender expectations of marriage compounded the untenable economic circumstances which pressured some young females to take

up the NYS. By the time Edith got a job in the civil service in 2004 her NYS certificate was not required, but she was quick to reiterate that some of her colleagues from her training camp had been able to enrol for the nursing service and teacher training because of the NYS and after a previous unsuccessful attempt. One can extrapolate to say that Edith's circumstances were not unique and many female youths found themselves in the frustrating inertia of having unmet gendered social expectations while facing delays in achieving adulthood though economic independence (Christiansen et al. 2006). It appears Edith joined the NYS to escape the former and achieve the latter, albeit without guarantee of success. In light of the shrinking economy, the private sector was struggling to cope and the public sector was increasingly becoming the single largest recruiter. This dovetailed with government plans to force youths to join the NYS in order to stand a chance of getting jobs. For some, the NYS became a vehicle to escape social inertia, particularly its economic problems.

Others state that they joined the NYS in 2005 reluctantly, in spite of the economic opportunity it presented. Nigel Sibanda (male, 32 years) who was 23 at the time of enrolling admitted that, "It was a very difficult decision to make because NYS graduates were hated, labelled ZANU (PF) supporters and were called all sorts of names in our area but I wanted to get a job. Two of my friends had joined the police force because of the NYS" (Interview with Nigel Sibanda [male], 16/05/2014). At the time of the interview, Nigel was working for a government ministry and was certain that he got the job because of the NYS because those who did not have the certificate were not accepted. Consequently, some youths became unwilling but active participants in the NYS programme. Some simply perceived the programme as a means to an end, and therefore were a potent but appropriated tool of violence.

By making the NYS a 'rite of passage' the state accentuated youth vulnerabilities to state power and created a youth dependent on the state and enhanced state control. ZANU (PF) manipulated state power, the economic downturn and social strife to stand between the youths and their opportunity for economic advancement, career development and, in some cases, basic survival. Much as some youths may not have believed the philosophy of the values of patriotism, citizenship and sovereignty as defined and advanced by ZANU (PF), their dependent position on state power left them with little choice but to join the politically focused NYS programme.

Moreover, social power relations at the family level further influenced the decision to join the NYS. Beyond state power and economic incentive, some youths enrolled in the NYS 'voluntarily' because their parents or guardians were ZANU (PF) supporters and 'encouraged' them to enrol. ZANU (PF) members, who held positions within party structures, especially in the rural areas, would sometimes send their children to join the NYS as a gesture of their 'patriotism'

and unfailing allegiance to the party. Party officials were duty bound to encourage youths in their areas to join the national programme, feeling it would appear hypocritical to keep their own children at home. Julia Saga's uncle was in the party's District Commissariat, and pressured her into joining the NYS in 2002.

I enrolled with the first group to train at Mshagashe Training Centre at the age of 19. When the training centre was opened, my uncle was part of the team that was tasked to mobilize the requisite number of youth recruits for training. He would always vow that [Province] would not be a failure because that would reflect badly on their leadership. It also became his personal battle because there were others who were after his position within the district political structures. (Interview with Julia Saga [female], 24/07/2014)

Members of the party acted as state agents in their localities to compel youths to join the NYS programme. In certain other cases, families compelled their children to join the NYS to make the family immune to suspicion of being MDC supporters. Election time generally produced a politically charged atmosphere. The terror caused by the ZANU (PF) machinery bred fear and suspicion. Individuals and families would accuse each other of being MDC supporters and 'sell-outs'. Therefore, having a family member in the NYS was a deterrent to potential violence and suspicion.

The coercion of youths into joining the NYS took various forms; there are reports of youths having been kidnapped by state agents into the NYS training programme. The magnitude of coercion and its effects on youth is captured in the following statement; "In some rural areas, youths who refuse(d) to volunteer for the training are victimized; young people have fled to avoid the training and the persecution / lack of opportunity that accompany not having completed it" (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003, 22). In view of this fact, the decision to join the NYS was not up to the individual who had to contend with social relational issues and state power, security and economic pressure.

Training

The youth training period was three months followed by a mandatory community project for one month in recruits' localities. Principally, NYS training focused on five values: National Identity, Patriotism, Unity and Oneness, Discipline and Self Reliance (Government of Zimbabwe NYS Manual 2001, 6).

The training camps also involved morning runs, chores and marching drills which resembled para-military training (Shumba 2006, 44). The NYS became a model of state coercion of youth into accepting certain political views and political culture because the above-mentioned values were interpreted according to ZANU (PF) party philosophies.

After ZANU (PF)'s poor electoral performance in the parliamentary elections of 2000, the party generated a coercive and hegemonic discourse which involved the resurgence of debates and the formulation of new discourses on patriotic youths, citizenship and sovereignty. Patriotism and citizenship were unequivocally equated with supporting the ZANU (PF) party agenda and its self-proclaimed position as custodian of Zimbabwe's independence. This new discourse was exclusionary, and political opposition was subjected to vilification and open hostility. The overall goal was to regain lost political ground under the challenge of the MDC by creating new ideas which would serve as a rallying point in the 'new' Zimbabwe with ZANU (PF) as the leading political party. The NYS became a model of state coercion of youth into accepting certain political views and political culture. Nathan Chegu revealed:

We were taught the history of Zimbabwe and the cruelties of white colonial rule, land dispossession and how our ancestors toiled under the colonial yoke. More importantly, we were reminded of the sacrifices that our heroes, both living and dead, made to achieve peace and freedom. Lessons were drawn on how the youths ought to emulate the leadership of the President [Robert Mugabe] and support his vision for a better Zimbabwe. We were also taught to be vigilant against surrogates of Western governments and sell-outs who are agents of neo-colonialism. (Interview with Nathan Chegu [male], 16/07/2014)

Adjectives like 'surrogate' and 'sell-out' were used in reference to collaborators in the colonial liberation struggle and had been adopted to identify opposition party supporters, especially MDC supporters, in order to legitimize ZANU (PF) hostility. Nathan emphasized that history was drilled into their heads so much that he began to believe that the white man and everything associated with him was his perpetual enemy. It is critical to note that the same language and tactics used by guerrillas in the liberation war in the 1970s (Second Chimurenga) was used by the NYS graduates. In its battle for power against opposition political parties, ZANU (PF) perceived itself as being at 'war' with agents of white interests and was determined to weed out all 'collaborators' and 'sell-outs' through violent means. Supporters of the main opposition party and the single largest threat to ZANU (PF)'s strangle hold on power since the

1980s, the MDC, were, therefore, labelled 'enemies of the state' who were allegedly against the post 2000 land redistribution exercise referred to as the 'third Chimurenga' (Government of Zimbabwe NYS Manual 2001).

As Obadare (2010, 27) argues, youth movements are a vehicle used by governments to cultivate 'good' citizenship's being premised on loyalty and thus open to indoctrination with regards to that loyalty. However, there is every possibility that some went into the NYS unwillingly but were converted to the ideologies and doctrines of the programme. According to Rejoice Shumba (2006), indoctrination in the NYS in Zimbabwe camps ended up creating a group identity espousing the notions of 'self' and 'other.' The youths were made to feel that they were the educators of the masses and that it was their duty to safeguard the country from Western 'surrogates' and 'sell-outs' even through the use of violence.

Beyond the ideological aspects, NYS training camp conditions were a subject of concern for human rights activists. There were allegations of rape of female recruits by their male counterparts and tutors. The gender violence issue in the camps added another dimension to youth brutalization. In the politicized camps the majority of cases went unreported because victims feared reprisals. Some of the reported cases have not been tried in the courts of law (Solidarity Peace Trust 2003). ZANU (PF) blocked calls for inquiry into the workings and problems of NYS camps because cases of abuse would add women's organizations to the list of critics. All my respondents professed ignorance of the existence of such cases during their training periods.

Human rights reports also highlighted the poor food and shelter provision in the camps as another serious violation of youth rights. Most of the training camps did not have adequate accommodation for the large numbers of numbers of youths in training and overcrowding was a common feature. Edith claimed that her group numbered about 500 youths at a facility designed for about two hundred (Interview with Edith Munhande, 12/06/2014). In addition, the dietary structure was poor and inconsistent with the physical demands of the training.

During the first month of training meals were consistent with porridge after our dawn road run and tea at 10 am. However, bread was not guaranteed anyone. By the third month of training in November of 2004 meals had become so inconsistent that at one point we went for three days on porridge only. I remember one boy who could not handle it deserted [laughter]. We could not complain about the situation because the administrators of the programme would say the programme was voluntary and one was free to leave if they so desired. But, of course, no one left because of fear of possible retribution. (Interview with Regis Ruvando [male], 04/06/2014)

However, Julia Saga and Rufaro Ngezi had a different opinion about the situation in their camp which they claimed was well provided with food, accommodation and uniforms. Two reasons may explain this difference in experiences. Julia and Rufaro were part of the first groups to train at Mshagashe and Dadaya training centres, respectively, and, possibly, the initial camp budgets were adequate. However, as the number of youths in the camps increased and the national economic situation continued to weaken, by 2004 when Regis enrolled conditions in the camps had deteriorated.

Regis, in the quote above, raises the critical issue of desertion. Once in the camp, it was difficult to make the decision to leave if conditions were unsuitable. Deserters could not guarantee their own safety and had to live in hiding. According to the Solidarity Peace Report (2003, 57):

Both within and outside Zimbabwe, youth who have abandoned their militia camps live in fear of retribution and only speak out reluctantly. Defected militia, who have fled to Johannesburg, live in fear of retribution if they return to Zimbabwe; even in Johannesburg they report that they are not safe from the Zimbabwean CIO [Central Intelligence Organization].

Life after Training

The youths were obliged to perform one month of community service in their localities before proceeding with tertiary education or getting jobs in the civil service. The reality of the Zimbabwe crisis was that many schemes were defunct and, instead, youths were principally tasked with educating the masses about ZANU (PF) rhetoric on the dangers of supporting the Western-allied MDC party and the merits of supporting the revolutionary ZANU (PF) party. Armed with political education blended with para-military training these youths were given *carte blanche* to operate in communities as political educators of the masses who wanted to 'sell-out' (vote for opposition parties).

It was during this period of 'conscientization' and 're-education' of the people that the youths committed acts of terror. 'Re-education' and the 'encouragement' of sell-outs to be patriotic was mere euphemism for the brutalization and forced support for ZANU (PF). Youth violence was central in the 2002 presidential and 2005 parliamentary and the 2008 harmonized presidential and parliamentary elections in which ZANU (PF) emerged victorious. In the run-up to the 2005 parliamentary election, Loyce Chingwe and Maxwell Zhare were detained by NYS youths at their base camp and were beaten so severely that Maxwell was hospitalized with a broken arm (Interviews with Loyce Chingwe

(female, 40) and Maxwell Zhare (male, 47), 27/08/2014). NYS graduates became a constant reminder of ZANU (PF)'s heavy-handedness, brutality and political intolerance in the communities in which they operated where they were harbingers of fear, brutality and tension. The youths believed they had wide powers in their operations. One NYS graduate confessed (male, 25) in a report:

We got a lot of power. Our source of power was this encouragement we were getting, particularly from the police and others. We were getting this power and it was instilled in us that whenever we go out, we are free to do whatever we want and nobody was going to question that.

Solidarity Peace Trust 2003, 82

Whether real or imagined these wide-ranging powers, coupled with the effervescence of youth, gave the NYS graduates a newly-found social status at a time when the economic and social reality of Zimbabwean society was limiting. Their actions reinforced the social image of youth as violent and the role of youth in contemporary African politics as nothing more than a tool of violence (Seekings 1993; Hirschfeld 2002; Igbinovia 1998, 134). Given their poor socio-economic backgrounds, desperation and desire to make a life breakthrough, the young appropriated the programme to refashion themselves in an environment of social strife. The new identity was expressed in committing acts of violence and intimidation to the extent that some were given over to a life of banditry and brigandage.

The above quotation assumes that youths had power and agency. However, they could not disobey instructions for fear of being labelled 'sell-outs' themselves. This conforms to observations by Honwana and De Boeck (2005) to the effect that youth are both 'makers' and 'breakers' in society and also 'made' and 'broken' by the same society. In this light, the youths had agency to operate and maximize their impact in the most immediate environment but could not guarantee their security once they disobeyed orders. Therefore, they traversed a very thin line between total obedience and being labelled charlatans. As a result, some youths were trapped into aiding the 'terror machinery' out of fear and anxiety about antagonizing their superiors and jeopardizing their physical safety and job security.

There was also an economic explanation to youth violence. The NYS enforced government policy on price control in a hyper inflationary environment, distributed government food relief and convened and mobilized for ZANU (PF) political meetings. Out of envy and jealousy some NYS youth also falsely accused shop owners or traders of hoarding scarce commodities so as to justify dispossessing them of their goods. Emilia recalled:

My father had always been accused of selling MDC party cards and on one particular day National Service youths came to our shop and accused my father of sabotaging the government by hoarding cooking oil and selling it at exorbitant prices. They threatened to beat him up and eventually decided to loot the shop. He did not even make a report to the police because we all knew that it was going to be a waste of time. The police were not going to do anything about it. (Interview with Emilia Mudiwa [female], 12/06/2014)

Basic commodities were in short supply and when available they were very expensive. Shop owners charged exorbitant prices on commodities to stay in business because the supply chain was riddled with corruption (Jones 2010, 285–299). In this respect, victimization of business people was sometimes perpetrated on economic and not political grounds. Therefore, youth actions were a blend of petty jealousies, expressions of social and political identity and a means of personal aggrandizement.

In maximizing their newly found power, some NS youths would label their family enemies as MDC supporters in order to settle old scores. In this volatile political environment, it became dangerous for unemployed youths below 30 years of age to stay at home without joining either the ZANU (PF) youth league or the NYS. It was interpreted as contempt for ZANU (PF) party programmes and a show of sympathy for the MDC. However, communities generally feared and loathed NYS graduates because they would accuse people of all sorts of wrongdoing. NYS youth became pariahs in communities they intended to 'serve'. For example, opponents of the NYS programme pejoratively labelled NYS youth 'green bombers', referring to their military green uniforms and equating their presence and activities with the green bottle fly, a pest which feeds on faeces and dead animal carcasses and transfers pathogens to humans (Interview with Obert Chikomba [male], 22/05/2014). The name reflected the strong revulsion and resentment with which sections of Zimbabwean society regarded the NYS programme. For many, its members were anathema and became subjected to pervasive social stigma.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwe NYS highlights youths' predicament in contemporary Africa's political, social and economic process. State structures make use of youth vulnerabilities and even ensure that youths are amenable to control and abuse by those in authority. Youth are viewed as a threat by their governments

(Obadare 2010). The NYS became a model of state coercion of youth into accepting certain political views and a particular political culture. Consistent with politics of patronage, the policy blended coercion and incentive. The NYS raises the question of whose interests policies are meant to serve, especially given the lack of trust which exists between governments and their people and the lack of proper consultation in policy formation (Sinha-Kerkhof 2011). The NYS uses and reinforces the image of youths as violent and vulnerable at the same time (Hirschfeld 2002; Igbinovia 1998, 134). Poor youths from rural environments and females often had no choice but join the NYS. Furthermore, young people's experiences with the NYS disassemble the binaries of victim and agent and highlight the fluidity of such identities (Honwana 2005). Although youths were subject to coercion, they were not always passive conformers to the state's social engineering strategies. Some negotiated within and outside the frame constructed by the state and it is from this interaction that the boundaries between agent and victim became convoluted.

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