Efficacy of top-down approaches to post-conflict social coexistence and community building: Experiences from Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper provides an assessment of the work done by the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) in post-2008 Zimbabwe. ONHRI was employed by the Zimbabwean government (precisely as Government of National Unity) to ensure national healing and integration. The efficacy of top-down approaches to social cohesion in post-conflict contexts is questioned. The paper outlines how political expediency, mistrust and polarisation debilitated the work of ONHRI. There was little consultation done in creating ONHRI, especially with communities affected by political violence. Academics, civil society, smaller political parties and private entities were left out of the process of creating social cohesion mechanisms. For the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the Organ was a concession on their part to the demands of the MDC and this led to problems in implementing its mandate. What transpired became a political cat and mouse game in

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which actors at the national level frustrated the process of uncovering the truth and the promotion of healing. ONHRI's work has to be understood within a context of political competition in the Government of National Unity (GNU) in which self-interest overtook the mandate of the Organ. The paper therefore argues that Zimbabwe lost an opportunity to entrench grassroots social cohesion and healing processes.

Keywords: National healing, social cohesion, Zimbabwe, Global Political Agreement, transitional justice

Introduction

This paper provides an analysis of Zimbabwe's Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) as a mechanism of achieving national healing, reconciliation and social integration. It highlights how top-down approaches to national healing are ill-equipped to achieve any meaningful impact at the grassroots. The establishment of the Organ was expected to usher in a promising era for most victims of violence in Zimbabwe. The work of the Organ did not meet the expectations, however, as it failed to provide any recourse for victims and survivors of violence. National healing has thus remained a dream. The paper draws from a wide-ranging selection of literature in order to highlight the problems inherent in initiating a national healing process as a centralised process without the participation of those at the grassroots. It highlights how national healing in Zimbabwe was captured by the political elites. It was turned into a political chess game with little regard for the process of social cohesion and healing. Without any legal powers, the Organ could not enforce any agreements or codes of conduct. The paper will cite many commentators who argue that the Organ was a political smokescreen for ZANU-PF to appear as if they were taking transitional justice seriously. What is clear from research is that the Organ was ineffective in its approach and performance, and in its objective of providing transitional justice.

Boraine (2006) argues that there are five key pillars constituting a holistic approach to transitional justice: accountability, truth recovery,

reconciliation, institutional reform, and reparations. However, the Organ in Zimbabwe failed to meet any of these requirements. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) did not provide for reparations or institutional reforms. The process to achieve transitional justice is usually implemented through structures known as truth and reconciliation commissions, such as those in South Africa and Rwanda. Torpey (2006) argues that before such commissions are established, there is a need to set up global processes that cater for pacification, democratic transition and legal procedures relating to perpetrators of violent acts. This will also include procedures for criminal proceedings, reparation programmes and long-term security measures. Looking at the Organ in Zimbabwe through such conceptual lenses, however, provides a picture of a hastily put together institution, born out of compromise, and without the necessary structural support to perform the job of national healing.

This paper will examine these issues according to the following structure: First, historical processes of violence and top-down reconciliation in Zimbabwe will be interrogated. After a note on methodology, this is followed by a look at the history of the Organ, its structure, operations and key challenges. These challenges include polarisation and the difficulties of enforcement; lack of political will and commitment; the dilemma over what to do with perpetrators of violence; and lack of understanding by the Organ of the complexities of violence. The article will then assess the efficacy of top-down approaches by examining the extent to which local communities, and especially women, have been engaged. Lastly, the article presents some alternative local approaches to reconciliation. Then some concluding remarks.

Historical processes of violence and top-down reconciliation in Zimbabwe

The historical fabric of the Zimbabwean nation is steeped in violence. After all, the country was born out of a violent liberation struggle after almost a century of brutal colonial rule. In tracing the roots of violence in Zimbabwe, it is important to note, from a post-colonial standpoint,

that what we are witnessing today has its roots within the colonial system. As Chung (2007:165) aptly notes, 'the culture and political polarity that leads to the killing of opposition members has its roots in the colonial settler heritage'. State power was used by white people to violently evict blacks from fertile lands (Muchemwa et al. 2013). Black Zimbabweans responded violently to brutal colonial rule through the First Chimurenga war which was ruthlessly crushed, and then the Second Chimurenga which led to a negotiated settlement and independence. Structural and institutionalised violence did not come to an end, however. It was built into the structures of state governance, and became an institutional characteristic for politics and change in independent Zimbabwe.

The pre-colonial era saw Shona-speaking societies emerging in the middle Limpopo valley in the 9th century before moving on to the Zimbabwean highlands. In the 11th century, many states rose and fell including the Kingdom of Mapungubwe with the capital of Great Zimbabwe. The Mutapa State existed from 1450 to 1760, and the early 17th century saw the rise of the Rozvi State. Zimbabwe was under colonial rule from 1888 when Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company obtained a concession for mining rights from King Lobengula of the Ndebele peoples which he (Rhodes) used to persuade the government of the United Kingdom to grant a royal charter. After obtaining this charter the Pioneer Column (a group of white settlers protected by well-armed British South Africa Police [BSAP]) travelled from South Africa and raised the Union Jack at Fort Salisbury (now Harare). The Ndebele rose up in insurrection which saw the death of their leader, King Lobengula. Another uprising, the First Chimurenga, was brutally crushed and spirit mediums Kaguvi and Nehanda, who had led the revolt among the Shona, were hanged. The white-minority Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front (RF) dropped the designation 'Southern' in 1964 and issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from the United Kingdom on 11 November 1965.

In 1978 the white Rhodesian government under Ian Smith signed an Internal Settlement with Bishop Abel Muzorewa that gave birth to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The following year negotiations with liberation movements

under the auspices of the Patriotic Front commenced at Lancaster House in Britain, ushering in majority rule on 18 April 1980. At independence the black government embarked on a social development project that saw an increase in social amenities, especially health care and education. Robert Mugabe won the first democratic election and preached reconciliation, arguing that:

> If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and an 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, in these circumstances that anybody should revive the wounds and grievances of the past? The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten (Huyse 2003:37).

This was a rather cosmetic papering over of historical conflicts, which required a much wider process of healing that included the grassroots. Mugabe and white capital agreed on an approach to reconciliation which did not address the needs of victims at the grassroots, thus sowing the seeds for the post-2000 land invasions by veterans of the liberation struggle.

Post-colonial peace in Zimbabwe was short-lived, as the Zimbabwe National Army unit known as Fifth Brigade, descended on Matebeleland and Midlands regions to suppress ex-Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) fighters and civilians. In 1962 ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo, was split into two, which saw a mostly Shona ethnic group led by Ndabaningi Sithole leaving ZAPU to form the rival party ZANU-PF. This sowed seeds of mistrust and division along tribal lines which would later boil over into open civil strife and leave 20 000 people dead (Muchemwa et al. 2013). The strife was ended when another top-down agreement was reached by the political elites in which a Unity Accord was signed and Joshua Nkomo became vice-president of the country. Victims and communities were left out of this process and nothing was done to ensure healing and to cater for the traumatic experiences of communities in the region. By the early 1990s the spending on social services, including free primary education, was

causing serious budget deficits and, following advice from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, the Zimbabwean government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The austerity measures that characterised the SAPs, coupled with devaluation and mass retrenchments, affected the poor negatively. The introduction of user fees meant that most social services were out of reach for the poor, especially in rural areas. The drought in 1992 worsened the situation.

By early 2000 Zimbabwe was facing an unprecedented social and economic crisis. The deteriorating economic situation adversely impacted on the pace of land reform. The food riots in 1998 were the beginning of open protest against the ZANU-PF establishment in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The economy was taking a battering, as the costs of Zimbabwe's involvement in the Congo war and war veterans' pay-outs took their toll. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) took the lead as a conglomeration of civil society organisations and challenged the ruling hegemony with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) – the first real threat to ZANU-PF's political hegemony in Zimbabwe. The rejection of the draft constitution in February 2000 was a precursor to the land occupations in Zimbabwe – a period popularly known as *jambanja* (chaos) due to the violent nature of the process. This led to a serious reduction in food and crop production, leading to food shortages and widespread hunger. The ensuing crisis was exacerbated by the economic sanctions of America and its allies, that led to world record inflation, cash shortages, fuel shortages, massive unemployment and mass migration of skilled and unskilled labour.

Electoral Violence

Electoral violence has been a further part of the Zimbabwean political landscape since 1980. The violence became much more pronounced at the turn of the twenty-first century as Zimbabwe witnessed the emergence of a strong opposition party with the formation of the MDC in 1999. Selby (2006:3) highlights that Zimbabwe since 2000 has been dominated by violence, political intolerance and intimidation, economic implosion,

food insecurity and general uncertainty. In many ways this crisis was an unavoidable culmination of unresolved and deep-rooted resource and race disparities, but the crisis has been dominated by ZANU-PF's often ruthless struggle to retain power. There was a sudden instrumentalisation of power in what Selby (2006:4) calls the rejuvenation of the security state:

> Had ZANU-PF lost power in 2000, senior officials would probably have been held accountable for a range of unresolved issues such as the genocide in Matabeleland, key corruption scandals of the 1990s, and the looting of the War Victims' Fund. Senior officials therefore had a clear interest in retaining power which clearly influenced ZANU-PF's post-2000 strategies. The nature of the state changed considerably during the late 1990s with the co-option of the war veterans and the growing influence of an impatient and radical empowerment alliance.

There is no way we can talk of a land reform movement in Zimbabwe without the crucial intervention of the state. More specifically, understanding the forced land takeovers can only be accomplished through a thorough analysis of the monopolisation and militarisation of state apparatuses. Raftopoulos and Phimister (2004:356) elucidate that this authoritarianism involved an 'internal reconfiguration of Zimbabwean state politics' leading to the emergence of domestic tyranny.

A referendum held in February 2000 led to an overwhelming defeat for government. According to Kagoro (2004:249), 'it was a protest vote against the manner in which the constitution-making process had been carried out by the government', as well as 'an angry protest against the performance of the government and parlous state of the economy'. This unprecedented defeat of the ruling party by an opposition party (which, according to ZANU-PF, was backed by white commercial farmers and the West) appeared to precipitate the largely state-sponsored land invasions, political violence, institutional interference and economic decline that were to follow – although there was of course a much longer and more complex history behind these trends (Hammar 2005:4). A massive campaign instigated by and comprising the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), the MDC

and the white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) led to the defeat of the draft constitution at the polls, with Mugabe immediately accepting the result. But, within days, twelve war veterans occupied farms in Masvingo Province, proclaiming that the white farmers had connived to defeat the constitution in the referendum. The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) supported these occupations and called for further action as a way of demonstrating the need for land. When leaders of the war veterans association and the ruling party realised by the end of March that white farmers were actively campaigning for the MDC, and encouraging farm workers to do the same, farm occupations became more violent with the build-up to the political campaign for the June 2000 parliamentary elections (Moyo 2001:318).

Elections in 2002, 2005 and 2008 were highly contested with many incidents of violence. A report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum shows there were 3180 reported cases of organised violence and torture between March 2008 and July 2009 perpetrated by state institutions such as the police, army and intelligence officers (Crisis Zimbabwe 2009). Research and Advocacy Unit (2011:1) noted that the period before the June 2008 runoff presidential election 'saw many people losing their lives, maimed, raped, abducted, losing properties and exposed to all forms of torture all in the name of fighting for political hegemony'. The violence in 2008 before the presidential runoff election saw many cases of members of communities beating and killing each other. ZANU-PF supporters led by war veterans set up base camps in which people were forced to come at night and pledge support for the party (Alexander and Tendi 2008). Known opposition supporters were beaten and tortured at the base camps. These incidents of violence led to Morgan Tsvangirai withdrawing from the election, yet the elections proceeded, with Robert Mugabe victorious. The win was however contested and not accepted worldwide, leading to negotiations for a Government of National Unity. What is clear from the above discussion is how violence was already institutionalised within the state apparatus.

Methodological note

This paper is based on document analysis conducted through systematic review. Systematic review is appropriate in identifying, appraising and synthesising research-based evidence and presenting it in an accessible format (Mulrow 1994). A systematic review attempts to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question. It uses explicit, systematic methods that are selected with a view to minimising bias, thus providing more reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn and decisions made (Antman et al. 1992; Oxman and Guyatt 1993). Unlike traditional reviews, the purpose of a systematic review is to provide as complete a list as possible of all the published and unpublished studies relating to a particular subject area. While traditional reviews attempt to summarise results of a number of studies, systematic reviews use explicit and rigorous criteria to identify, critically evaluate and synthesise all the literature on a particular topic. For this paper, searches on literature relevant to social cohesion and national healing in Zimbabwe were conducted on the internet, and in journal articles, books and newspapers.

History of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration

Zimbabwe's major political parties signed a historic political agreement on 15 September 2008 that gave birth to the Government of National Unity (GNU). The deal brokered by former South African president Thabo Mbeki brought together ZANU-PF and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations into a single government as a way to end the political impasse which had degenerated into a socio-economic crisis. The power sharing arrangement in Zimbabwe provides an important insight into how transitional formations can provide a pathway to sustainable peace and the well-being of citizens. It is intriguing to understand the internal dynamics of this political 'Frankenstein', in which sworn enemies are forced to co-exist for the betterment of the populace. Clearly, the GNU was riddled

with problems from its inception, coming into fruition after months of negotiations, marked by accusations and counter accusations. With three parties making up the government, 'the implication is that despite being in the same cabinet, the ministers put party loyalty first. They do not view themselves as one unit and this surely is not good for state affairs' (Chigora and Guzura 2011:25).

The agreement included sections on social cohesion and national reconciliation. The relevant sections of The Global Political Agreement, Article VII, are cited below to highlight the parties' commitment to national healing given the widespread political violence after 2000.

Article VII: Promotion of Equality, National healing, Cohesion and Unity

7. Equality, National Healing, Cohesion and Unity

7.1 The Parties hereby agree that the new Government: …

c) shall give consideration to the setting up of a mechanism to properly advise on what measures might be necessary and practicable to achieve national healing, cohesion and unity in respect of victims of pre- and post-independence political conflicts; and

d) will strive to create an environment of tolerance and respect among Zimbabweans and that all citizens are treated with dignity and decency irrespective of age, gender, race, ethnicity, place of origin or political affiliation.

Section 7.1c thus provides for the establishment of ONHRI. In a speech in 2009, Sekai Holland, then Minister responsible for the Organ, noted that: 'the key result area…was the launching of…the machinery for national healing, reconciliation and integration… [with] three specific targets…: launch the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration and establish a secretariat; hold pre-conference workshops for local and international experts; establish machinery and processes for national healing, reconciliation and integration' (Holland 2009:2).

Mbire (2011) argues that the ONHRI provided a new frame through which the discourses on transitional justice, reconciliation and national healing

could be understood. The task of the Organ however was soon limited to an advisory role as it fell to the Principals (the three political leaders who signed the Global Political Agreement) to accept or decline the offered proposals. According to the then Minister Holland in a speech at Chatham House in 2012, the GPA 'gives us the mandate as the Organ to advise on what mechanisms to address pre- and post-independence conflicts' (Chatham House 2010). This was a serious flaw in that the Organ could not make independent decisions outside the Principals. Its proposals were voluntary and not legally binding. In essence the Organ was toothless. As an advisory body its tasks did not extend beyond producing documents and voluntary codes of conduct.

Structure and operations of ONHRI

The ONHRI was headed by three co-ministers appointed by the president but nominated by each of the three political parties. The three included Vice-President John Landa Nkomo (ZANU-PF), Gibson Sibanda (Movement for Democratic Change faction led by Welshman Ncube, known as MDC-N founder member, later replaced by Moses Mzila-Ndhlovhu when he passed away) and Sekai Holland (Movement for Democratic Change faction led by Morgan Tsvangirayi, known as MDC-T founder member). There was both cause for optimism and concern when the three were chosen (Chipaike 2013). The optimism stemmed from the belief that appointing such very senior members of each party reflected the great deal of importance the GNU placed on social cohesion and national healing. On the other hand, however, placing senior members in these roles was really geared towards ensuring advantage in manoeuvring the work of the Organ towards certain political goals. The members were chosen by party leadership without any form of consultation. Zimbabwe Watch and Crisis Coalition (2008) thus concludes that political elites excluded the concerned and affected communities from any discussion of building up a mechanism for national healing. The three ministers embarked on a wide-ranging consultation exercise with traditional leaders, churches and civil society, but not with the victims of violence in Zimbabwe. The result was that only the elite

with access to traditional and church leaders were heard. The exclusion of rural women and children from these consultations highlights another patronising tendency of top-down approaches to governance by the Zimbabwean state. In November 2011 ONHRI reported that it had finished drafting a code of conduct to hold political parties perpetrating violence to account for their actions. The code emphasised that political parties should be able to campaign and disseminate their political ideas around the country without fear. It was a voluntary mechanism without any legal backing. As such, the Organ had no power or authority to compel political actors to act in a peaceful manner. The Organ was thus largely ceremonial, and without any real impact on the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Challenges facing ONHRI

Polarisation and the challenges of enforcing healing and coercion

ONHRI was a child of a compromise government made up of conflicting and suspicious partners. The polarised nature of the political scene made any work towards national healing almost impossible as any talk of violence was seen as political manoeuvring to discredit ZANU-PF. The GNU was championed as a power-sharing arrangement to end the political crisis in Zimbabwe. Yet at its worst it was a dysfunctional animal with separate heads pulling in different directions. Burgess (2011:101) notes that successful power sharing is capable, in theory, of preventing the outbreak of violence by bringing all major stakeholders to the table. The Zimbabwean case of power sharing and subsequent political brokerage showcases the overall fragility, but effectiveness towards peace, of putting to the test such systems after election disputes (Neal 2012). There were, then, grave issues around the dysfunctionality of the GNU as a viable governance instrument in Zimbabwe. Despite successes in reducing both record-breaking inflation and political violence, the GNU faced serious problems in functional and control areas (see Mandaza 2012). One of the most interesting cases was the long-drawn contestation over the control of money from diamond deposits, which were allegedly not going through the

MDC-controlled Ministry of Finance. Suspicion and accusations saturated the everyday operations of a government with such inconvenient partners.

Lack of political will and commitment

Whilst the GPA provided a framework to implement national healing and social cohesion, the political actors remained unwilling to ensure the full implementation of the agreements. The language of Article VII in the agreement that led to the birth of the Organ highlights how provisions of social cohesion are dependent on the will of the political parties who had the power or choice to stall any process. Machakanja (2010:4) argues that:

> Article 7.1(c), which focuses on national healing, cohesion and unity, is also stated in very vague and ambiguous terms as it lumps together conflicts from different historical periods. This lack of clarity and specificity makes the job of national healing overwhelming as the process may take decades. Such vagueness abrogates the ZANU-PF party from taking social responsibility in accounting for post-independence human rights violations.

Zimbabwe has gone through different epochs of violence so often that for any mechanism to succeed there first needs to be an admission and acceptance of historical moments of violence. There are still 'silences' on the part of the state on the exact nature of the 1987 conflicts in the Matebeleland regions known as Gukurahundi where, according to the Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice (1997), 20 000 people lost their lives. Mapuweyi (2014:9) notes the view of MDC-N on this issue:

> Moses Mzila-Ndlovu, who replaced Gibson Sibanda on the organ following the death of the MDC founder, summed up the civil society and private media sentiments saying, ZANU-PF was making a mistake by trying to sweep the Gukurahundi issue under the carpet because many people are still angry about the massacres and want the issue discussed in public and they also want compensation.

There is thus no clarity on which exact period the Organ focused on and whether it had the mandate to finally provide impetus towards resolving social justice for victims of the violence in the Matebeleland region.

The lack of political will was thus a deliberate ploy especially for those political actors who had vested interests in ensuring their part in violent activities remained (and remains) hidden across the political spectrum. Any healing has to start with admission and confession of past atrocities in colonial and post-colonial eras. Machakanja (2010) argues that ZANU-PF even after the signing of the GPA continued to arrest and detain political activists aligned to the MDC parties. This went against the spirit of social cohesion and healing and, in the eyes of some observers, highlighted the disregard and unwillingness of ZANU-PF to follow the provisions of the GPA (Machakanja 2010).

The question about what to do with perpetrators of violence

One of the key questions that was never addressed by the GPA but is now included in the work of the Organ is what to do with known perpetrators of political violence in Zimbabwe. The agreement was a negotiated affair between political leaders with the aim of ending a political impasse. Thus from the onset of negotiations, '[i]t [was] the needs of the nation, not individuals, that [were] of paramount concern…' (Machakanja 2010:5). Individuals' search for truth, justice or compensation was to take a back seat for the good of the nation. The macro focus of the GPA thus ignored critical issues affecting communities at a local level. National healing cannot be a national affair for politicians, but is rather a concern for people now living together who might have turned against each other in the past – leading to deaths, serious injuries as well as inter-generational grudges and hatred. Without understanding how healing and social cohesion are intricately relational issues concerned with lived experiences of individuals, the Organ was also bound to become irrelevant to the victims of violence. Any transitional justice mechanism needs to include measures to deal with perpetrators of violence. If amnesty is offered, it has to be based on total transparency and public acceptance of violent acts in the past. The Organ has no plan in place even for compensation of victims, because '…Article VII precludes civil claims against perpetrators as this [was] likely to erode the state's limited fiscus…Article VII does not represent an

individual-friendly process but rather a politically-orchestrated national healing and reconciliation project' (Machakanja 2010:5). The project had little to offer victims and survivors of violence. Their physical, spiritual and emotional needs were not catered for in the negotiations. Gabriel Shumba, speaking at Chatham House, argued that the perpetrators of post-colonial violence have never been arrested and that 'these people are still roaming the streets; they are part of the power sharing agreement' (Chatham House 2010).

The failure to understand the complexities of violence in Zimbabwe

The Organ seemed to have been limited in its scope to the post-electoral violence of 2000. In fact, the then Minister Holland admitted that the Organ categorised violence as mainly political and thus as perpetrated by political parties – thereby masking various complex factors around race, ethnicity and gender. Whilst the majority of cases of violence may indeed be intertwined with periods of political upheavals, most cases usually do involve complex questions around the social make-up of communities. A good example is violence against women – including rape – perpetrated under periods of political violence. Political promotion of violence is intertwined with a patriarchal social system in which women's bodies are portrayed as sexual things. Moyo (2008) argues that violence in Zimbabwe is structural in nature and steeped in historical processes. These processes can be explained through a political economy approach but there are also social factors such as ethnicity, race and gender which intersect with politics to create complexities in Zimbabwean violence. To simply locate violence as an inter-party phenomenon without asking how personal, family, community, regional and ethnic grudges tend to play out within communities masks the true nature of how violence occurs and is experienced. There are different forms of violence which include physical, symbolic, mental and psychological violence. To understand the interplay of all these forms of violence within a transitional justice framework requires understanding the fluid nature of violence as a process

and not an event. This requires a more in-depth analysis of the nature and factors influencing violence as a historical process in Zimbabwe. The Organ did not undertake such an analysis, erroneously categorising violence as a political act perpetrated through political party structures.

Hiding in plain sight: the Organ's experience with the public

The Organ did little to engage communities. There may be various factors to explain this, which include lack of skills, resources, political space or the will to engage the grassroots. This lack of engagement led Mapuweyi (2014) to label the Organ the 'Invisible ONHRI' due to a serious lack of reporting of its activities in the major newspapers in Zimbabwe. Due to this invisibility, the Organ was rendered useless to most Zimbabweans who did not know or understand what its role included. Chipaike (2013:22) further asserts that the Organ:

> …ha(s) not been proactive in the communities. What they have simply done is to issue… statements in the media calling upon people to desist from political violence (Newsday, 27 July 2012). Instead of mobilising communities against violence before it occurs, they have mainly been reacting to those occurrences.

The Organ had no community or grassroots structures, which seriously limited its effectiveness. National level processes are concentrated in the capital Harare with very little devolution to districts and wards. Given the limited access of rural communities to news sources such as newspapers or television, news of the Organ was not reaching the grassroots. The urban bias of the Organ, which appeared to place an emphasis on engaging 'experts' and conducting international travels to hold meetings in the United States of America and in South Africa, meant that it was separated from the rural masses who had lived through violence as perpetrators, survivors and victims. There was no investment in community structures for social cohesion and national healing. The process of the creation of the Organ and the planning of its activities was not participatory, which

seriously limited the input of most ordinary Zimbabweans who did not fit into the categories of traditional chiefs, experts, or people in the Diaspora or in the church.

In 2013, after the elections paved the way for the 'death' of the GPA and GNU, the Organ died as a legal entity. National healing and post-conflict justice were not made explicit in the new constitution which ushered in the elections. With ZANU-PF the ideology of the liberation struggle remains dominant and constructed narrowly to shower praise on the ruling elite. This ideology has led to the demonising of dissenting voices and the sweeping under the carpet of many problems. As noted elsewhere in this paper – except for one description by the president of Gukurahundi as a 'moment of madness' – nothing has been done to initiate processes of healing, reparations and social cohesion (New Zimbabwe no date).

Women's exclusion from national healing processes

The role of women in the national healing process has remained marginal. The exclusion of women from these processes is rather worrying given that many women suffered serious trauma due to beatings, rape, murder and sexual abuse. Shaba (2011) argues that women were the majority of victims in post-2008 violence yet the Organ has proven ineffective in the following ways: The Organ did not provide a gendered analysis of violence in Zimbabwe which would have spelt out how the experience and impact of, as well as the nature of, violence remain gendered. It did not seek to understand how perpetrators, survivors and victims are all gendered beings and that gender is a central issue in understanding the historical processes of violence. Victims and perpetrators were assumed to be homogenous without further interrogation or analysis. This mirrors the historical patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean state.

Major political parties involved in the GNU remain male-dominated and patriarchal in orientation. Women are represented in the two biggest parties, the MDC and ZANU-PF, yet the women's wings of these parties remain oriented towards the political goals of male leaders.

Without women-centred political parties, the efforts of women within these patriarchal structures will achieve very little as women's activist Thoko Matshe notes, 'Zimbabwe will still be a patriarchal state no matter who wins [the elections] currently, so for women it is 'Aluta Continua' – the struggle continues' (Jones 2008). In a gender analysis of the Global Political Agreement, Mugadza (2011:6) argues that:

> There have been many issues related to politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe's past that necessitate provision for a comprehensive national healing and cohesion mechanism, especially for women who bore the brunt of the conflict in 2008. …Given that healing and cohesion are not clarified, there is a danger that it will be difficult to implement anything under this article, to the detriment of women who suffer violence, discrimination and intolerance disproportionately.

Even in practice the Organ proved incapable of responding to historical gendered processes of violence or of challenging the patriarchal status quo which often promotes abuse of women in conflict situations. The Organ had no capacity or mechanisms to deal with women victims because of the unique nature – often both physically and mentally brutal – of violence against women.

Efficacy of top-down approaches

Experiences from Zimbabwe highlight the serious limitations of top-down approaches to national healing and social cohesion. Without the involvement of communities – especially the input of victims – any mechanism for healing after conflict will fail to achieve its objectives. There was naivety in believing that social cohesion can be forced from above. Without full participation of communities, the Organ was doomed to fail in achieving its mandate. For commentators such as Muchemwa et al. (2013) this is precisely what ZANU-PF wanted. ZANU-PF did not want an effective process which provided truth and reconciliation for the post-independence conflicts, particularly in Matebeleland and Midlands in 1987, and the 2008 post-election violence (Dzinesa 2012; Machakanja

2010). The Organ was an instrument of the powerful, and thus served a limited political purpose which reduced transitional justice to mere statements and consultative meetings with experts.

Top-down approaches rarely take a victim's rights perspective. The major focus is on broader political and economic considerations which do not necessarily favour the rights of the victims. Political elites have vested interests in post-conflict mechanisms which do not necessarily serve the needs of the ordinary people. The Zimbabwean example highlights how the need for self-preservation especially within ZANU-PF has resulted in tokenistic approaches to national healing. In arguing for a grassroots-based approach to national healing in Zimbabwe, Thomson and Jazdowska (2012:77) point out that:

> …local communities hold the key to a more inclusive and sustainable restorative justice process in Zimbabwe (and elsewhere). The more people that participate in, and benefit from, a transitional justice programme, the broader the 'ownership' generated, and the more chance there is that outcomes will be sustained. Transitional justice, and its content, should not therefore be the sole preserve of international lawyers, human rights NGOs /or national politicians, as it so often is. Instead, alongside these aforementioned practitioners, those who suffered politically motivated violence also need to participate in policy formulation and decision-making.

Yet the Organ was dominated by experts of all kinds speaking for the victims. The lived experiences of communities that suffered trauma remain silenced.

Muchemwa et al. (2013) argue that the failures of the initial reconciliation project at independence were reborn with the Organ under the Government of National Unity. They argue that:

> …while the notion of resuscitating reconciliation is an important step towards durable peace, this institutionalised, state-centric and state-propelled project is haunted by the very same challenges that undermined and shattered its predecessor…reconciliation and healing project, which is politically engineered and institutionally driven without being inclusive

and community driven, (and) is a mere token that comes at the expense of durable peace and the actual victims of violence and impunity (Muchemwa et al. 2013:145).

At a 'meeting held in Bulawayo, on 26 November 2009, ONHRI members exchanged harsh words with former ZIPRA liberation fighters who accused them of living a lavish life on the national healing assignment at the expense of victims who are struggling to eke out a living' (Muchemwa et al. 2013:154). This is probably the greatest weakness of state-centric, top-down approaches carried out by state bureaucracies. The resources expended on the functions of the Organ with three co-ministers all with a salary, benefits and allowances, day to day administration and staffing together with foreign trips could, in principle, have gone a long way to initiating and establishing community cohesion projects. Top-down approaches are thus top heavy, requiring enormous financial outlays that do not necessarily flow to the communities or meet any needs of the victims or survivors. In the following section, a consideration is made of how indigenous systems can be factored into local social cohesion and reconciliation processes.

Infusing indigenous systems in social cohesion processes

Chimuka (2009) uses Shona concepts of *kugarisana* (cordial co-existence) and *kunzwanana* (mutual understanding of one another) to highlight an approach grounded in *Ubuntu* to explain social cohesion in Shona societies. Such an understanding grounds social cohesion as something inherent in African social systems. Zimbabwean communities have endogenous systems of promoting social cohesion and healing. Amongst the Shona, concepts such as *kugarisana* and *kunzwanana* assist in explaining social cohesion in Shona societies. Communities have knowledge accumulated over centuries on how to manage conflicts and ensure social cohesion. Such knowledge was however not utilised by the Organ. In explaining these concepts Chimuka (2009:117) argues that:

> …*Kunzwanana* (mutual understanding) and *kugarisana* (peaceful co-existence) are still relevant to the moral, legal and political spheres, though some modifications are anticipated to reflect the changed needs of modern social configurations. Historically, *Kunzwanana* was conceptualized as the recognition by one (or a group of people) of the humanity of the other (or group of people). This recognition meant the creation of space for the other. Admittedly, one gained direct access to *ubuntu* through a certain entrance. In principle, there was so single and rigid access point. The family was the usual starting point. Civic relationships were cemented by blood – (*hukama*). One then went out and got connected to the wider web of people related largely by blood.

Relations are not only based on blood but sharing a totem can lead to building of community spirit. Peter (2007) defines totem as an animal, plant, or natural object (or representation of an object) that serves as the emblem of a clan or family among traditional people. It represents a mystical or ritual bond of unity within the group. Such interpersonal relationships, built over time, is the basis upon which that social cohesion is hinged.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how top-down approaches are inadequate in achieving national healing and social cohesion. I have argued that any sustained search for national healing requires the active participation and voices of communities, survivors and victims of violence. Through an analysis of various processes, the paper has shown how the Organ tasked with national healing under the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe became a tokenistic window-dressing exercise meant as an obligation rather than a duty to implement a process of forgiveness and healing. The institutional apparatus of violence in Zimbabwe was not challenged or dismantled, which makes it inevitable that Zimbabwe will experience further episodes of violence and societal fractures. The paper concludes that any hope for lasting peace and social cohesion in Zimbabwe depends on the willingness of political elites to allow communities the space and support to engage in processes of engaging historical hurts, where truth, justice and reparations are the cornerstone.

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