



THE PROGNOSIS AND WAY FORWARD ON THE TENSION BETWEEN WAR VETERANS
AND NATIONALISTS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe's political and governance matrix is largely defined by the interaction of former liberation war participants especially war veterans and nationalists. Over the years, the two groups have experienced growing tension which has ultimately affected both the national economy and the liberation movement. Therefore, this analysis sought to diagnose the tension between war veterans and nationalist with a view to possibly craft a sustainable way forward. The analysis is expected to offer critical parallels and insights into the movement's conflicts and struggles for power. The analysis derives its data from various archival material, literature and policy documents from as far as the 1960s to allow coverage of all the events and proceedings in the movements.

Keywords: War Veteran, Nationalism, Movement, Conflict, Conflict Resolution

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an implicit conclusion in the general populace that former liberation war participants, constitutionally referred to as war veterans and nationalists, who in this paper are referred to as a movement, are a single entity. This is derived from the fact that they share some common philosophies. However, given the trajectories and varied dynamics within the Zimbabwe political playing field, that implicit conclusion is failing to stand its ground. Since the 19760s[??] when the armed struggle was mooted, war veterans have always been subordinate to the nationalists on account of age, wisdom, ownership of the movement and education levels. Though there have been recorded conflicts along the way that relationship has sustained.

It is therefore the intention of this analysis to diagnose the tension between war veterans and nationalists with a view to possibly craft a sustainable way forward. This is in view of the fact that the two constituencies have worked together and will need each other for as long as their rallying point remains in existence. The analysis is expected to offer critical parallels and insights into the movement's conflicts and struggles for power. The analysis derives its data from various archival

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material, literature and policy documents from as far as the 1960s to allow coverage of all the events and proceedings in the movements.

2. NATIONALISM AND LIBERATION *COMBATISM*: BACKGROUND

Nationalism in general is about black consciousness of the fact that prevalent poverty and a general worsening in the standard of living of most Africans, particularly in the urban and industrial regions was a result of oppression and deprivation. Cultural and political subjugation by the colonisers coupled with economic exploitation by capitalists severely impacted upon most Africans. Their discontent was worsened by simply knowing that it was their effort that guaranteed an up-market lifestyle amongst the colonisers. Besides poverty, Africans also realised that there was an aspect of oppression because of the colour (Moyana, 1984). It was then that Africans started complaining about their treatment by their oppressors and colonisers. Nationalism as sign of resistance to colonialism was a feeling built on common social practices, cultural legacy, and customary establishments and shared historical experience (Boahen, 1987). In Zimbabwe, nationalism emerged as an extension of peasant struggles and resistance to colonial rule. E.g. the Matobo peasant struggles to regain lost lands sucked in early nationalists like Burombo taking a judicial trajectory in Bulawayo. One cannot also ignore the effect of the Tangwena movement on nationalism and the war itself.

Nationalism as a response to oppression and colonisation manifested differently depending on what the people on the ground had in possession, their levels of knowledge and what they could cripple economically or politically as their way of expressing their concerns. In the industry, workers would organise labour unions, in the church sector, preachers would sermon at the same time, Africans would also demand equal status with their European counterparts while in the townships, women and children would also organise protests (Gray, 1960). All these were meant to send their grievances and discontent to the authorities so that they could get some attention. This was the era when there was a boom in labour bodies, cultural associations and the apostolic church as a protest to oppression and deprivation. Nationalists were typically the elite Africans agitating and galvanising the working people against colonial rule. Also, nationalists were not interested in removing colonial capitalism but mainly to fight for their elevation to a status of being equal with the Whites. They wanted White to remove discriminatory laws against elites. Their argument was that they had proved to be civil enough by succeeding in learning white habits through education.

Over time, it was realised that it was from these social, political and labour bodies' efforts that more nationalism was built (Mashingaidze, 1981). It was also from the repression and tough hand by the colonisers that the level of resistance firmed and grew. And these were the forerunners to the formation of most of the early political movements in Africa. Studies have shown that nationalism was responsible for all other efforts towards the liberation of most colonized African countries (Bhebe, 1999).

This paper purpotes that this is a controversial argument. Was nationalism responsible for peasant resistance or vice versa? Without taking away the credit of nationalism to foment liberation wars, did their stance remain immutable? Consider the countries that experience anti-colonial guerrilla struggles for example. FRELIMO in Mozambique, MPLA/FNLA in Angola, PAGC in Guinea Bisau and especially SA and the importance of the labour movement. We think the picture is much more complex and fluid than Bhebe has depicted.

Typically, Zaire, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia amongst others are outcomes of nationalist struggles that were probably not complemented by either military or diplomatic efforts. This was far before the birth of nationalism these were peasant resistance movements. Nationalism did not address the land question as this was not a priority for them.. Their focus was mainly elevation of their status above other Blacks and at the same level with Whites.

Nationalism as an approach is an effort by a collective either from a common field or varied fields joined together for more strength. It presents itself as a form of diplomacy which may however graduate to more militant ??? depending on the response by the oppressor and coloniser. With regards to some of the cases in southern Africa; Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, and South Africa, after the efforts by the nationalists had partially failed, the disgruntled and impatient masses in the township joined hands in support of nationalism. These efforts culminated into the protracted military offensives that finally led to the independence of the respective countries. What is clear with nationalism is that there was no military approach but diplomacy and community protests.

In southern Africa, nationalism was generally experienced from the mid-1920s when a number of Africans had started going to school and being able to tell oppressive tendencies up till the late 1980s. Education has a history of enlightening the masses to be able to see what is beyond what others see like social, political and economic inequalities in society. It also allows people to be flexible especially when it comes to critiquing the surrounding world from a reasoned philosophy. This is what really motivated the first secondary school students' protest at Dadaya Mission School in 1947 (Shamuyarira, 1978).

In Zimbabwe, nationalism was a reaction to the occupation of land by the settlers in 1893 culminating into the enactment of the Reserves Act in 1903 and the Municipal Act of 1897 which described the settlement conditions for Africans. The 1903 Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau which helped the Chamber of Mines to force Africans to work in the available mines and the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which entrenched the racial partitioning of land in Zimbabwe also influenced. There were also the Maize Control Act of 1931, Cattle Levy Act, 1931 and the Land Settlement Act of 1944 which saw the forced mass relocations of Africans from their original homes to semi-arid regions where agriculture was a non-event (Moyana, 1984; Beach, 1999). All these Acts invoked peasant not nationalist resistance. Nationalist politics began in the late 1950s with people Benjamin Burombo and Mzileki as originators of this movement. This was far before the birth of nationalism these were peasant resistance movements. Nationalism did not address the land question as this was not a priority for them.. Their focus was mainly elevation of their status above other Blacks and at the same level with Whites.

Therefore, nationalism in the majority of cases culminates into military options as was the case in Zimbabwe, SA, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia amongst others. War is the highest form of political struggle with a qualitatively different form from nationalism. This is why nationalism of the Dare reChimurenga and Chitepo/Moyo leadership cannot be equated with the earlier phases. This was a war effort and the nationalists had abandoned the nationalist agenda and practices of earlier periods. In fact Chitepo/Moyo committed what Cabral termed Class suicide The military strategy implies the creation of an army that compliments protests and diplomacy by the nationalists. In the Zimbabwean case, there were two liberation armies; Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) under Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA) under Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The two armies were formed and directed by their mother bodies that were being led by formally educated and professional individuals (McGregor, 2002). The armies were largely made up of the illiterate and desperate young people who had either skipped the borders running away from criminal cases or had been kidnapped from the schools by the recruiting guerillas (Bhebe, 1999).

3. BACKGROUND TO RIVALRY

The tension between war veterans and nationalists in Zimbabwe dates back to the liberation era when the latter saw themselves as better-educated political leaders the combatants were just a militarised uneducated group. To the nationalists, combatants took instructions from the nationalists who also viewed themselves as the architectures and drivers of the entire liberation struggle (Mashingaidze, 1981; Bhebe, 1999; McGregor, 2002). However, during Chitepo period this conflict

did not exist at least in ZANLA/ZANU (Hondo's interview with Munyaradzi Huni of the Sunday Mail, also Sadomba WZ 2011, Moore 1992). Combatants were categorised into two groups; combatants of peasantry upbringing with no proper education, who joined the liberation war between the 1960s and early 1970s, and the educated, left-wing combatants, who joined the struggle in the mid-1970s. The differences in their education and the period of joining to a greater extent played a role in their conception of the entire independence aspirations. This also explains the struggles within the struggle.

During the liberation era, combatants often clashed with nationalists over the entire administration of the war with the former accusing the latter of abusing war resources whilst the latter accused the former of ignorance (Shamuyarira, 1978). This culminated into the assassination of Herbert Chitepo in Zambia who was chairperson of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). Similarly, combatants felt that they had the power to appoint and remove leadership. This was confirmed by the Mgagao meeting in Tanzania in 1976, where members of the War Council declared President Mugabe leader (Ranger and Bhebe, 1997). As a response to a show of strength by the nationalists, a number of combatants were persecuted from 1976 after a coup attempt. The nationalist-war veteran tension simply spilled into the independent Zimbabwe as the latter hoped to either take over power or enjoy some power in government.

4. LIBERATION ENGAGEMENTS

Most nationalist efforts were transformed into liberation movements where the objective material circumstances obtaining made this revolution unavoidable. It was often circumstantial that nationalists resorted to the military approach as a last option towards securing independence. It was therefore from this arrangement that participants in the military had to be young and junior to the nationalists who often times drove the agenda, mobilised resources and steered international diplomacy amongst other initiatives. Age thus became a design for the war effort and not a default by the nationalist.

It was also observable that most of the nationalists shared a common ideology derived from their western propelled education hence their adoption of an almost similar military approach. However, the military approach was influenced by the effects of the bi-polar world politics where the west was at cold war against the east. According to Mashingaidze (1981) and Bhebe (1999), most liberation movements in southern Africa were identifiable through the following traits: guided by liberation philosophy and supported by scientific socialism, resolutely anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist; were mass movements and believed in protracted armed struggles. These liberation movements then had military wings which were responsible for the armed approach. The military needed to be highly trained and of high moral and discipline.

As a follow up to the nationalist efforts that in most cases failed to convince the colonisers, there were military arms in most southern African countries. Some of the noted military nationalist movements include; Movement for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and Movement for People's Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in Angola (Mondlane, 1970), ZIPRA and ZANLA in Zimbabwe, and South West African Peoples' Organisation (SWAPO) and African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress (PAC) in Namibia and South Africa respectively (Mashingaidze, 1981).

5. NATIONALIST-WAR VETERAN TENSION

The movement in the politics in Zimbabwe has had its fissures magnified over time so much so that it has become a free-for-all crisis. Tension between war veterans and nationalists has been taken to the public gallery and has revolved into various forms and magnitudes with accusations and counter-accusations being traded on the tuff. War veterans strongly feel that besides being responsible

for the appointment of Mugabe to the top leadership during the Mgagao Declaration of the 1970s, they have over the years safeguarded the interests of both the party and the nationalist leadership. Notably, they cite the 2000-2003 land invasions (Kriger, 2003b), 2001-2008 parliamentary by-election political violence, 2008 Harmonised elections violence (Blair, 2002; Dodo et al, 2016) and the 2007 ‘million man march’ in Harare amongst others. War veterans feel that the nationalist leadership is abusing them without any eventual recognition (Mhanda, 2011). The nationalist leadership has over the years observed that there is a clique of war veterans who have continually demanded compensation for their participation in the liberation war. After the attainment of Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, there have been six programmes meant to compensate former liberation war participants as follows:

- Reintegration fund ‘Demob’ 1981-84
- Empowerment and employment 1981
- War victims’ compensation 1992
- War veterans’ compensation 1997
- Land reform quota (medical and tuition) 2000
- Civil service upgrades 2000

Some beneficiaries have not meaningfully utilized the funds for personal development and have developed a tendency of making more demands on the basis that the constituency has previously campaigned for ZANU PF during elections. Like the war veterans, teachers, doctors, cotton and tobacco farmers, nationalists have not used their money productively. Thus war vets are no exception in using the funds particularly given the fact that they lacked rehabilitation on the proper use of the funds. Realizing this trend, some leadership have developed a defensive posture hence some of the conflicts. According to some scholars, (Meredith, 2007; Dodo, 2012) some war veterans make demands as if they were forced to participate, which has irked some nationalists. . However, what these authors failed to take note of is the fact that settlement of hostilities always ends with considerations of reintegration, rehabilitation and economic empowerment whether you are talking of Hannibal, Shaka, Churchill, Mao or Bwanyamulenge.

The actual philosophy behind compensation and reintegration is about the inevitable and unexpressed but social contract entered between liberators and the subjugated society. Both have rights, duties and obligations during and after the war of liberation. However, why should this be accepted for Rhodesian soldiers and not liberation ex-combatants? Why are RSF paid even in their currency of choice and not liberation fighters? This needs an answer from those who speak of ‘they were not forced.

There have been some conflicts pitting reformist (younger) war veterans against nationalists in the leadership largely emanating from the governance crises. Some of the war veterans who had an opportunity to formally acquire education are opposed to the politicisation of the military and militarisation of the administration of the country (Rupiya, 2007). This clique led by Jabulani Sibanda and his ZNLWVA national executive believe that the militarisation of Grain Marketing Board, National Railways of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (Meredith, 2007; Mhanda, 2011; Dodo, 2015) and others have contributed in the collapse of the economy.

Mainline Churches as opposed to the pentacostal and traditional ones have also fueled conflicts through their propagation of human rights and democracy defined from their religious lenses (Boahen, 1987). While the two constituencies may have historical differences dating back to the era of the liberation struggle, the churches in Zimbabwe have their governance system which they seek to construct within the liberation-led government. In order to achieve their objective, they have identified some young members from the war veterans’ constituency to advocate for the change.

The church through mission schools plays a very significant role in the provision of education. It is through some of this education that was imparted to the former liberation war combatants post-independence that they have mobilised courage, confidence and knowledge to

confront the leadership that is largely made up of the nationalists enunciating their expectations and questioning the legitimacy of nationalist leadership (Boahen, 1987). This was the argument raised by such young former liberation war participants and collaborators like Chenjerai Hitler Hunzvi in 1997 and Aggripa Gava during the 2004 Congress in Goromonzi.

Most nationalist leaders in Zimbabwe; Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Joseph Musika, Edgar Tekere, Herbert Ushewokunze, Simon Muzenda, Nathan Shamuyarira, Enos Nkala and several others remained locked within the mind-sets of the liberation war, even well after independence, when people especially war veterans were expecting to see growth and development in all sectors, social, political and economic. This archaic mentality in some nationalists locked all opportunities to allow power to move across the movement freely and democratically. Over the years, this has created a syndrome of hero-worshipping some nationalist leaders (Nyakudya, 2013).

It is nearly inevitable that most of the excessively widespread anticipations related to victory, which both nationalists and war veterans had sincerely shared, had been disenchanted by the realities of its performance in office, and the utter unfeasibility of effecting the amount of change that had been pledged (Clapham, 2012). Given that the government controlled the machinery of state power, it got a powerful inducement to apply that power to suppress practices of opposition, which was contrary to the beliefs by some educated and young war veterans. This followed a realisation by young war veterans in July 2015 that the nationalist leadership was reluctant to share power, and their attempts to voice their concerns attracted severe retribution by the nationalist leadership. In 2015, Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) chairman, Christopher Mutsvangwa, ZNLWVA spokesperson, Douglas Mahiya and Victor Matamadanda were persecuted for expressing their opinions. Some war veterans feel that President Mugabe supported by some of his nationalist colleagues have always out-foxed, hounded, annihilated and banished war veterans (Blair, 2002) who question his governance system.

There is a methodical entrenchment of despotic inclinations, personified by the President and his allies, sidelining war veterans who were labeled dissidents in 2016. While there have been various government-sponsored development programmes and various forms of compensation for the war veterans, they still feel sidelined by nationalists in leadership. War veterans have often cited land reform programme as one area where they did not benefit as expected despite having served as foot soldiers and having committed atrocities in the farms between 2000 and 2003 (Kriger, 2003a; Nyakudya, 2013).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The movement has been characterised by severe tension pitting war veterans against nationalists. These conflicts have also impacted on the effective performance of the government system so much so that the economy has been operating at its lowest ebb with unemployment staggering around 96%. These conflicts are not healthy just like several others. This is despite John Burton's contention that conflicts are necessary, healthy, inevitable and sometimes productive.

To address some of the tension in the movement, the paper first and foremost identified some of the problems, parties to the conflicts and factors driving the conflicts with a view to crafting possible remedies. Firstly, the paper acknowledges the structures within the movement that date back to its formation in the 1960s. Recognizing the leadership hierarchy, it then becomes clear that since the peasants founded nationalist politics should it not be peasants, nationalist then guerrillas that the nationalists founded the movement and therefore deserve some superior recognition. However, this does not imply deserving superior and unending positions since the movement is a result of collective effort.

The paper also notes that there are some reformists fighting against conservatives, definitions emanating from the groups' access to power and lootables. Therefore, as a way of addressing the tension, there has to be an acknowledgement in the people ideological differences especially the

natural ones. The movement has to devise a mechanism which accesses all the deserving members to economic and growth opportunities based on meritocracy rather than patronage. It is precisely through patronage that Mugabe and other nationalist leaders are rewarding members and in the process perpetuating conflicts. The movement has no constitution that regulates everyone as is supposed to be the case.

Personal vendettas in the movement should not take precedence over national development. The tension that has been recorded between war veterans and nationalists has ultimately impacted negatively on the generality of the population especially as it relates to economic development. To address the challenge of abusing resources in a bid to out-do each other, it is recommended that personal conflicts be amicably addressed through a meticulously established independent conflict resolution panel. To ensure effectiveness, the principle of separation of powers has to be religiously adhered to as a way of ensuring that the leadership does not either interfere or manipulate the processes.

The paper also recommends that there be an acknowledgement that the two constituencies; war veterans and nationalists are simply two sides of the same coin whose interests may not be either compromised or reconciled. What would be ZANU PF without war veterans? Indeed what is ZANU PF without the war fought by war vets? Just the formation does not accord nationalist superiority even these 50 years after War veterans should appreciate the fact that they are a solidarity group to ZANU PF which was formed and directed by nationalists. Anyone who then joins ZANU PF must then enjoy equal privileges.

In view of the above including the need to respect hierarchy, the leadership should also respect the grassroots by adhering to the founding principles of the liberation struggle of freedom, honesty, transparency, respect for humanity, development and constitutionalism amongst others. The same leadership should also realise that power needs to rotate in order to allow tapping different talents and expertise for the development and growth of Zimbabwe. The paper realises that other conflicts emanate from the fact that there is one very powerful centre of power in the movement. This has subsequently resulted in every member willing to survive and develop to hero-worship Mugabe and his other nationalist leaders. Given that there are some war veteran members who are opposed to that, the movement should just revert to the founding principles and possibly challenge the status quo. Most of the people in the movement should develop some spine if they are to challenge and reform the movement.

7. CONCLUSION

The study observes that the movement is so complex that it may not be easy to identify the dynamics driving the entire structure. However, over the years, there have been reformists fighting against conservatives. Of interest to note is that the two groups are defined by their access to power and lootables. Some war veterans like Mutsvangwa and his executive have become reformists because they were pushed to the periphery while conservatives would want to maintain that situation mainly because they are financially and materially benefitting from the system. Therefore, it is concluded that some of the conflicts are founded on personal vendettas rather than national grievances.

Given the trajectories and varied dynamics within the Zimbabwe political playing field, the long held implicit conclusion that war veterans and nationalists in the Zimbabwean politics are one is failing to stand its ground. Rather, what the analysis concludes is that the two constituencies are simply two sides of the same coin, which never sits on both sides at the same time. The two constituencies, though sharing some philosophies, have over time failed to compromise on various aspects owing to some beliefs held by others in the puzzle. Nationalists are convinced that they founded the movement and therefore are in charge and that most of the war veterans are less educated and ill-prepared to take over leadership. On the other hand, war veterans feel that most of the nationalists are philosophically archaic, despotic in nature and generally old that they need to hand

over leadership to the young constituency. They blame the nationalist leadership for all the visible ills in Zimbabwe despite the fact that for the greater part of the economic decline, they were part of the governance system.

There is a clique in the war veterans' ranks that has always arm-twisted government to avail resources wherever there is a pending election, threatening to boycott national campaigns. The movement has over the years employed war veterans to unleash terror and manipulate elections in order to steal elections in Zimbabwe. It is after this realisation by the nationalist leadership that they have plugged that end that conflicts now manifest. While the movement needs war veterans for its survival, the paper concludes that the former feels manipulated and blackmailed.

There has also been a realisation by some members within the movement that survival and relevance rests on Mugabe as head of both the government and the movement. Therefore, there has over the years been a rush towards securing Mugabe's recognition and favours. In the process, several individuals have been scathed and discarded subsequently resulting in inter-movement tension. However, the paper concludes that the existence of nationalist-war veteran tension is interpreted differently since there are national and personal interests being settled using the movement the liberation war legacy.

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