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Making sense of cultural nationalism and the politics of commemoration under the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe¹

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Abstract

This article examines the range of cultural events and activities promoted by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in the 2000s under the banner of the Third Chimurenga. It contributes to the lively debate on post-2000 cultural imaginings of a fetishised nation riddled by contestations over state power. The article posits that the version of 'cultural' nationalism promoted as part of the Third Chimurenga emerged partly as a political response to the failures of 'developmental' nationalism of the 1980s and 1990s and partly as a continuation and intensification of the previous imaginings of Zimbabwe that began in the 1960s. Through a range of cultural activities, the ruling party sought to legitimise its continued rule of Zimbabwe in the face of the challenges posed to its rule by the increasingly popular Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the growing number of civil society organisations. Through the specific genre of the 'music gala', cultural nationalism came to attribute new meanings to concepts such as 'independence,' 'heroes' and 'unity' in the changed political context of the 2000s. The gala effectively syncretised the elite memorialism of the 1980s and 1990s with the cultural practices of the 1970s liberation war. The revival of the project of cultural nationalism in the 2000s assisted ZANU-PF in deepening and strengthening the liberation war as Zimbabwe's primary foundation myth. It also enabled the ruling party to delegitimise the MDC as a party without liberation war credentials and as a threat to the country's 'independence' and 'unity'. This article tracks the roots of cultural nationalism prior to the 2000s, and analyses the forms that were promoted as part of the Third Chimurenga, with a specific focus on music galas, bashes and commemorations, in order to consider the type of nation that was being celebrated, performed and commemorated in post-2000 period.

Introduction

At the beginning of 2000, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government, through the Ministry of Information and Publicity which was headed by Jonathan

¹ The first version of this article was presented at *The Cultural Images in and of Africa Workshop* organised by the Nordic Africa Institute (Uppsala, Sweden) in collaboration with the Britain Zimbabwe Society (BZS), St. Anthony's College, University of Oxford, 27 June 2008.

Moyo, mounted a profound cultural nationalist project that unfolded in tandem with the fast-track land reform programme. This project comprised of a very elaborate media campaign carried primarily on the state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). This article seeks to examine the meaning and significance of this project for post-2000 politics. It starts off with a historical explanation as to why Zimbabwe found itself in the throes of an aggressive state-sponsored cultural nationalism. A closer look at this cultural nationalism reveals both continuities and a re-packaging of ZANU-PF's appeals to African culture and memories of the liberation war.²

Cultural or political nationalism?

Scholars such as John Hutchinson and Ernest Gellner have attempted to define cultural nationalism as separate from political nationalism. Hutchinson argued that 'cultural nationalism is a movement of moral regeneration which seeks to re-unite the different aspects of the nation—the traditional and modern, agriculture and industry, science and religion—by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation.'³ He specified his aim in these words:

I propose to demonstrate that...there are two quite different types of nationalism—cultural and political—that must not be conflated, for they articulate different, even competing conceptions of the nation, from their own distinctive organisations, and have sharply diverging political strategies.⁴

According to Hutchinson, political nationalists share with cultural nationalists an antipathy to the bureaucratic state. They tend to look to reason as their ethical source. Political nationalists conceive the nation as a 'civic *polity* of educated citizens united by common laws and mores like the *polis* of classical antiquity.'⁵ The objectives of political nationalists are to 'secure a representative state for their community so that it might participate as an equal in the developing cosmopolitan rationalist civilisation.'⁶ He added that:

Political nationalists have as their objective the achievement of a representative national state that will guarantee to its members uniform citizenship rights. They tend to organise on legal-rational lines, forming centralised apparatuses in order to mobilise different groups against the existing polity and to direct them to this unitary end.⁷

On the other hand, cultural nationalists perceive of the nation as a product of history and culture. To cultural nationalists, 'nations are then not just political units but organic beings, living personalities, whose individuality must be cherished by their members in all their manifestations.'⁸ According to Hutchinson, cultural nationalists are not comfortable with political nationalists' ideas of universal citizenship rights. They rather emphasise particularism as

² N. Kriger, 'From Patriotic Memories to 'Patriotic History' in Zimbabwe, 1990-2005,' in *Third World Quarterly*, 27, (6), (2006), p. 1164; T. Scarnecchia, *The Urban Roots of Democracy and Political Violence in Zimbabwe: Harare and Highfield, 1940-1964*, (University of Rochester Press, Rochester, 2008), pp. 1-15.

³ J. Hutchinson, 'Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration,' in J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith (eds.), *Nationalism*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1994), p. 123.

⁴ Ibid, p. 122,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p. 124.

⁸ Ibid.

‘the dynamo of national creativity.’⁹ In short, cultural nationalists seek to inspire ‘love’ of community, educating members of community on their common national heritage of splendour and suffering, engaging in naming rituals, celebrating cultural uniqueness, and rejecting foreign practices.

While Hutchinson and Gellner have made attempts to distinguish cultural and political nationalism, scholars focusing on the emergence of Zimbabwean nationalism have emphasised particular aspects of nationalism such as religion, peasant consciousness and post-war healing without necessarily making an effort to separate the political from the cultural.¹⁰ Similarly, this article considers that throughout the colonial and postcolonial period, political and cultural nationalism(s) were inextricably intertwined and impossible to disentangle from one another. Culture has been crucial ever since the idea of a Zimbabwean nation first became apparent in the 1960s. Like Antonio Gramsci, we treat culture as pivotal in the reproduction of power. For Gramsci, hegemony cannot simply be produced through coercion but always needs to be balanced with consent. However, we agree with Gellner that culture is particularly pivotal during moments of crisis. As Gellner has argued, cultural nationalists should be understood as ‘moral innovators’ who establish ‘ideological movements at times of social crisis in order to transform the belief-systems of communities, and provide models of socio-political development that guide their modernising strategies.’¹¹

In the history of Zimbabwean nationalism, cultural performances and commemorations have been an essential part of ZANU-PF’s attempt to popularise a form of nationalist politics that spoke to the heart, ‘the politics of affect, emotion and drama, which we call the “politics of performance”.’¹² John R. Gills has argued that ‘commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the product of processes of intense contest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation’.¹³ With reference to the specific case of Zimbabwe, Thomas Turino has stated that: ‘Nation-building - the forging of national sentiment - largely involves cultural and artistic domains, with language, music-dance, sports, food, religion, and clothing style often being central. The use of art and other cultural practices to develop or maintain national sentiment for political purposes is termed cultural nationalism’¹⁴

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ D. Martin and P. Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War*, (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1981); M. Sithole, *Zimbabwe: Struggles Within the Struggle: Second Edition*, (Rujeko Publishers, Harare, 1999); T. O. Ranger, *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe*, (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1988); D. Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*, (Zimbabwe Publishing House, Harare, 1988); N. J. Kriger, *Zimbabwe’s Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992); J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making & the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe, 1893-2003*, (James Currey, London, 2006); J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence & Memory: One Hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matabeleland*, (James Currey, London, 2000); N. Bhebe, *ZAPU and ZANU Guerrilla Warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Mambo Press, Gweru, 1999); N. Bhebe, and T. Ranger (eds.), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, (James Currey, Oxford, 1995); J. Nhongo-Simbanegavi, *For Better or Worse? Women and ZANLA in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, (Weaver Press, Harare, 2000)

¹¹ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983).

¹² J. C. Strauss and D. B. C. O’Brien, ‘Introduction,’ in Strauss and O’Brien (eds.), *Staging Politics*, (IB Tauris, London, 2007), p. 2.

¹³ J. R. Gills, ‘Introduction: Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,’ in J. R. Gills (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994), p. 5.

¹⁴ T. Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000), p. 14.

The role of culture in the evolution of Zimbabwean nationalism

The cultural aspects of the nationalist project of the early 2000s should not be treated in isolation from the historical emergence of Zimbabwean nationalism. Partha Chatterjee has pointed out that anti-colonial nationalism created its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society long before the battle with imperial power began.¹⁵ In his 1993 publication, Chatterjee emphasised how the cultural and spiritual sphere was the main domain within which anti-colonial nationalism emerged before it assumed political and militaristic features to fight imperial power.¹⁶ In other words, nationalists imagined a postcolonial nation long before fighting for its political realisation. As we shall see later in this article, these early imaginations made an important come-back in the early 2000s.

Chatterjee provides a useful periodisation of the unfolding of anti-colonial nationalism into three stages which he describes as 'moments'. The first stage is the 'moment of departure' which is characterised by the emergence of a nationalist leadership, the setting of goals of the nationalist movement and the effort to define the imagined postcolonial nation.¹⁷ In Zimbabwe, the period 1950-1963 could be understood as the 'moment of departure'. Enocent Msindo has referred to this phase as the 'golden age' of nationalism because of the positive complementarities between ethnicity and nationalism. Msindo has noted that during this period, ethnically-based societies such as the Sons of Mashonaland Cultural Society, the Kalanga Cultural Society, the Monomotapa Offspring Society and the Matabele Home Society produced nationalist leaders while ethnic histories provided the needed pre-colonial heroes, heroines, monuments and local expressions of anti-colonial discontent.¹⁸ Advocates of nationalism drew from pre-colonial language and culture and reinterpreted pre-colonial histories as they mobilised across ethnic lines as fighters for independence. Early nationalists appealed to ethnic cultural symbols such as the leopard skins and fur hats worn by pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele chiefs, which leaders like Joshua Nkomo and Leopold Takawira often wore when addressing the masses.¹⁹

It was also during the 'moment of departure' that a name for the imagined postcolonial nation was chosen: Zimbabwe.²⁰ Peter Garlake has pointed out that this name was chosen as a nationalist response to white settler Rhodesian 'cultural aggression' that sought to deny Africans any historical achievements. According to Garlake, the name 'Zimbabwe' was 'chosen to give a historical validity to the nation'.²¹ Emerging within a colonial settler milieu that aggressively

¹⁵ P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁶ Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

¹⁸ E. Msindo, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950-1963,' in *Journal of African History*, 48, (2007), pp. 276-279.

¹⁹ Ibid. See also J. Muzondidya and S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Echoing Silences': Ethnicity in Postcolonial Zimbabwe, 1980-2007,' in *African Journal on Conflict Resolution: Special Issue on Identity and Cultural Diversity in Conflict Resolution in Africa*, Vol. 7, (2), (Dec. 2007), p. 280.

²⁰ *Oral History Index: Oral/2333* Interview with Lawrence Vambe by I. J. Johnstone of the National Archives of Zimbabwe, National Archives of Zimbabwe, June 1983. See also J. Fontein, *The Silence of Great Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage*, (London, University College of London Press, 2006), pp. 117-139.

²¹ P. Garlake, 'Prehistory and Ideology in Zimbabwe,' in J. D. Y. Peel and T. Ranger (eds.), *Past & Present in Zimbabwe*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 15. See also J. Fontein, *The Silence of Great*

denied Africans of history and culture, African nationalism inevitably unfolded as a cultural phenomenon. In its cultural manifestations, it became highly evangelical as it positioned itself as a counter-ideological, cultural and political movement to settler colonialism.

Cultural nationalism reached its apogee during the celebration of the founding of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) on the 4th of March 1962 at Gwanzura Stadium in Highfield. Different forms of African traditional dances and songs graced the occasion, creating an inclusive image of a united imagined African nation.²² This was followed by the first ever 'Zimbabwe Festival of African Culture', organised by the Zimbabwe Traditional and Cultural Club (affiliated to ZAPU) in May 1963. Activities of this festival included a dress show whose aim was to find a new national dress that could be called the 'Dress of Zimbabwe'.²³ Cultural nationalism had taken root and the imagined nation was being performed and commemorated through the wearing of fur hats, carrying of traditional walking sticks, traditional music and dance.

The phase of the 'moment of departure' closed with a dramatic symbolic event in 1962 that took place at the airport, when Joshua Nkomo returned from a trip abroad and was met by ninety-year old Mr. Nyamasoka Chinamhora, uncle to Chief Chinamhora and veteran of the *First Chimurenga* (1896-1897). Chinamhora handed over a war-axe, sword and knobkerrie to Nkomo, encouraging him to fight to the bitter end.²⁴ This event marked the crucial role of the cultural aspects of the *First Chimurenga* in legitimising the 'moment of departure' of the nationalist project. The war-axe was an important symbol of the living spirit of African resistance. Despite these signs of unity against the colonial aggressor, the emergence of cultural nationalism was severely affected by a split among nationalists in 1963 that was followed by a period of inter-nationalist violence as well as an intensification of colonial repression under the reactionary Rhodesian Front (RF) government of Ian Smith. ZAPU and ZANU were banned and the nationalist leaders thrown into detention for the next ten years.

These developments set the stage for the next phase of the nationalist struggle, the 'moment of manoeuvre', which involved the beginning of the armed struggle and the building of rear military bases in Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. During the armed struggle, cultural nationalism played itself out in exile and in the rural areas where the guerrilla fighters operated. Musicians such as Comrade Chinx and the Light Machine Gun Choir led the *Chimurenga Songs/Ingoma zeNkululeko* (Liberation War Songs) in Mozambique and Zambia respectively. Thomas Mapfumo performed *Chimurenga Songs* inside Rhodesia to the chagrin of colonial authorities.²⁵ In the rural theatres of the struggle, *Chimurenga* music became an important mobilising, motivating and conscientising cultural tool, particularly for ZANU's Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). Songs featured during nightly gatherings held by guerrilla fighters (*pungwe* in chiShona) and also on programmes broadcasted via shortwave guerrilla radio stations such as ZANU's 'The Voice of Zimbabwe' (based in Mozambique) and ZAPU's 'Voice of the Revolution' (based in Zambia).

Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage, (London, University College of London Press, 2006), pp. 117-139.

²² *African Parade*, 1962.

²³ *African Parade*, 1963, p. 8. The idea of a 'national dress' was revived in the post-2000 period by Aeneas Chigwedere.

²⁴ *Daily News*, 30 July 1962.

²⁵ B. Chinamhora, 'African Popular Music,' in K. Sayce (ed.), *Tabex Encyclopaedia Zimbabwe*, (Quest Publishing, Harare, 1987), pp. 261-263.

In 1980, Zimbabwe entered the crucial ‘moment of arrival’ that saw ZANU-PF taking over the state and making efforts to mobilise the general population behind a vanguardist party and a vanguardist developmental state. During this phase, the state created such institutions as the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, the Zimbabwe Arts Council and the National Dance Company as part of its efforts to carry over nationalist-revolutionary messages. The liberation war served as the main foundation myth of the new nation. Radio programmes were introduced that played liberation songs such as *Dzimbodze Chimurenga Dzakasunungura* (‘Chimurenga Songs Liberated Zimbabwe’ in chiShona). The new government changed the old Rhodesian names of roads, streets, public buildings, towns, and parks, replacing these with nationalist-oriented ones. Furthermore, it also introduced a number of national public holidays which served to celebrate the country’s independence (Independence Day on 18 April), to remember those who had died during the liberation struggle (Heroes Day in August), and to mark the successes of Zimbabwe’s defence forces (Defence Forces Day in August). National days were marked with militarised official mass ceremonies in sport stadia.

The fragility of the new nation soon, however, became apparent in the early 1980s with the growing fall-out between the two former liberation movements, ZANU and ZAPU. Ex-ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo enjoyed significant support in Matabeleland. During the liberation war, he led ZAPU while Mugabe headed ZANU but in 1980 he lost against Mugabe in Zimbabwe’s first elections. In the early 1980s, ZANU increasingly revealed its intentions to establish a one-party state and began to represent Nkomo as a ‘dissident’ leader responsible for destabilising of the country.²⁶ In order to eliminate ZAPU ‘dissidents,’ the government sent the Korean-trained Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland and the Midlands in the early 1980s which resulted into deaths of over twenty thousand civilians.²⁷ The signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 brought an end to the violence and Nkomo was appointed as Vice-President, a position he held until his death in 1999.

Against the background of government’s efforts to create a one-party state, the nation was increasingly imagined as a ‘Shona-centred’ and ‘ZANU-PF-centred’ nation which excluded PF-ZAPU and Ndebele-speaking communities. This was indicated for example by the initiation of an ethno-centric dance-drama called *Mbuya Nehanda - The Spirit of Liberation*, which was created to coincide with the second anniversary of Zimbabwe’s Independence in 1982.²⁸ Criticism also targeted the national broadcaster ZBC which was accused of producing several documentaries about the history of ZANU but neglecting ZAPU. As ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo pointed out: ‘I wonder how ZIPRA’s disabled heroes feel when they hear ZBC say only ZANLA fighters fought during our struggle?’²⁹ ZAPU followers even launched a protest in front

²⁶ In the early 1980s, ZAPU was accused of plotting a war against the newly independent government. The government’s military operation in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in the early 1980s – also known as Gukurahundi – was justified by government under the premise of creating a unified nation in which there was no dissidence. Gukurahundi resulted in a large number of deaths, many of whom were civilians instead of former ZIPRA cadres, thereby questioning the government’s motives behind the military operation

²⁷ Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace & Legal Resources Foundation, *Breaking the Silence: Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands Regions, 1980-1988*, (CCJP & LRF, Harare, 1997).

²⁸ Turino, Nationalists, *Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*, p. 323.

²⁹ Quoted in: J. Zaffiro, *Media & democracy in Zimbabwe, 1931-2002*, (Colorado Springs, CO: International Academic Publishers, 2002), p. 79.

of ZBC's Bulawayo studio because they felt ZBC only aired ZANLA liberation war songs and failed to broadcast ZIPRA songs.³⁰

ZANU-PF's efforts to make itself central to the birth of the nation were also expressed in the declaration of 'national heroes' to commemorate those who had actively contributed towards the liberation struggle. After independence, the government constructed a national Heroes' Acre in Harare as well as equivalent official burial grounds for 'provincial' and 'district' heroes. Those who posthumously are declared 'national heroes' by government are buried in a state-funded funeral at Heroes' Acre and the status entitles widows and relatives of the deceased to a state pension. This hierarchical system of elite memorialism has been marked by numerous contestations over who deserves 'hero status'.³¹ In relation to the politics around the conferral of hero status, Kriger has argued that "public debates about war heroes have merely reflected the tensions in Zimbabwean society and politics, and have highlighted how fragile national authority and national unity are in a new nation".³²

Apart from these official commemorative ceremonies, the government did not heavily invest in cultural activities in the immediate post-independent period. The ZANU-PF government primarily legitimised its rule by referring to its aim to bring about 'development' for the majority black population and to redress colonial injustices. In many ways, the new government enjoyed obvious legitimacy in 1980 after a long protracted struggle for liberation. It did not find it necessary to resort to cultural activities in order to justify its rule but instead primarily defined its role in economic terms.

The nationalism of the 1980s should primarily be understood as a developmental nationalism coded in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric of scientific socialism. In practical terms, the ZANU-PF government underpinned its Marxist-Leninist political rhetoric with drawing up impressive five-year development plans as the foundation of the socialist transformation of the colonial political economy that had left the majority of Africans enveloped by poverty. Under the government's policy of *Growth with Equity*, it was stated that 'economic exploitation of the majority by the few, the grossly uneven infrastructure and productive development of the rural and urban distribution sectors ...and the consequent grossly inequitable pattern of income distribution and of benefits to the overwhelming majority of this country, stands as a serious indictment of our society'.³³ Developmental nationalism was pushed forward through the adoption of a *Transitional National Development Plan* in 1982 that was underpinned by socialist transformation as a strategy to reduce poverty and to fulfil the liberation war promises.³⁴ It was under developmental nationalism that Zimbabwe attained the highest standards of education and was hailed as a successful transitional state. The early 1980s also witnessed some successful and orderly land reforms and resettlement of peasants on newly bought farms.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 105.

³¹ R. P. Werbner, 'Smoke from the barrel of a gun: postwars of the dead, memory and reinscription in Zimbabwe', in R. P. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the postcolony: African anthropology and the critique of power* (London, Zed Books, 1998).

³² N. Kriger, 'The politics of creating national heroes: the search for political legitimacy and national identity', in N. Bhebe & T. Ranger (eds.), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's liberation war* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995), p. 162.

³³ Government of Zimbabwe, *Growth and Equity: An Economic Policy Statement*, (Government Printers, Harare, 1981). See also L. Sachikonye, 'From Growth with Equity' to 'Fast Track' Reform: Zimbabwe's Land Question,' in *Review of African Political Economy*, 96, (2003), pp. 227-240.

³⁴ Government of Zimbabwe, *Transitional National Development Plan: 1982/3-1984-5: Volume One*, (Government Printer, Harare, 1982).

While ZANU-PF projected itself as a radical socialist vanguard party, the developmental nationalism that it espoused remained locked within fiscally conservative, export-oriented structures inherited from colonialism. State-interventionist programmes that included government-sponsored agrarian reform and import-substitution industrialisation were expected to result in an equitable distribution of national assets and incomes. But like the case with all postcolonial governments, the ZANU-PF government's drive for an eradication of poverty remained constrained by the reliance on or acquiescence to global capital. As a result of these constraints, the government was not able to fulfil its ambitious development projects. Worse still, the political economy of developmental nationalism became compromised by corruption and an accrual of riches to a few politically connected classes.

By the 1990s, the developmental aspects of nationalism stagnated and the first signs of state failure to deliver on material promises became apparent.³⁵ Economic growth stagnated and the ZANU-PF government was forced to adopt the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) that was overseen by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). While ESAP met with stiff resistance from workers and students, the ZANU-PF government insisted that it was a home-grown developmental initiative meant to increase economic growth. By 1997, ESAP had caused more problems and had failed to deliver economic growth. ZANU-PF government had to officially abandoned it. Meanwhile, the disastrous economic consequences of ESAP created many enemies for the ZANU-PF government, ranging from retrenched workers, starving college and university students and other suffering constituencies, including the war veterans. Some began to blame nationalism as an ideology that had served its purpose and needed to be replaced by a post-nationalist dispensation attentive to global trends.³⁶

Cultural nationalism as compensation for state failure (2000-2008)

Across Africa, failing regimes like that of Mobutu in Zaire have resorted to cultural nationalism as a way of managing society.³⁷ In the midst of diminishing economic resources and a failure to deliver material goods to citizens, governments facing a crisis of legitimacy have fallen back on culture in an attempt to renew themselves. In a context in which the legitimacy of the ZANU-PF government was increasingly contested, the nationalist struggle proved a valuable resource for ZANU-PF in order to rejustify its rule, particularly in the face of an opposition party that drew large support from white Zimbabweans, civil society organisations and major world powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom. It was at this conjuncture that cultural nationalism became an important project for the ZANU-PF government to re-assert its anti-colonial message in the face of new 'imperial threats' embodied by the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). While the expropriation of land provided ZANU-PF with some material resources in the struggle for power, culture emerged as an ideological resource that could easily be mobilised for political survival. The cultural nationalist project of the early 2000s should thus be interpreted as one of the ways through which the ZANU-PF government attempted to compensate for the failure of the developmental nationalism of the 1980s that had sought to

³⁵ S. Dansereau, 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Zimbabwe's Development Impasse,' in H. Melber (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Decline*, (Discussion Paper, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2005)

³⁶ In March 2000 Morgan Tsvangirai openly declared that the MDC was not inspired by nationalism and that it sought to build a post-nationalist dispensation. To him nationalism was now captive to a time warp and cronyism. It had become an end in itself. See P. Bond, 'Radical Rhetoric and the Working Class During Zimbabwean Nationalism's Dying Days,' in *Journal of World-Systems Research*, VII, (i), (Spring 2001), pp. 52-89.

³⁷ F. de Boeck, 'Postcolonialism, Power and Identity: Local and Global Perspectives from Zaire,' in R. Werbner and T. Ranger (eds.), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, (Zed Books, London and New Jersey, 1996), pp. 75-99.

transform the settler colonial economic system, to reduce poverty among workers and peasants and to initiate sustainable economic development of the country as part of the fulfilment of liberation struggle promises.

The emergent cultural nationalism of the 2000s was partly a response to the post-Cold War global ideologies of human rights, democracy and neo-liberalism and ideals such as pluralism and cosmopolitanism. ZANU-PF's post-2000 discourse openly disparaged democracy and human rights as part of alien values that were potentially subversive of national sovereignty. However, it was also a reflection of the ideological shifts that had taken place within the ZANU-PF government. While the newly independent government in 1980 emphasised a plural and civic conception of the nation, this has been transformed into Afro-radicalism and a nativist interpretation of the nation in the face of the growing opposition in the early 2000s. This shift was accompanied with a revival of anti-colonial rhetoric and a careful re-packing of the land question not only as an economic issue but also as a fundamental part of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. Land played a central role in the cultural and symbolic project of the *Third Chimurenga*. The material importance of land was well expressed in ZANU-PF's campaign slogan "land is the economy, the economy is land".

A crucial element of the resuscitation of nationalism in Zimbabwe in the early 2000s was the intensification of government-sponsored cultural activities which, under the pretext of celebrating 'the all-inclusive nation', sought to gather support for ZANU-PF's agenda and discredit the MDC. As argued by Askew with reference to Tanzania, 'performing the nation' included the repackaging of romanticised culture as a hand-maiden of a particular mode of politics.³⁸ In Zimbabwe, this performance took the form of range of bashes, galas and commemorations as well as a dramatisation of ZANU-PF's legitimacy as founded on the liberation struggle through well-selected television documentaries, a revival of *Chimurenga* music and carefully crafted political speeches. Performing the nation involved the conflation of state, nation, ruling party and the person of Robert Mugabe into one symbol of national sovereignty that needed to be jealously guarded. It ranged from singing a national anthem to the wearing (by the ZANU-PF Women's League) of identical dresses with Mugabe's portrait emblazoned on the fabric.³⁹

The national broadcaster ZBC, which held a monopoly on the airwaves, played a central role in beaming the performances and commemorations into the homes of Zimbabweans. In the early 2000s, the broadcaster was increasingly incorporated into the state project of cultural nationalism, particularly after the introduction of ZBC's new strategy 'Vision 30' in November 2001. Through Vision 30, the broadcaster sought 'to provide world-class quality programmes and services that reflect, develop, foster and respect the Zimbabwean national identity, character, cultural diversity, national aspirations and Zimbabwean and Pan-African values.'⁴⁰ Vision 30 brought into effect the local content conditions which were part of the Broadcasting Services Act that was introduced in April 2001. This Act stipulated that 75 percent of television content should consist of local and African material, while 75 percent of radio content should comprise

³⁸ K. M. Askew, *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002), p. 14.

³⁹ Ibid, pp 290-291.

⁴⁰ Advert in ZBC relaunch supplement, *The Herald*, 30 November 2001.

Zimbabwean music. The local content conditions resulted in the removal of foreign soaps, music and news programmes but led to the flourishing of a new music genre named ‘urban grooves’.⁴¹

Vision 30 also saw the launch of a range of televised ‘galas’ (i.e. music festivals) which commemorated a number of historical events, national days or politicians who had played an important role in the liberation struggle. The galas served to popularise the celebration of national days such as Independence Day, Heroes’ Day and Unity Day. They also sought to commemorate and mark the contribution of crucial ‘national heroes’ such as Joshua Nkomo and Simon Muzenda. These music festivals, which were broadcast live on television and radio, constituted an important part of ZANU-PF’s mediation of patriotic history and sought to popularise a particular version of national identity.⁴² While they were strongly associated with government and the ruling party, the galas did not tend to make explicit references to ZANU-PF nor were they always used by government politicians to make speeches. As compared to the official annual commemoration of national days such as Independence Day and Heroes’ Day, the political message of the galas was more subtle and served to indirectly back up ZANU-PF’s agenda. They sought to complement the more formal commemorative ceremonies of national days which had been introduced in the 1980s. The music galas were ZANU-PF’s attempts to forge a consciousness based on its narrow version of the ‘party-nation’.

Reinforcing the link with sovereignty and the liberation war, galas were announced as *pungwes*. For example, an article in *The Herald* argued that ‘musical galas are the reincarnation of the night vigils (pungwes) that whipped people into common liberation thinking and kept them informed, educated and united.’⁴³ Thus, while government in the 1980s and early 1990s primarily understood the nation as an economic entity that had inherited colonial inequities which the new government was going to rectify, the failure of this developmental nationalism in the early 2000s and resultant loss of state legitimacy forced government to resort to a cultural justification. The cultural practices of the liberation war constituted the main basis for the revival of cultural nationalism.

The galas became an important platform for government-sponsored musicians part of the *Third Chimurenga* music album series as well as for the new ‘urban grooves’ generation of musicians. Lesser known theatre ensembles and dance groups performing ‘traditional’ dance were also part of the line-up. Well-known and best-selling musicians who fitted none of these categories often faced a difficult decision when invited whether or not to participate in the galas. Association with galas - and thereby with the ruling party - could be damaging to those fans supporting the opposition but not participating could, on the other hand, result in less airplay on the national broadcaster which was controlled by government. For example, musician Andy Brown lost significant popular support after he associated himself with the *Third Chimurenga* project. In early 2005, popular artist Oliver Mtukudzi swiftly distanced himself from the ruling party after it was reported he performed in a private bash to celebrate Joice Mujuru’s appointment as Vice-President. The galas were an important means through which musicians could distribute and publicise their music on radio and television. In the context of a severe

⁴¹ ‘Urban grooves’ artists comprise musicians such as Flash Gordon, Decibel, Sanii Makhalima, Roy and Royce, David Chifunyise, Roqui, Leonard Mapfumo, Betty Makaya, Extra Large and Maskiri. ‘Urban grooves’ heavily draws from American music genres such as Rap, Hip Hop and R&B but song lyrics are mostly in local languages such as chiShona or siNdebele.

⁴² D. Gandhi and L. Jambaya, *Towards A National Agenda on ZBC: Vision 30 Revisited*, (Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe, Harare, 2002).

⁴³ Guvamombe, Isdore, Galas a reincarnation of pungwes, *The Herald*, 26 July 2005.

economic crisis, musicians therefore often creatively manoeuvred between participating in state music events and offering critical social commentary on the situation in the country.

Galas, bashes and the politics of commemorating the ‘nation’

While the revival of cultural nationalism in the early 2000s popularised the post-independence elite memorialism of the 1980s and 1990s, it most obviously drew from the cultural practices of the 1970s liberation war. Immediately after independence, the new ZANU-PF government adopted a policy of racial reconciliation but this was largely abandoned in the early 2000s. The post-2000 period saw the re-emergence of the race trope and the anti-imperialist discourse that had been part of the liberation struggle.⁴⁴ Race featured as a central element in ZANU-PF’s revival of nationalism. As Brian Raftopoulos has argued: ‘One of the central features of the Zimbabwean crisis, as it unfolded since 2000, has been the emergence of a revived nationalism delivered in a particularly virulent form, with race as a key trope within the discourse, and a selective rendition of the liberation history deployed as an ideological policing agent in the public debate’.⁴⁵ White Zimbabweans were excluded from official versions of the nation. They were portrayed as part of the opposition MDC which according to government sought to counter radical reform and re-instate colonial rule.

The re-definition of white minorities as enemies of Zimbabwe was accompanied with efforts to incorporate youth through a combination of coercion and consent. The establishment of ‘National Youth Training Service Centres’ served to indoctrinate youth with ‘official nationalism’ at its cultural insurrection phase.⁴⁶ The toughest job for ZANU-PF at the beginning of 2000 was to foster ‘patriotism’ founded on the memory of the liberation struggle on the youth who had not experienced the liberation struggle. Coercion as a strategy of retaining power was coming under serious criticism and was proving inadequate as a political survival strategy. The televised galas popularised official versions of the nation through music, a medium which was particularly suitable to engage the so-called ‘born-frees’ (those born after 1980) who had not experienced the liberation struggle and the hardship of colonialism. Young Zimbabweans had to be re-educated so as to appreciate the importance of the liberation struggle. While the *pungwe* of the 1970s sought to convince youth to join the liberation struggle, the music gala of the early 2000s was aimed at hailing young Zimbabweans as patriotic supporters of the ruling party. The incorporation of popular ‘urban grooves’ musicians into galas would guarantee a young audience who during the gala would not only be subjected to ‘urban grooves’ but also to the revived *Chimurenga* songs of the liberation war.

The cultural nationalism of the early 2000s thus in important ways continued the cultural practices of the liberation struggle. Galas proved a useful resource to emphasise the contribution of ZANU-PF to the liberation of Zimbabwe and to discredit the MDC. The following sections discuss the way in which the gala syncretised the elite memorialism of the 1980s with the cultural practice of the 1970s *pungwe*. Through the galas, concepts such as ‘independence’, ‘heroes’ and ‘unity’ obtained a new relevance in the particular political context of the 2000s in which ZANU-PF’s legitimacy was increasingly challenged by the opposition MDC.

⁴⁴ Kriger, ‘From Patriotic Memories to ‘Patriotic History in Zimbabwe,’ pp. 1164-1166.

⁴⁵ B. Raftopoulos, ‘Nation, Race and History in Zimbabwean Politics,’ in S. Dorman, D. Hammet & P. Nugent (eds.), *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa*, (Brill Publishers, Leiden and Boston, 2007), p. 101.

⁴⁶ The Solidarity Peace Trust, *National Youth Service Training-Shaping Youths in a Truly Zimbabwean Manner’: An Overview of Youth Militia Training and Activities in Zimbabwe, October 200-August 2003*, (The Solidarity Peace Trust, 5 September 2003).

Independence Day

In the 2000s, 'independence' no longer merely referred to the year 1980 when Zimbabwe obtained independence from colonial rule but it had been given renewed meaning by ZANU-PF in the face of an emerging opposition party which was portrayed as an agent of the British government and white Zimbabwean 'Rhodies' who threatened the sovereignty of the nation. Tony Blair was accorded a central place in ZANU-PF's campaign as he was considered to be the main instigator and supporter of the opposition party MDC.⁴⁷ While Zimbabwe was formally independent, election campaigns of the ruling party stressed that the country's sovereignty was again under threat because of the rising popularity of the MDC which was backed by major world powers, and Britain in particular.

Both the 'old' and 'new' meanings of independence were mediated through the annual 'Independence Gala' which was broadcasted live on ZBC. For example, during the 'More Fire Independence Gala' held in Harare in April 2002, musician Last Chiangwa (also known as 'Tambaoga') performed a song called 'Agirimendi' ('agreement' in chiShona). In the song, Tambaoga attacked Britain's attempts to 'recolonise' Zimbabwe and mocked Tony Blair who he referred to as "The only Blair that I know is a toilet". 'Blair toilets' commonly refer to pit latrines in Zimbabwe which are prevalent in the rural areas. The song fitted well with ZANU-PF's focus on Blair's attempts to re-establish Zimbabwe as a British colony and endorsed the 'new' meaning the government attached to 'independence'.

The 'Silver Jubilee' celebrations in 2005, on the other hand, which marked 25 years of independence, expressed the older meaning of independence and the role of the liberation struggle in this regard. The celebrations, which were extensively televised on ZBC, included an award ceremony which conferred "the country's highest national honours and awards on Zimbabweans and foreign nationals who distinguished themselves in different fields and service to the liberation of Zimbabwe and its general socio-economic development".⁴⁸ Among those honoured with a Silver Jubilee award were former presidents of the 'frontline states' such as Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, Mozambique's Samora Machel, Botswana's Seretse Khama and Angola's Agostinho Neto and Zimbabwean nationalists such as Leopold Takawira, Samuel Parirenyatwa, Joshua Nkomo, Simon Muzenda and Bernard Chidzero.

The extensive celebrations of Independence Day in the 2000s thus sought to emphasise the achievements made by ZANU-PF during the liberation war and ultimately conferred legitimacy on the party to continue its rule over Zimbabwe. The opposition party MDC was considered as the antithesis of 'independence'. The majority of MDC representatives had no strong links with the liberation war. Worse still, MDC accommodated white Zimbabweans in its ranks and this enabled ZANU-PF to link the opposition to Rhodesian and British interests. A vote to MDC was equated with a threat to independence. In this political context, Independence

⁴⁷ The sour relations between Mugabe and Blair date back to October 1997 when Mugabe approached Britain for funds to finance a land reform redistribution programme during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh. Further damage to the relationship between the two governments was done in that year through a letter written by the previous Secretary for International Development Clare Short to the Zimbabwe Minister for Agriculture, Kumbirai Kangai in which she stated the following: "I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new Government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonised not colonisers". See: Short, C. (2002) 'How it all started', *New African* 40(5), p. 10.

⁴⁸ Silver Jubilee: Zim to honours distinguished individuals, *The Herald*, 15 April 2005.

Day therefore proved a suitable occasion for ZANU-PF to justify its continued presence in Zimbabwe.

Heroes' Day

The main aim of the annual Heroes' Day celebrations is to remember the 'fallen heroes' of the liberation struggle. In 2002, the official annual celebrations were supplemented with a range of televised music galas that both served to commemorate the liberation war and its victims and to raise awareness about the war among the younger generation of 'born-frees'. In August 2002, the first 'Heroesplush' gala took place in Chinhoyi and hereby complemented the official Heroes' Day celebrations in Rufaro Stadium in Harare. The choice of this location was significant because Chinhoyi had been the site of the famous 'Battle of Sinoia' on 28 April 1966 between ZANLA forces and the Rhodesian Security Forces.⁴⁹ To ZANU-PF, this day effectively marked the start of the armed struggle. In addition to the galas held around Heroes' Day, the government also sponsored a one-off music festival in Chimoio, Mozambique in October 2004 which was dubbed the 'Solidarity Bash'. Chimoio served as an important military base for ZANLA forces in the liberation war. On 23 November 1977, Rhodesian forces attacked the base and killed an estimated 3,000 guerrilla fighters. The event served to commemorate those who died in the massacre and also sought to mark good relations between Zimbabwe and Mozambique that dated back to the liberation struggle. The Minister for Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo, justified the event by stating that 'We should pay homage and celebrate the solidarity. This is yet another way of recalling our Independence' and branded those who criticised the event as 'enemies and merchants of confusion'.⁵⁰ The locations chosen for Heroesplush in 2002 and the Solidarity bash in 2004 implicitly served to emphasise the contribution of ZANU-PF and ZANLA forces towards the liberation struggle. Both Chinhoyi and Chimoio were places where particularly ZANU-PF and ZANLA had fought. The absence of similar celebrations in ZAPU or ZIPRA bases indirectly silenced their role in the liberation war.⁵¹

The revival of commemorations of liberation war victims should be understood in the changed context of the 2000s during which Heroes' Day regained a specific relevance. Firstly, because of the increased importance of the political constituency of war veterans who had successfully negotiated for a pension scheme in 1999 and hereby obtained a higher public and political profile. Their role was constantly emphasised and their symbolic value proved useful for government in order to legitimise actions such as the occupation of commercial farms and more generally conferred legitimacy on ZANU-PF to rule the country.⁵² Ex-combatants who had fought for land during the war merely returned to complete the unfinished business of the Lancaster House Agreement. Because of its contribution to the liberation war, ZANU-PF was the only legitimate party to rule the country as sovereignty was not guaranteed if other parties would come into power.

Secondly, the notion of 'hero' served to reinforce a clear distinction between on the one hand the 'true patriots' and on the other hand the 'sell-outs' who threatened Zimbabwe's

⁴⁹ Martin and Johnson, *The Struggle for Zimbabwe*, pp. 25-30.

⁵⁰ Mbiriya Mveke, Jonathan, 'Zim-Mozambique solidarity bash roars into life', *The Herald*, 11 October 2004.

⁵¹ A. M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union, 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, (Africa World Press, Trenton, 2005).

⁵² N. Kriger, 'Zimbabwe: Political constructions of war veterans,' in *Review of African Political Economy*, 30(96), (2003), p. 323.

sovereignty.⁵³ According to government minister Witness Mangwende, it was ‘a revolutionary duty for a son and daughter of Zimbabwe to come to the Heroes’ Acre to honour their heroes who brought them the hard-won independence’.⁵⁴ But ‘Heroes’ Day’ was not a mere neutral state ceremony but had become closely associated with ZANU-PF. For example, during the 2003 official Heroes’ Day celebrations, President Mugabe urged the opposition party MDC to ‘repent’: ‘Those who would go together with our enemies abroad cannot at the same time want to march alongside us as our partners in the nation-building efforts that are underway. We say no to them, they must first repent. There is room for them to repent, there is room for them to say we were wrong yesterday, we shall not be wrong tomorrow.’⁵⁵

The notion of ‘hero’ thus did not merely refer to the past but had a clear bearing upon the present of the 2000s in which the MDC was considered to pose an illegitimate challenge to the exclusive claim of ZANU-PF to rule the country because of its ‘non-existent’ liberation war credentials. The continued importance of Zimbabweans to follow the spirit of ‘its gallant sons and daughters’ in fighting imperialism was emphasised by Mugabe in another speech during Heroes’ Day in 2004:

This National Shrine [Heroes’ Acre], as indeed are the district and provincial and other shrines where our fallen heroes lie, is a place of renewal and re-dedication that strengthens our resolve and pledge that Zimbabwe shall never be a colony again. For, as we look at the pantheon of heroes and heroines who make our roll call today, what greater challenge, what greater patriotism is there, than to faithfully and resolutely guard that which cost us tens of thousands of lives to achieve? Where would our honour be if we were intimidated by imperialism’s tired trickery into letting go of our sacred land?⁵⁶

Indirectly, Mugabe hereby referred to the disservice Zimbabweans would do to its ‘fallen heroes’ by supporting the opposition party MDC which would bring back ‘colonialism’ and hereby threaten the very independence that those who participated in the liberation war had fought for. The category of ‘hero’ thus became restricted to loyal members of ZANU-PF. In another address in Victoria Falls in July 2005, Mugabe again reinforced the distinction between ‘heroes’/‘patriots’ and ‘sell outs’/‘stooges’ along party lines:

We have always said we don’t want stooges and puppets working day and night to effect regime change with our former colonial masters. So that’s the difference between us and the MDC. Zanu-PF is a revolutionary party while the MDC are counter-revolutionaries and reactionaries. For us in Zanu-PF, the power of the Government, the President and his ministers comes from the people of Zimbabwe. For the MDC, they derive their power from Mr. Blair. So there you are. You have a choice. Where do you stand? On the side of the people, or the British? If you stand with the British, you are not one of us you are a sell out, a stooge.⁵⁷

The association of national heroes with ZANU-PF was further supported by the incorporation of ‘new’ heroes who had not necessarily actively participated in the *Second Chimurenga* but who

⁵³ S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ‘Puppets or Patriots! A Study of Nationalist Rivalry Over the Spoils of Dying Settler Colonialism in Zimbabwe, 1977-1980,’ in W. J. Burszta, T. Kamusella & S. Wojciechowski (eds.), *Nationalisms Across the Globe: An Overview of Nationalisms in State-Endowed and Stateless Nations: Volume II: The World*, (School of Humanities and Journalism, Poznan, 2006), pp. 345-398.

⁵⁴ Thousands Expected At Heroes’ Commemorations, *The Herald*, 9 August 2004.

⁵⁵ President Implores MDC to Repent, *The Herald*, 16 August 2003.

⁵⁶ Time to Remember Gallant Liberators, *The Herald*, 10 August 2004.

⁵⁷ Madonko, Innocent, Remain United – President, *The Herald*, 15 July 2005.

were loyal party members. Heroes' Acre began to incorporate 'new' heroes who had played an instrumental role in the *Third Chimurenga*. For example, although he did not have identifiable liberation war credentials, Chenjerai Hunzvi was declared a 'national hero' after his death in May 2001 for his leadership in the occupation of commercial farms in 2000. Hence, what constituted a national hero did no longer strictly refer to past contributions but also incorporated the present and particularly loyalty to the party in the 2000s.⁵⁸

Apart from commemorating old heroes from the liberation struggle, young Zimbabweans were invited to become 'new heroes'. In August 2001, the government introduced a formal 'National Youth Service' training programme which was the brainchild of the late Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment, Border Gezi. Gezi introduced the programme in a government policy document in October 2000 but could not witness the implementation of his ideas as he died in a car accident in April 2001.⁵⁹ The programme saw the establishment of a range of youth training camps throughout the country. Based on a speech delivered by Vice-President Simon Muzenda during the graduation of over 2,000 youth at Dadaya training centre in the Midlands, *The Herald* summarised the aims of the training programme as follows:

The national youth service training programme is a Government nation-building programme that has been designed to correctly inform our youths of their history and more importantly to equip them with skills that enable them to survive the socio-economic challenges facing Zimbabwe as a previously colonized developing nation [...]. The modules delivered to youths during the training demystify what many of our youths have been misled to believe, that Africans and their culture are inferior to other inhabitants of this earth, more so to Europeans. The programme impresses in the minds of our young Zimbabwean citizens the basic human and democratic principles of equality, equity and individual freedom. It is geared towards boosting the self-worth image of the youth as an independent and self-reliant generation that is knowledgeable of its own roots, patriotic, and ready to defend its right to existence on planet earth.⁶⁰

While the government denied that the programme was a partisan project that served to further ZANU-PF's political agenda, the programme provided the party with a trained youth militia – popularly known as 'green bombers' – that has been deployed on a number of occasions to serve the ruling party, e.g. in government elections and in the distribution of food.

In order to popularise and revive the role of the liberation war among youth, a musical event termed 'Freedom Youth Hangout' was organised in March 2005 in Avondale Shopping Centre in Harare. As other galas, the event was broadcast live on ZBC and the line-up was dominated by popular young 'urban grooves' artists such as Rocqui, M'afriq, Maskiri, Stunner, Double Trouble, Afrika Revenge, Taurai, Themba & Victor and Betty Makhaya. Often referred to as 'born-frees', youth in Zimbabwe have been distinguished from the older generation that witnessed colonialism. The event was effectively a *pungwe*, lasting from Saturday afternoon until early Sunday morning, thereby associating itself with the all-night gatherings organised during the liberation war. While *pungwes* during the 1970s sought to motivate young people into

⁵⁸ S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Patriots, Puppets, Dissidents and the Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Contemporary Zimbabwe,' in *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, (January 2008), pp. 81-108.

⁵⁹ Solidarity Peace Trust, *National youth service training – "Shaping youth in a truly Zimbabwean manner": An overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe, October 2000 - August 2003*, (Solidarity Peace Trust, South Africa/Zimbabwe, 5 September 2003), p. 13.

⁶⁰ Solidarity Peace Trust, *National youth service training – "Shaping youth in a truly Zimbabwean manner": An overview of youth militia training and activities in Zimbabwe, October 2000 - August 2003*, (Solidarity Peace Trust, South Africa/Zimbabwe, 5 September 2003), p. 18.

joining the struggle, the 'Freedom Youth Hangout' served to remind young Zimbabweans of the situation of 'freedom' during which they were born and the importance of retaining this freedom by standing up against 'imperialist' forces such as the MDC. During the event, t-shirts were handed out with a logo that included the conical tower of Great Zimbabwe that has now become primarily associated with the logo of the ruling party ZANU-PF. While the t-shirt itself did not explicitly mention ZANU-PF, inclusion of the Great Zimbabwe conical tower in the design indicated a subtle reference to the ruling party. Both the 'national youth service programme' and the 'Freedom Youth Hangout' concert intended to glorify the heroic nature of ex-combatants and invited youth to play a similarly 'heroic' role in the struggle against 'imperialism' in the 2000s as exemplified through the MDC.

Unity day

Like the Independence Day and Heroes' Day celebrations, Unity Day obtained a new meaning in the political climate of the 2000s. While the original Unity Day celebrations served to commemorate the signing of the 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU-PF and ZAPU, the government began to re-emphasise the importance of 'unity' against the background of the rising popularity of a new opposition party MDC.⁶¹ The MDC was represented as a party that threatened the unity of Zimbabwe as is demonstrated for example in the following extract from an article that appeared in *The Herald*:

[T]he unity among Zimbabweans has been constantly attacked by the country's detractors and those who want to manipulate its people. Western nations, particularly Britain, are now employing some devious means of dividing Zimbabweans by creating and funding opposition political parties. The funded opposition parties such as the MDC are often dangerous and are bent on dividing the people along tribal lines. The British sponsored violence in the country by funding the MDC to embark on mass protests soon after the presidential election last year. They even tried to evoke tribal sentiments by manufacturing a document alleging that the Government had hatched a scheme to exterminate the Ndebeles.⁶²

The MDC was considered a party bent on destroying the 'national unity' that was introduced with the Unity Accord in 1987. However, 'national unity' was primarily defined in terms of a de facto one-party state in which ZANU-PF had exclusive, monopoly rule. The MDC was presented as a direct threat to unity. For example, during a rally in Umzingwane District, Matabeleland South in the run-up to the March 2005 parliamentary elections, Mugabe put it as follows:

We are a people-oriented Government, a people-oriented party in the first place. It is the interests of the people we look at as we formulate our programmes. But we would want the people to be with us. Give us the necessary support. It is that oneness that we require and it must be demonstrated once every five years. And now I ask: Are you going to demonstrate that unity by voting for Zanu-PF in the parliamentary elections?⁶³

This call for unity was particularly invoked during rallies in Matabeleland because of the resonance that the concept of 'unity' had in that part of the country. The Unity Accord was

⁶¹ C. S. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890-1990*, (The College Press, Harare, 1989) and M. Sithole, 'Turmoil and Tenacity: The Road to the Unity Accord: Essay Review,' in *Zambezia*, Vol. XVIII, No. ii, (1991), pp. 143-152.

⁶² Chikova, Lovemore and Lovemore Mataire, 16 Years On Zim Remains United, *The Herald*, 22 December 2003.

⁶³ Keep Unity Alive, Says President, *The Herald*, 8 February 2005.

concluded between ZANU and ZAPU, and ZAPU had enjoyed particular appeal in Matabeleland. Similarly, the MDC had managed to obtain widespread support in Matabeleland since the 2000 parliament elections. ZANU-PF's evocation of 'unity' thereby to some extent intended to remind inhabitants of the province of the importance of not showing themselves as 'dissidents' as government alleged they had done during the 1980s through their support to ZAPU. The government's emphasis on 'unity' also served to intimidate Matabeleland residents who were well aware of the implications of not supporting ZANU-PF as was evidenced by the violent military operation carried out by government in the 1980s to conquer Matabeleland and the Midlands regions through the destruction of PF-ZAPU.

On the other hand, the government was at pains in its encounters in Matabeleland to emphasise that ZANU-PF did not only represent ZANU but also included PF-ZAPU. Many residents of Matabeleland believe that ZANU-PF effectively swallowed PF-ZAPU at the time of the Unity Accord in 1987. For them, ZANU-PF equals the ZANU before 1987. This view was for example echoed by former head of intelligence at ZIPRA and later Minister of Home Affairs, Dumiso Dabengwa⁶⁴, who in December 2007 explained the signing of the Unity Accord as follows:

Some of us were very reluctant to sign the unity agreement with ZANU then. We were convinced that there was no serious commitment to the unity cause on the part of our comrades on the other side, which was ZANU. There were a number of pointers that made us reluctant to sign the agreement, but were convinced by our leader [Joshua Nkomo] that signing would bring about good things to us as well as to the people whom we were fighting on behalf of [...] One of the main reasons why we had to enter into unity was that we sought an end to the suffering and killing of the people of Matabeleland by Fifth Brigade. It was like a forced agreement because some of the leaders in ZAPU had been thrown in jail and the only way their freedom was to be sought was through their agreement to sign the unity accord. To a larger extent, unity was achieved in an unbalanced and forced manner, given that the government had failed to crush the dissident activities that were spreading all over the Matabeleland region [...]. Even the appointment of cabinet ministers is still an issue up to this day. We had hoped there would be balance in the appointments but we have realized that most of the young men from the ZAPU side are appointed only as deputies, which raises the question whether they are incapable of performing the same duties performed by their ministerial colleagues from Zanu-PF. We need to revisit this unity accord and put right those disparities that have been pointed out by the people because this is a people's party.⁶⁵

To try and create an impression of harmony and unity between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU in Matabeleland, Mugabe emphasised the contribution of both liberation movements in his speeches in the province. In relation to the liberation war, Mugabe stated the following during a visit to a school in Matobo District, Matabeleland South: 'We were oppressed, but we fought that as a united people and we should fight as a united people, as our present shows that we are not united. We fought the war as a united front as ZIPRA and ZANLA and we were united against the enemy. This unity we must keep'.⁶⁶ In another speech in Victoria Falls, Matabeleland North, Mugabe also made an explicit reference to ZAPU when he stated that: 'ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU

⁶⁴ Early 2008, Dabengwa resigned from ZANU-PF to join Simba Makoni's faction which participated in the March 2008 elections. Subsequently in December 2008, he announced the resuscitation of ZAPU as an independent party.

⁶⁵ Dabengwa talks tough on unity, *The Zimbabwe Times*, 24 December 2007, <http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com/page269.htm> (last accessed: 23 March 2008).

⁶⁶ Remain United: President, *The Herald*, 30 November 2004.

are the liberation parties of this country. We are the custodians of the independence of Zimbabwe and we will forever jealously guard that hard-won freedom'.⁶⁷

In order to celebrate the signing of the 1987 Unity Accord, the first edition of the 'Unity Gala' was symbolically held at Great Zimbabwe national monument in Masvingo Province in December 2001. Great Zimbabwe has not only functioned as a national symbol but since the signing of the Unity Accord also features on ZANU-PF's official party logo, underlined by the slogan "unity, peace and development". While no explicit political statements were made nor were there direct references to party politics, it was clear that the event neatly fitted into the furtherance of ZANU-PF's political agenda. The state newspaper *The Herald* further affirmed this in the following extract from an article:

Fittingly, the venue is the historical national monument, from which the vast and beautiful country derives its name, Dzimba Dzemabwe – Houses of Stone. Being the largest and most significant ancient monuments in Africa South of the Sahara, the Great Zimbabwe is a tribute of unity, power and authority for the rulers of Zimbabwe [...]. Unity Day will be celebrated in Masvingo, where the Third Chimurenga, Zimbabwe's current land revolution, kicked off on February 16 2000.⁶⁸

Great Zimbabwe was thus not only a powerful national and party symbol but it was also near Masvingo where residents had started the occupations of white-owned farms in 2000. However, what the newspaper article failed to highlight was that Masvingo Province was not merely a 'revolutionary' location that supported ZANU-PF but also should be seen as an area characterised by intra-party dissent and growing support for the opposition. In the second half of the 1990s, two factions emerged within Masvingo's ZANU-PF structures. One faction was led by the Masvingo Provincial Governor Josaya Hungwe under the auspices of Vice-President Simon Muzenda. Both remained loyal to President Mugabe. The other faction, which was headed by Eddison Zvobgo, had strong support among the local Karanga population who saw Zvobgo as a suitable successor to Mugabe. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, the opposition MDC managed to win two seats in Bikita West and Masvingo Central districts, and nearly obtained a victory in Bikita East, Chiredzi North and Masvingo North. Zvobgo's critique of Mugabe's rule meant that he was demoted to Minister without Portfolio in the 1990s and was dropped from cabinet altogether after the 2000 parliamentary elections. In the run-up to the 2002 presidential elections, he refused to campaign for President Mugabe, and was accused of supporting the opposition party MDC. The government's message of 'unity' as mediated through the gala therefore had an extra bearing in Masvingo Province, and particularly three months before the 2002 presidential elections in December 2001 when the Unity Gala took place.

The Unity Gala, however, was not successful in bringing about 'unity' and resulted in local communities in the Masvingo area feeling marginalised by the event. As Joost Fontein has argued, the appropriation by the ZANU-PF government of Great Zimbabwe as a national monument of great archaeological significance has frequently been contested by local Karanga communities resident around the monument.⁶⁹ In the eyes of local community members around Masvingo, Great Zimbabwe had become an object that had been appropriated by the state and these tensions were also clearly expressed during the Unity Gala. While local communities were

⁶⁷ Madonko, Innocent, Remain United – President, *The Herald*, 15 July 2005.

⁶⁸ M. de Goede, *Rethinking Cultural Heritage. The Commercialization and Politicization of Great Zimbabwe National Monument 1902-2002*, Unpublished MA Dissertation, (Leiden University, Leiden, 2002), p. 76.

⁶⁹ J. Fontein, *The Silence of Great Zimbabwe: Contested Landscapes and the Power of Heritage*, (London, University College of London Press, 2006).

not granted access to the site for religious rituals, the state had complete control and was able to use the monument as a venue for a music festival. A leader in the Masvingo area, Chief Murinye, complained about government's selection of Great Zimbabwe as a location for the Unity Gala:

How could the government allow a gala to be held at the Great Zimbabwe monument? You can't organize a function at a sacred place and have drunken youths and promiscuous elders coming to engage in sexual activities and to defecate the shrine. Has anything like that happened in our history? They even allowed musicians to come and play their guitars. These instruments have not been played at the shrine since the monuments were constructed.⁷⁰

Chiefs in the area felt that government should have consulted them before holding a musical festival at the sacred site. For example, Chief Mugabe was quoted as saying the following: 'I am aware that some people have gained mileage out of it, but this is unacceptable. You can not come and hold celebrations at this sacred place without consulting with the traditional leadership'.⁷¹ However, the Masvingo Governor, Josaya Hungwe, disputed this view and argued that government did not require permission from local chiefs as it was a national monument. Chief Murinye blamed the road accidents in June 2002 which killed 48 people on the lack of consultation of the organisers with local chiefs, and this had angered ancestral spirits. As he warned: 'I don't want to frighten people, but mark my words, a lot of disasters will occur in the province unless Zanu PF swallows its pride and rectifies its stupid mistake'.⁷² The incident demonstrated the tensions between the national and the local where Great Zimbabwe has gradually been transformed into an official state and party site from which local communities have been excluded. The mediation of unity through the Unity Gala ironically revealed the contested nature of the process of nation-building.

'Umdala Wethu'

The increasing use of previously 'regionalised' and 'tribalised' leaders such as Joshua Nkomo has resulted into levels of discontent similar to the appropriation of Great Zimbabwe as national and party symbol. Despite the uncomfortable relationship between Nkomo and ZANU, he proved to be of renewed use to ZANU-PF after his death in 1999. While in the 1980s, Nkomo was considered as a threat to the nation, he was celebrated as a hero in the changed context of the 2000s, and reinscribed into the nation. In the new context of an emerging opposition party in the 2000s, Nkomo's willingness to sign an agreement with ZANU-PF enabled government to depict him as a visionary who saw the value of national unity. Furthermore, Nkomo's emphasis during his time as Vice-President on black economic empowerment and a resolution to the land issue also made it possible for the ZANU-PF government to represent him as a major champion for land reform which was the party's major campaign issue. For example, during an official ceremony to commemorate Nkomo in July 2002, President Mugabe stated as follows:

We remember him as the Father of Zimbabwe, as the one who pioneered the struggle and one who was committed to the very end to liberate his people and after liberation wanted the people to get their land. We also remember him as father of the family and politically, as father of all of us. But what's important now is that we should follow his steps on those things that he showed us as virtues and that he wanted done. And the things he emphasized most were, firstly, the unity of all Zimbabweans. That unity is important as the basis on which we can put our minds together, our energies together, and work as one and for the good of us all, the good of our children. The second

⁷⁰ Masvingo Accidents Blamed On Zanu PF, *The Standard*, 16 June 2002.

⁷¹ Masvingo Accidents Blamed On Zanu PF, *The Standard*, 16 June 2002.

⁷² Masvingo Accidents Blamed On Zanu PF, *The Standard*, 16 June 2002.

issue is land and this issue must be resolved in the interests of the people of Zimbabwe. Therefore imperialism must never be allowed to thrive and prosper in Zimbabwe.⁷³

By associating Nkomo with major ZANU-PF campaign issues, the party sought to gain support in Matabeleland where the opposition party had become increasingly popular. In order to drum up support, the ruling party equated voting for ZANU-PF with giving support to Nkomo and opting for MDC was presented as abandoning Nkomo's belief in unity. For example, in a speech during a visit to Joshua Mqabuko High School in Matobo District, Matabeleland (where Nkomo was born), Mugabe criticised residents for having given their support to the MDC in previous parliamentary and local elections:

You gave your school the name Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo on your own volition. On the other hand, you say you want the MDC and Tsvangirai. What contradiction is that? Do you still have Nkomo in mind? Do you have him in your heart? I heard the schoolchildren here singing a tune that says Nkomo is still alive. That is as it should be. However, we should show that he is still alive in our hearts, in our minds, in our whole lives [...]. He taught us to be united. He also taught us to be the owners of our land and to suffer for our land; to defend our land so it is not sold to the enemy.⁷⁴

The revival of Nkomo's legacy and the silence on the ruling party's treatment of Nkomo in the 1980s was expressed most strongly through the introduction of the Umdala Wethu ('Our Father' in siNdebele) Music and Cultural Gala which was launched in Harare in July 2001 and from then on served as an annual commemoration of Nkomo's death. After the Harare launch in 2001, the gala rotated annually in different provinces such as Manicaland (Mutare) in 2002, Midlands (Gweru) in 2004, Matabeleland South (Beitbridge) in 2005, Bulawayo in 2006 and Mashonaland East (Marondera) in 2007. The rotation of the event in provinces throughout Zimbabwe served to reinforce Nkomo's status as 'Umdala Wethu', father of the nation.⁷⁵

While Nkomo passed away in July 1999, it was only in July 2001 that the musical gala was introduced, reinforcing the idea that political motivations were behind introduction of the gala. After ZANU-PF's loss of a significant number of parliamentary seats in the June 2000 elections, the gala was introduced in 2001 in order to gain support particularly from Matabeleland voters. However, a number of Nkomo's colleagues and friends distanced themselves from ZANU-PF's efforts to appropriate Nkomo as national hero. For example, the former secretary-general of ZAPU and former Matabeleland North governor, Welshman Mabhena, criticised the party as follows: 'If an elderly person dies, and is respected, honoured and buried, he can no longer be used for people's gain. He must be given the reverence he deserves, which has not been the case with Nkomo'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Max Mkandla, a former ZIPRA soldier, stated: 'As a former Zipra cadre, my heart bleeds when I see Zanu PF trying to get political capital out of a man who was forced to go into exile, fleeing from the very same party that wants us to believe that he was its stalwart.'⁷⁷

Conclusion

⁷³ 'Follow in the Footsteps of Father Zim', *The Herald*, 2 July 2002.

⁷⁴ Remain United: President, *The Herald*, 30 November 2004.

⁷⁵ S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Forging and Imagining the Nation in Zimbabwe: Trials and Tribulations of Joshua Nkomo as a Nationalist Leader,' in *Nationalities Affairs*, Issue 30, (June 2007), pp. 25-42.

⁷⁶ Marwizi, Walter, Zanu PF Accused of Using Former Vice President's Death, *The Standard*, 7 July 2002.

⁷⁷ Marwizi, Walter, Zanu PF Accused of Using Former Vice President's Death, *The Standard*, 7 July 2002.

This article has demonstrated some of the shifting characteristics of Zimbabwean nationalism capturing the context within which cultural nationalism was brought back into the centre of national politics by ZANU-PF at the beginning of 2000s. While pre-colonial culture played an important role during the nationalist struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in order to give legitimacy to the claim of guerrilla fighters to take over the Rhodesian state, the cultural legacy of the liberation struggle came to occupy a central role in ZANU-PF's project of cultural nationalism in the early 2000s which sought to legitimise the ruling party's continued rule over Zimbabwe. After the failure of the developmental nationalism of the 1980s and the disastrous economic consequences of liberalisation policies, the ruling party was faced with a crisis of legitimacy. While land was a crucial material resource in ZANU-PF's struggle for power, histories and memories of the liberation war also proved an essential resource which could easily be mobilised in order to justify ZANU-PF's continued reign of the country.

The music gala formed a key part of this revival of cultural nationalism and aimed to popularise the commemoration of national days and 'national heroes' part of the elite memorialism of the 1980s by linking with the *pungwe* tradition of the 1970s liberation war. Like the *pungwe*, galas sought to instil 'patriotism' into those most likely to vote for the opposition MDC such as youths and urbanites. Through the mixture of new 'urban grooves' tunes and old *Chimurenga* songs, the gala sought to seduce 'born-frees' into the nationalist project. The televised nature of all music galas ensured that especially those resident in the cities were reached, given that 80 percent of high-density urban residents has access to television (compared to only 22 percent in rural areas).⁷⁸

The national imaginary that was promoted through the music galas was by no means an inclusive definition of the 'nation' but should rather be seen as the mediation of a 'party-nation'. Within the ceaseless drive to authenticate ZANU-PF's liberation credentials and to inscribe itself into every structure and institution, such concepts as 'independence', 'unity' and 'hero' proved particularly relevant to ZANU-PF in the specific political context of the 2000s in which the party's rule was increasingly challenged by the increasing competition from the opposition MDC. In the early 2000s, the concept of 'independence' no longer strictly referred to the moment of 1980 but also became associated with Zimbabwe's continuing struggle for autonomy and sovereignty in the face of a new opposition party that was portrayed as representing the interests of the 'Empire': Britain and their 'kith and kin' in Zimbabwe, i.e. white Zimbabweans. Similarly, the notion of 'national hero' did not only include the 'fallen heroes' of the liberation struggle but was also used to refer to the 'new heroes' of the *Third Chimurenga*.

While the 'party-nation' communicated through the galas was highly exclusionary, it was at the same time inclusive in the sense that it came to incorporate old enemies which were previously excluded from government's national imaginary. Official versions of the nation in the early 1980s often ignored the contribution made by ZIPRA and ZAPU to the liberation of Zimbabwe, as was for example evidenced by the dominance of ZANU on ZBC in the early 1980s. However, in the early 2000s, it was no longer ZIPRA and ZAPU but the MDC that constituted ZANU-PF's major enemy. In this context, ZAPU, ZIPRA and its leader Joshua Nkomo were then in some occasions reinscribed into official versions of the nation, as was for example demonstrated through the 'Umdala Wethu' gala which suddenly began to hail Nkomo as 'father of the nation'. However, on other occasions, these forces remained unacknowledged as was the case in the early 1980s. While ZIPRA and ZAPU received recognition in the 'Umdala

⁷⁸ Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation, *Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey (ZAMPS)*, (Harare: Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation, 2001).

Wethu' and 'Unity Gala', their contribution to Zimbabwe's independence was again neglected in the 'Heroesplush' gala which was held in Chinhoyi and Chimoio and hereby particularly sought to emphasise the contribution of ZANU and ZANLA forces to the liberation of Zimbabwe.

The concept of 'unity' was thus not invoked consistently and universally, neither was it applied in a positive and embracing manner. The government particularly resorted to calls for unity in those areas where the MDC had obtained popular support such as Matabeleland and Masvingo provinces. Both the 'Umdala Wethu' and 'Unity Gala' addressed voters in these areas to remain 'united' and to continue to give their support to the ruling party. Especially in Matabeleland where memories of *Gukurahundi* were still vivid, government's emphasis on 'unity' served to remind citizens about the potential consequences of not supporting the ruling party. Like in the 1980s, unity was thus equal to compliance and assimilation rather than inclusion and tolerance of diversity.

The revival of cultural nationalism in the early 2000s could be seen as ZANU-PF's attempt to deal with the fragility of the national project. While the coercion, violence and intimidation used by government have been extensively reported, the range of cultural activities used by the state to produce loyal subjects has received less attention. Despite ZANU-PF's efforts, the different tensions which arose around the music galas demonstrate the failure of government to create consent and reveal the continuing challenges the government faces to build a coherent nation.