Perpetuating Colonial Legacies: Reflections on Post Colonial African States' Development Trajectories; Observations from Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Colonial rule which lasted for over a century in some African countries had devastating consequences on the continent which continue to haunt modern Africa states politically, socially and economically. While for some African countries the end of colonialism set the stage and foundation for democratic transition, in others, which are the majority, was continuation and exacerbation of undemocratic systems of governance and policies which stalled development. Colonialism was premised on exploitation of the majority by the white minority, the use of unjust laws and violence as tools of domination, among many others. The means of production principally land and mineral resources were a preserve of the ruling white minority in cahoots with international capitalism. This paper exposes that in many post colonial states, Zimbabwe in particular; there has never been any significant paradigm shift of the status quo to empower the black Africans. The means of production, rich mineral resources, power and opportunities still remain a preserve of a small clique of politically and economically connected elite.

Key words: Colonial Legacy, Perpetuate, Post-coloniality

Introduction and Background

Independence in Zimbabwe was achieved after a protracted liberation struggle prompted not only by the denial of even basic rights to the majority of the population, but also an extremely inequitable distribution of economic resources. The need to redress these injustices was therefore used by liberation movements in the country as a rallying point for the masses against the minority white regime. The euphoria that followed

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the electoral victory of Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in the 1980 elections was therefore highly justified. The victory, for the majority African masses, meant the undoing of systems, laws and institutions that had oppressed them and denied them dignity and access to their own economic resources. The new elite were therefore expected to deliver on these expectations and promises which they, themselves had also made during the liberation struggle. An audit of government performance from 1980 into the 21st century *vis-a-vis* the promises and expectations, however, reveal an uninspiring performance record as has become the case in the majority of African countries.

The low levels of development are a striking indictment of the human condition in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is particularly so when compared to other regions such as Asia that were even worse in their development outlook before the attainment of independence (Jan Keen Van Dong, et al 2012, Mbeki 2009). The continent has the highest number of conflicts, lowest life expectancy, highest number of failed states, lowest rates of economic growth if not declining, home to the highest number of dictators and the most decayed infrastructures and highest rates of qualified emigrants. More people die of AIDS on the continent than anyway in the world. Across the region, 75 percent of the people lack appropriate sanitation and every year over two million children are estimated to die in the first twelve months of their lives (Heleta, 2007). Many observers argue that this is because the elite across the region soon turned to a phenomenon of rule known as "predatory rule"[1]. This type of rule is the extreme end of "developmental rule" that has taken root in very few cases such as Botswana and Mauritius[2].

In these two countries economic growth has been consistent, with Botswana rated as having the highest rate of per capita growth of any country in the world for the last 35 years (Goldsmith, 2007). Mauritius's economy as measured by GDP on the other hand, grew about four and a

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[1] Predatory rule is defined by Peter Lewis (1996) as "personalistic regime ruling through coercion and material inducement…that tends to degrade the institutional foundation of the state as well as the economy". It also seeks hegemony over subordinate groups whose passivity is an element in their own oppression. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) add that political predation includes the proclivity of leaders to unleash violence against their own people.

[2] This is rule or leadership that prioritises economic growth and the overall well being of the country

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half times faster than in Africa overall during the same period (*ibid*). Social and political indicators of development for these countries improved accordingly. The state invested heavily in education, health, infrastructure and housing. The two countries, Botswana and Mauritius came out number one and two respectively for the region on the World Bank's indicator of "government effectiveness" (World Bank,2002). Coincidentally, the two are also rated democratic political systems.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Zimbabwe was nowhere close to these [two examples] of Africa's "beacons on the hill" in terms of developmental rule. Instead, she stood at the extreme end of the spectrum. Her condition could not be expressed any better than in the following quotes in Bratton and Masunungure (2011); "In Zimbabwe today, virtually everything that can go wrong has gone wrong. There is political chaos and anarchy. Economic meltdown is nearly complete. The jewel of Africa is in intensive care unit" (The Zimbabwe Liberators Platform, 2004). The first president of independent South Africa, also added, "Nearer home, we had seen the tragic failure of leadership in our neighbouring Zimbabwe" (Mandela, 2008). Mhanda (2008) summarised the situation in Zimbabwe as follows,

"The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leadership totally underestimated Mugabe. They believed the struggle for democracy would be hard, but they never understood that he was prepared to destroy everything, them, the economy, the institutions, the infrastructure, the whole country and everything in it to survive".

Theoretical Framework

The predatory rule theory was used as a window of analysis to understand the current state of underdevelopment and the lack of a major paradigm shift in both economic and political policies for the betterment of the majority black Zimbabweans. Sachikonye (2012) defines predatory rule as one whose major thrust is the consumption of the surpluses of the economy [by the elite] as government offices become income generating sinecures. Lewis (1996) defines it as "a personalistic regime ruling through coercion and material inducement …that tends to degrade the institutional foundations of the state as well as the economy". This concept or theory is also sometimes known as prebendalism and it has been widely applied by Nigerian writers to explain the underdevelopment of the country through institutionalised of neopatrimonialism in the country. Where prebendalism prevails, state

offices are regarded as prebends or entitlements that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups. (http://africaplus.wordpress.com/2013/07/26/prebendalism-and-dysfunctionality-in-nigeria/). Brattton and Masunungure (2011) add that predatory leadership not only fails to deliver developmental outcomes but also kills, maims and terrorizes its citizens.

According to Goldsmith (2007), such predation is a rational behaviour engaged in by the majority of African political elites because of the many risks and uncertainties present in Africa's political market place. Since the majority of states in the region are not products of democratic norms and procedures, political elites whether in office or after leaving office lack security. Such political leaders are therefore less concerned with the development of their states but their supporters who matter for their political survival. This is achieved by rewarding such political supporters with material and non material rewards such as appointment to public offices regardless of technical competency at the expense of national development. With regards to Zimbabwe, one would note that the features of predation and prebendalism noted

above have characterised much of the post independence era. The Willogate scandal of 1987 and the consequent pardon of the culprits, the 1980s Gukurahundi war in the Midlands and Matebeleland provinces, acquisition of farms meant for resettlement in the 1980s by government officials, attempts to establish a one party state, War Veterans Victims compensation Fund, War Veterans pay out of 1997 and the Fast Track Land Reform Programme are among many other events and policies that show the predatory tendencies of the post independent state. Bratton and Masunungure (2011) actually see state predation as the major explanation for the crises that have rocked the country since the turn of the new millennium.

Economic and social development trajectory of the post independent state

As already alluded to elsewhere in the paper, the new government inherited a highly skewed economy and society controlled by and benefiting a small white minority while the black African majority languished in poverty. Africans were disadvantaged in all facets of life; education, employment, skills acquisition, accommodation, agricultural support for the peasants and infrastructural development. The

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new government had therefore to urgently attend to this as a matter of "right" as well as fulfilment of the promises made during the liberation war as well as election campaign. This explains the massive investment in the social services sector such as education and heath as well as rural development programmes undertaken in the 1980s (Brett 2005). This was also made possible by the massive donor support to the newly independent state.

However, beyond this there was no major paradigm shift in terms of policy that would meaningfully and sustainably benefit the people. In fact, before the end of even the first decade of independence the interests of the new elite were already converging with those of the former white elite which seriously undermined the will of the state to meaningfully and substantially redistribute resources to lower income groups (Jenkins 1997). The little gains of the early 1980s were under serious threat by the end of the decade. This was due mainly to policies adopted to retain waning political power at the expense of everything else. Thus the state was now used by the new elite as a vehicle for personal enrichment as well as consolidation of political power through an elaborate and extensive system of patronage. As Arzaya and Chazan (1998) note, "The state assumed the character of the proverbial goat that grazed where it was tethered-preying upon the people, capturing, dominating, exploiting and squeezing the local citizenry"

During the early 1980s, the state defined itself as a socialist state. Thus, the state justified its heavy control and presence in the economy as being partly driven by the need to redistribute the benefits of the economy to the once marginalised blacks. While some little redistribution did take place, the socialist approach was extensively used to consolidate political power and amass wealth by the new regime elites. The public service offices and existing state parastatals as well as many other companies that were bought by the state became the *prebends* of the new elite to loot, reward supporters and consolidate political power. The Willowvale scandal in which ministers acquired cars with scarce foreign exchange at controlled prices, then resold them for up to five times the amount exposed the rot in a government that purported to be a socialist government (Jenkins1997).

While the International Financial Institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have also been blamed in many circles for fomenting the economic decline, Brett (2005) views the adoption of the neo-

liberal economic doctrine in the form of economic adjustment programme in the early 1990s as partly being politically motivated. The heavy investment by the state in the social services sectors against a non expanding economy had created serious balance of payments problems by the end of the decade. The performance of the economy was heavily affected by foreign currency shortages. Employment creation was declining putting the country in an economic crisis. Resources required for maintaining the party's extensive patronage networks and its support base were also dwindling. The business sector in particular pressured government to liberalise the economy. Thus, according to Brett (2005), liberalisation was a rational response to the economic crisis that was threatening the party's political power base by reducing the economic resource base to maintain patronage networks. Further, the principles of liberalisation itself also stood to benefit the elite. For instance, the privatisation of state owned parastatals corporations benefited those politically connected who had already made wealth from the 1980s. The War Victims' compensation Fund, the Affirmative Action Lobby group, War veterans pay out of 1997, the Fast Track Land reform programme and lately the indigenisation drive are also among some of the policies that many writers

have attributed to the crises that have gripped the country since the turn of the new century (Brett 2006; Jenkins1997; Sachikonye 2011). These policies served the parochial political and economic interests of the ruling Zanu PF elite and its supporters. The War Victims' Compensation Fund, the Affirmative Action Lobby group, War veterans pay out of 1997, the Fat Track Land reform programme as well the indigenisation) drive were largely undertaken to quell mounting discontentment by critical Zanu Pf political allies (War Veterans, the Youths and the rural electorate in particular) due to increasing socio-economic hardships. With specific reference to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme which has been touted by the Zanu PF party as evidence of its concern for the people, Sachikonye (2011) notes that;

> Newspapers were awash with stories of a frantic scramble for such land (high quality land) by cabinet ministers, governors, senior army, intelligence and police officers, top civil servants, war veterans and others connected to this elite. ...Members of the elite, through patronage and clientilism have become beneficiaries of a process which should have been largely aimed at poverty reduction through the decongestion of communal areas.

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These allegations of corruption, patronage and clientilism have rocked nearly all otherwise well thought and meaningful policies and programmes meant for the poor and the general development of the country. The War Victims compensation fund and the indigenisation policy have also not been spared from these allegations. These allies of Zanu PF, particularly the War Veterans would play a decisive role in the party's political survival since the 2000 parliamentary and presidential elections. According to Brett (2005), as a result of these policies GDP fell by about 26 percent between 2000 and 2002, food production was less than 50 percent of a normal year 2003 while inflation was more than 600 percent by the beginning of 2004. Thus, while these policies certainly guaranteed the political survival of Zanu PF, they also led to the collapse of the economy and suffering of powerless Zimbabwean majority.

Political trajectory of the post independent state

The achievement of independence by Zimbabwe was welcomed by the black majority who had suffered from oppression under the Smith regime (Chiware, 2008). It was common thinking that the colonial masters were repressive in their way of ruling. Deprivation, subjugation and marginalization of the natives by colonizers were common. In an attempt to realize the right to self-determination and self-governance, a liberation struggle that spanned decades was waged by the black natives. The goal of this liberation struggle which was based mainly on the demand of universal suffrage was realized in 1980 with the attainment of independence after a constitutional negotiated settlement was reached at Lancaster House in England in 1979 between the colonial powers and the political principals who had led the liberation struggle (Zimbabwe Country Report, 2012).

From 1980 until the late 1990s, Zimbabwe's history of political transformation was characterized by a continual process of concentrating more and more power in the presidency and the politburo of the ZANU-PF (Ibid). It appeared power had just been transferred from an authoritarian white minority to another authoritarian black minority. A lot of injustices have occurred in Zimbabwe that many thought would end with the attainment of independence. Continuation of violence and intimidation has become the order of the day in contemporary Zimbabwe. Several aspects that have become rampant in Zimbabwe have been there in colonial Zimbabwe and have since increased in intensity in post colonial Zimbabwe.

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While violence was a decisive instrument in the attainment of independence, it has also become a major divisive force in contemporary Zimbabwe. Though the Zimbabwean government claims to be democratic there is evidence of undemocratic tendencies. According to Sachikonye (2011), violence has remained a cancer that corrodes the country's political culture and blocks its democratic advance. Independent Zimbabwe presents a situation where people want to liberate themselves from the government they voted for in 1980. The government that took power in 1980 implemented a socialist style of governance, created a network of patronage, and politicized most governance processes, ensuring that they tallied with the party's ideologies (Chiware, 2008).

From 1982 to 1987, the new government speedily established a de facto one-party state through a campaign which has been known as the *Gukurahundi* massacres (*ibid*). The campaign was justified by its implementers as an attempt to stamp out dissident and terrorist activities which were allegedly being spearheaded by the main opposition party the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo (*ibid*). It was estimated that between 10000 and 20000 people were killed in this violence that was largely unleashed by the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe National Army in early 1983 (Sachikonye, 2011).

It was observed that *Gukurahundi* violence and terror brought back memories of the most brutal methods used by the Rhodesian forces, but imposed on the victims even more ruthlessly and far more devastatingly throughout Matebeleland (*ibid*). This violence ended with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 between the two main political parties ZANU (PF) and ZAPU, which merged into one political establishment called ZANU (PF). This effectively created a *de facto* one party state (Chiware 2008). This is despite the fact that the liberation struggle had been fought so as to bring political pluralism and freedom. Repetition of this kind was seen in 2009 with the signing of Government of National Unity between ZANU (PF) and the two MDC factions.

The right to vote was one of the fundamental driving forces of the liberation struggle and yet thirty-three years after independence, a peaceful election is elusive (http://harare24.com/index-id-news-zk-14326.html). This situation that Zimbabweans find themselves in is not different from what transpired in the colonial period. In colonial Zimbabwe the presence of the narrow franchise ensured that the blacks did not have the chance to vote and make

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their voices heard. On the other hand, the post colonial Zimbabwe state allows everyone above the age of 18 [can] to vote, but a lot of intimidation and injustices have been implemented so as to influence the voting outcome in favour of the elite. Most elections conducted in post independence Zimbabwe have been characterised by violence. According to Sachikonye (2011), "Some of it (the violence) has been typical inter-party violence using basic technology such as stones, sticks and crude petrol bombs. But some of it has been state-organized and sophisticated violence orchestrated by the ruling party taking advantage of its levers of power."

Elections in Zimbabwe have become a crucial battleground in which violence and other methods, such as rigging, are employed against opponents. This is what became quite clear during the 2000 election campaign when state-directed violence was unleashed systematically on a large scale. The greater the opposition threat or victory, the more massive the scale of ZANU (PF) violent backlash, as the 2000, 2002 and 2008 elections showed (Ibid). The recent elections of 2013 have been alleged to be associated with vote-rigging and intimidation of opponents. To this end, violence in many cases has been a tool of choice if and when opposition parties

threaten to erode the ruling party's support base.

In most cases, the ruling party took advantage of its control of state media, that is, radio, television and publicly owned newspapers, to tip the electoral balance in its favour. In a more calculated fashion, state institutions such as the police were used to harass or arrest opposition party candidates and supporters, or to ignore such cases of violence as the latter would bring to them (Ibid). This became particularly pronounced in the 2000, 2002 and 2008 elections. The establishment of restrictive legislation such as AIPPA and POSA and their strict enforcement during periods of such political processes as elections also ensured that opposition parties and their campaigns did not get enough coverage.

The repression that existed during the colonial regime seems to have increased in intensity in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The repression against Black Nationalist leaders by the colonial masters who fought for the liberation of Zimbabwe has took another dimension in post colonial Zimbabwe. For instance, ZANU (PF) after independence emphasised on repression of workers and students. Students and workers in Zimbabwe have become united and formed organisations against such repression. Due to such an agenda they have been

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targets of repression, especially detentions, beatings, torture and even killings.

According to http://harare24.com/index-id-news-zk-14326.html "though independent since 1980, the business, political and social community in Zimbabwe continues to question the relevance and meaningfulness of celebrating the country's independence amid concerns the country is not free and independent at all." The political situation in Zimbabwe shows that the ideals of independence have been betrayed. This makes independence in Zimbabwe to be celebrated by the political elite who over the years enjoyed the fruits of self-governance. It appears that the transition of white colonialism ushered in black colonialism.

According to Sachikonye (2011), in Zimbabwe there is "a scramble for resources of political power and economic benefit". The land reform is such a brilliant instance. Notoriety in the use of violence for political and economic purposes in Zimbabwe spread in 2000 with the onset of 'land invasions' sometimes termed 'land occupations' or *jambaja* in the local vernacular (*ibid*). Land has been a contentious issue since the early colonial days in Zimbabwe when natives were pushed to the dry areas of Gwaai and Shangani. This

situation has been intensified in post colonial Zimbabwe as land has been used as a way to destroy the political base of the opposition party MDC especially in the rural areas. The land reform was associated with social violence and political violence to intimidate the white farmers and opposition supporters resident on the farms.

Conclusions

Why did the highly anticipated people oriented developmental policies in both the economic and political sectors not occur at the expected rate and breadth in the 1980s? Why after 1990 was there a complete paradigm shift from redistributive policies and rhetoric towards neo-liberalism? Last, why did the country descent into a crisis, economically and politically from the turn of the new century? Many factors obviously interacted. Different scholars and observers have emphasised different factors as important at different periods. The constitutional limitations of the Lancaster House agreement, unfulfilled donor pledges of support, adoption of the neo-liberal paradigm and sanctions are some of the most often cited factors. While some of these factors were important, they for instance, do not explain the growing authoritarianism of the state. The

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writers assert that the state itself has used these issues as a façade for its predation that has largely contributed to the country's political and economic malaise. This has been made possible by the state's control of the public media which it has used to convince the public that its failure to deliver is because it is a victim of these circumstances. The paper has argued that the post colonial state in Zimbabwe has not performed to the expectations of the citizens, the region even the international community. This is because there has never been a major paradigm shift in policy orientation and institutional structures away from serving the parochial interests of a small minority towards the broad based interests of the black majority. The post colonial state maintained most of the institutions of the colonial state but now to further the interests of a new emerging small clique of the black political elites. As Fanon (1968), succinctly puts it,

> The native bourgeoisie, despite its black colour, was a creation of colonial modernity, had imbibed colonial languages and embraced Western cultures. It aspired to occupy the positions monopolised by the white colonial bourgeoisie. Its agenda was limited to replacing the colonial white bourgeoisie.

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