

Hostage to Nationalist Monologue, Recycled Histories and Sanitised Memories: The Case of Zimbabwe

Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni¹

¹University of South Africa, Development Studies, Pretoria, South Africa

sjndlovugatsheni@gmail.com

Zimbabwe has remained hostage to a hegemonic nationalist singular narrative of the birth of the nation and its history. This powerful nationalist monologue has been described as ‘patriotic history’ by Terence Ranger. At its centre are tropes of race, sovereignty, resource ownership and the question of authentic subjects of the nation. The overarching national ideology is deeply anti-imperialist/colonialist and Afro-radical. The only acceptable national history is that which is articulated in terms of *Chimurengas/Zvimurenga* (a Shona word referring to the series of nationalist revolutions running from the 1896-7 primary resistance, the nationalist armed liberation struggle of the 1970s right up to the fast-track land reform programme of the 2000s that was christened the *Third Chimurenga*—a war for black economic empowerment through land expropriation). Consequently, issues of inclusion and exclusion are still being negotiated thirty years after the attainment of political independence as citizens found themselves fragmented into war veterans who claim primal and uncontested belonging to the nation; white settlers who are considered aliens; black sell-outs and puppets who need to repent before being re-admitted into the nation; and the so-called ‘born-frees’ for whom the war veterans claim to have died during the liberation struggle and who must remain perpetually indebted to them through voting for ZANU-PF in every election.

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has become deeply nationalist if not ‘nativist,’ to the extent that the state has taken an active part in the articulation of history and memory. The state sponsored ‘galas,’ ‘bashes’ and commemorations that buttressed nationalist monologues of the nation to which citizens were invited as guests of the state. Alternative histories, memorialisation and commemorations remain silent. State complicity and sanction of violence against citizens as happened in Matebeleland in the 1980s and during the post-29 March 2008 harmonised elections was either denied or articulated as part of defending the national shrine from desecration by sell-outs, dissidents and puppets. Communities and individuals that experienced various forms of violence most of which emanated from the state have not been afforded any space to articulate, memorialise and commemorate their losses, traumas and pains. Against this background, this paper seeks to explore what constitutes the nationalist monologue and assesses its impact on the country’s political development.