

Volume 16 Number 1 (2022): 26-45

<http://www.infactispax.org/journal>

ISSN 2578-6857

Creating and Developing Capacities for National Healing and Peace Building in Zimbabwe Through ‘Difficult History’

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Abstract

National healing and reconciliation have become integral engagements in post-conflict recovery processes in Africa. However, the persistence of violent conflicts has cast doubts on the extent to which governments can facilitate reconciliation. Unless a deliberate effort is made to incorporate peace education through the lens of ‘difficult history’, the cycles of ethnic violence characterising post-colonial Zimbabwe will continue unabated. This study examines how the Zimbabwe government can navigate social conflicts and contribute to building democratic peace

Volume 16 Number 1 (2022): 26-45

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and security through public education. The *Gukurahundi* massacre is considered pivotal towards understanding how ‘difficult history’ can be utilised to promote healing and reconciliation in a state with perennial ethnic antagonism. An argument is sustained that educational institutions have the capability of transforming the pervasive atmosphere of suspicion, mistrust and discord between the Ndebele and the Shona for national healing and reconciliation.

Key words: difficult history, *Gukurahundi*, healing, reconciliation, Ndebele, Shona

Introduction

In Zimbabwe, public schooling is a government responsibility and this explains why some official curricula have been shown to encourage compliance with the dominant political status quo. Bishop (1985:10) maintains that “there is an inextricable relationship between education and national ideals and objectives”. Zimbabwe, like many other African countries has used “the school as an important instrument to further the achievement of [its] political aims and to foster particular attitudes and values deemed necessary for national advancement and cultural identity” (Bishop 1985:10). The emergence of patriotic history in the year 2000 prompted the formulation of the new curriculum package which was implemented in institutions of higher learning in 2005.

Tertiary institutions which included teacher training colleges and polytechnics introduced a compulsory course National Strategic Studies (NASS). The course was designed to cultivate values of patriotism, national identity, national unity and commitment to sustainable national development (Ranger 2004). The introduction of NASS in institutions of higher learning was welcomed with suspicion and distrust since it was labelled a ZANU-PF project. As patriotic history evolved, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2011) notes, it embraced new themes and discarded others. In this study, we argue that patriotic history deliberately overlooked other critical historical elements that would expose past unhealed wounds. Given that patriotic history emerged during an era when Zimbabwe relations with the international community were strained, controversial issues like *Gukurahundi* were sidelined in patriotic history discourses. According to Tendi (2010), themes and events which did not serve ZANU PF’s agenda were downplayed and misrepresented.

What becomes blatantly clear is that history education may legitimize or mitigate enmity through narratives of past conflicts, in particular by silencing (or acknowledging) alternate perspectives and pluralist identities. The presentation of one hegemonic version of the

past impedes understanding of complex realities (Anne Tupper 2014; Davies 2005).

The existence of conflict and its consequences in Zimbabwe are traceable to the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. Although Zimbabweans share a common territorial area, they tend to live within it as a divided people not only geographically, but also in terms of experiences, traditions and values. With the Ndebele and Shona speaking Zimbabweans comprising approximately 15% and 80% of the country's population respectively, the political leaders have often mobilized identity-based nationalism. Historically, the relations between the Ndebele and Shona people in the late 1830s, have been subjected to a process of legend-making that amounts to the creation of a mythology (Beach 1986). Myths flourished because missionaries, traders and travellers desired to gain the support of the British government for their varied activities, an objective which the Rudd Concession of 1888 achieved. Admittedly, the Ndebele and Shona were equally involved in the myth-making process. While cordial relations and intermarriages between the belligerent ethnic groups have continued, the weight of the evidence to the contrary confirms long-term and persistent tensions between them. Despite having fought side by side to free the country, heroes of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle seem to have failed to accommodate each other in the post-colonial era. Ndlovu (2015), Lindgren (2002), Muchemwa (2016), Tarusarira (2000), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) among others, have aptly observed that *Gukurahundi* indeed heightened the tensions between the Ndebele and the Shona. Against the backdrop of the 1987 Unity Accord and other initiatives, this paper unpacks the untapped potential of the *Gukurahundi* experiences in setting the stage for national reconciliation projects in Zimbabwe. While government curricula generally include some dimensions of peace building, citizenship knowledge and competencies, we argue that the curricula examined are insufficiently comprehensive to equip young people for constructive democratic action to transform the nation towards sustainable peace. This study is particularly interested in investigating the feasibility of promoting, deepening and broadening reconciliatory or peace building education opportunities through public institutions. We stand guided by Brouneus (2003:20)'s definition that reconciliation is "a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgement of past sufferings and the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviours into constructive relationships towards sustainable peace".

Conceptual Framework

The diametric but pivotal terms under consideration are patriotic and difficult history. Patriotic history is a liberation war-related version of

history which was advanced by the then President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party since the year 2000. The substance of this brand of history, according to Coltart, (2009) proclaimed ZANU PF as the alpha and omega of Zimbabwe's past, present and future. The thrust of patriotic history was propping a radical revolutionary tradition "premised on land, race, a dichotomy between 'sell-outs' and 'patriots' and the rejection of the Western interpretation of human rights" (Tendi 2010:1). Mugabe considered patriotic history as an essential response to resurgent Western imperialism and its local allies who purportedly threatened 'the hard-won integrity and sovereignty of Zimbabwe' (Coltart, 2009). ZANU-PF used the patriotic history narrative to foster transmission of liberation struggle ideas to gain legitimacy in the wake of great political and electoral rejection in the face of the challenge posed by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). As discussed below, this brand of history entered the schools' curricula.

Straddling et al, (1984:2) define 'difficult history' as History that "divides the society and for which significant groups within the society offer conflicting explanations and solutions based on alternative values". Difficult history includes contested issues such as terrorism, violence, and any related sensitive and controversial questions (Foster, 2014). Kidd (2014) is more emphatic that this brand of history encompasses, 'challenging', 'emotive', 'sensitive', 'contested heritages' and 'legacies'. As an aspect of difficult history, re-engagement with the past is done from a critical perspective which promotes the development of transformative approaches in the way history is written, taught and understood. *Gukurahundi* is considered as an epitome of difficult history.

Methodology

This study employed mixed methods by combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative method was facilitated by using structured questionnaires which were prepared and administered among lecturers and students either personally or by e-mail. The qualitative method consisted of interviews conducted with the lecturers and students. With the permission of the interviewees, the conversations were recorded and later transcribed and used for the analysis. Both questionnaires and the interview schedules revolved around an attempt to make sense of the meaning of difficult history through making inferences and interpreting different views surrounding the *Gukurahundi* violence. The intention was to get clarity on whether the syllabi content created any opportunities and challenges for students to build capacity and inclinations for peacebuilding citizenship participation. The other task was to identify curricular spaces where

capabilities for participation in promoting values and developing confidence for peacebuilding, including conflict awareness and communicative conflict resolution skills could be located.

The population of the study comprised of 8 lecturers and 60 students aged between 19 and 60 years. The age range was considered as a key period for developing citizenship inclinations and capabilities to handle social conflicts. The population of the study comprised lecturers and students from Hillside Teachers College, Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, Bulawayo and Kwekwe Polytechnics. The first three institutions are located in Matabeleland while the last one is in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. The two provinces suffered the wrath of the *Gukurahundi* violence. All the institutions offer the National Strategic Studies as a compulsory course. This course was selected for this study because it represents explicit locations for peace and citizenship-related education with the provision to address how the official curriculum normalizes (or questions) the use of violence and military force in both historically rooted and contemporary conflicts.

Some thoughts on classroom practice

While authentic classroom discussion on sensitive and controversial issues might be rare, we argue that the teaching of contested issues has a role in democratic education. According to Davies (2005) curricular narratives may normalise or glorify enmity, militarism, and other violence. In contrast, any curriculum that engages students in interpreting the causes and consequences of social conflicts from multiple perspectives can help develop affective and cognitive capacities for democratic peacebuilding. Engaging students in deliberation of controversial issues inducts them into the community of responsible citizenship and predicts democratic participation attitudes. We concur with Tarusarira's (2016:611) claim that the history of Zimbabwe being taught in schools and universities is riddled with deliberate biases and distortions. The current political history from where NASS is rooted, is bent on celebrating the incumbent regime as heroic and as such "shielding the regime from accountability for human atrocities it committed during the post-colonial times" (Tarusarira, 2016:612). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009:14) argues that the politics of inclusion and exclusion meant to advance the ZANU-PF political ideology has distorted history, hence the clarion call for the "deconstruction of the celebratory texts". Tendi (2010:3) has bemoaned the marginalisation and deliberate omission of contributions to the liberation struggle by critics of ZANU-PF. He questions why important events in Zimbabwe's history like *Gukurahundi* have been overlooked. "It is in the significant silences of a text, in its gaps and silences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt..." (Eagleton, 1976:35).

Barnes (2007:633) notes that Zimbabwean Secondary School historical textbooks which include Proctor and Phimister's *People and Power Book 1* (1991); Prew, Pape, Mutwira and Barnes's *People Making History Book 4* (1993); Mukanya's *Dynamics of History* (1994) and Mlambo's *Focus on History* (1995) were produced to meet the requirements of a nationalist, Africa-centred and Marxist-inspired history syllabus introduced in 1991". In as much as these texts might have wanted to articulate an agenda of national reconciliation, they were constrained by the hegemonic ZANU-PF ideology of the day. Macherey (1978:132) was emphatic that what should and what should not be said is governed by ideologies "which set the parameters by which writers can tell their stories while avoiding certain aspects".

Murphy et al (2017:213) observed that a distressing History can be hard to digest, but all the same, History must be swallowed whole to undeceive the present and to fortify the future. They stress the importance of editing the past with honesty and equity for posterity. Kidd, (2011) believes that educators and intellectuals can be brought together to bring about ideas and share knowledge on any History that is contested or difficult and upsetting to know about. This kind of History should be delivered to learners in order to unite and not divide the nation. In as much as Difficult Histories help us to understand our past, there is need to approach the past with a critical mind. If teachers approach *Gukurahundi* with biased minds and perspectives, they are likely to continue to worsen relations. Wertsch (2002) says that historians have a professional responsibility to convey the past as something not one sided or simple but complex.

Goldberg (2017) and Wallis, (2019) agree that teachers have a major challenge in that they might lack the expertise both in terms of content knowledge and pedagogy to handle controversial issues about a 'disturbing past' which might raise the emotions of the affected group. Moody (2015) warns that in as much as teachers can contribute towards ongoing discourses and changing insights about the past, they face the danger of approaching difficult histories with a subjective mind. The moment teachers follow their own biases and political inclinations in selecting and presenting materials, the entire purpose gets defeated. Teachers have to "subordinate many of their own interests and enthusiasms in pursuit of objectivity" (Tosh 2010:232). Teachers must never force learners to accept their point of view about a controversial topic but must give an opportunity for more research so that learners can feel accommodated in the teaching and learning of History. Carrico (2014) suggests a "pedagogy of disengagement" whereby the teacher distances himself/herself from dominating or directing the unfolding discussions but continues to share views with the students. When

handled inexpertly, the teaching of controversial topics may lead to partial or biased knowledge and partisan views of history.

Thus dealing with controversial issues is what Vessey (2009) terms the ‘fusion of horizons’ or a blending of the cognitive and affective domains in the students’ learning. According to Goldberg and Savenije (2018:505), “discussion of controversial issues leads to cognitive gains in the realm of argumentation and reasoning where connections between claims and evidence are seen”.

Cole (2007), says that it is crucial to teach a violent past as a form of reconciliation and to foster reconciliation. Reconciliation affords those responsible for the violent past to actually apologize for such a past and help in the promotion of unity among warring communities. Peace remains fragile for as long as animosity continues to exist. As such, evading or avoiding such History is damaging and only worsens relations which were already sour. As Himmelfarb (1987:177) argues, “there is no fact in history which is not a judgement, no event which is not an inference”. While it is impossible to prevent students from making moral judgements, they should be made to recognise that their judgement is a matter of opinion. Wren et al (2007:4), say that, “the study of history can be emotive and controversial where there is actual or perceived unfairness to people by another individual or group in the past...where there are disparities between what is taught in school history, family/community history and other histories”. Wallis, (2019) observed that teachers have challenges in dealing with ‘Difficult Histories’ especially when they might follow their own biases or political inclinations in selecting and presenting materials. Lederach (1997) observed that tension- based past relationships can influence present and future relationships through intergenerational transmission of distrust and disrespect of each other. In this study, we argue that patriotic history in Zimbabwe could not play a reconciliatory role because of its selective conception and intolerance to open questioning and re-examination of difficult histories like the *Gukurahundi* violence.

Understanding *Gukurahundi* as an epitome of ‘difficult history’

Gukurahundi was the code name for the Fifth Brigade soldiers, “an army that was sanctioned by then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe to dismantle the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the defected military wing, the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) officials” (CCJPZ 1997:45). While Sisulu (2007), Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2008), Murambadoro (2016) and Eppel (2008) proffer different definitions and motives behind *Gukurahundi*, their points of convergence are the massacre of over 20 000 people, havoc, violence and the excruciating atrocities which the people of Matabeleland and

Midlands suffered at the hands of the government sanctioned North Korean- trained soldiers between 1980 and 1987. The Shona derivative of the label given to this elite regiment of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) seems to have added fuel to an already smouldering rag. According to Eppel (2008:1) *Gukurahundi* is “a Shona term referring to the first rain that washes away chaff before the spring”. An analogous interpretation, was that the Fifth Brigade was created for a special purpose of establishing peace through violent means by washing away (killing) either the dissident menace or the opposition ZAPU (Murambadoro 2016, Cameron ,2017). The historical conflict between ZAPU and ZANU going back to the mid-1960s was now being re-lived through *Gukurahundi*. Ranger (1996:12) observed that “ZAPU elders in Matabeleland ‘s northern districts of Nkayi and Lupane believed that the Brigade was the tool, not of the state, but of ZANU-PF as a party”. Given that most of the soldiers who were members of the Fifth Brigade were largely Shona, it could be interpreted that *Gukurahundi* was indeed planned to tame the people of Matabeleland and Midlands for supporting ‘dissidents’ in their areas.

Although Matabeleland and Midlands’ demographic loss due to *Gukurahundi* remains conservative, popular estimates by most scholars have pegged the figure as having been no fewer than 10 000 and not more than 20 000 people, exclusive of thousands who were maimed, detained without trial, tortured, beaten and raped and left for the dead (Eppel, 2001; Cameron,2017, CCJP 1997). In 1983, Mugabe even hinted that men and women who provided food for the dissidents were indiscriminately eradicated; compounding the government’s attitude that “to support ZAPU was the same as to support dissidents” (CCJP 1997:16). It is beyond doubt that crimes against humanity were committed by the Fifth Brigade during the days of *Gukurahundi*. Webner (1998:91) noted that the elites of Matabeleland, “most prominently those suspected of being ZAPU supporters, were picked out, and systematically decimated by hit squads; its people were starved, brutalised and raped...” Sisulu (2007: 62) bemoans that the events of Matabeleland remain “a mouldering sore on the country and the effects will not go away until they have been properly dealt with”. The emergence powers to enforce widespread curfews, detention without trial, arbitrary arrests, torture and rape suffered by the Ndebele created an atmosphere of fear and mistrust which has persisted to this day between the people of Matabeleland and Mashonaland. The political leadership has remained silent over the issue possibly out of fear of being implicated in the investigations. Our stance is that the post-genocidal regime should have adopted a discourse of reconciliation through educational institutions towards the realisation of a genuine

form of reconciliation. While the victims are clamouring for justice, the perpetrators are elusive and wish to escape justice at all costs.

President Robert Mugabe described *Gukurahundi* as a ‘moment of madness’ whose emotional attachments have remained highly political and sensitive. People in Matabeleland and Midlands are still bitter about *Gukurahundi* because the government has not exhibited any political remorse for the violence and deaths inflicted upon them. While Grosland (2015) argues that certain content may be considered difficult or dangerous in a given context, due to the emotional responses that may be elicited, if a conflict is left undressed, it can also have destructive consequences. Arguably, *Gukurahundi* has nourished the permanency of scars of hostility between the communities of Matabeleland and Mashonaland.

According to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the saddest outcome of the 1980s violence is that the people in Matabeleland believe themselves to have been the target of a war not against dissidents, but against the Ndebele and ZAPU (CCJP, 1997). As a result, the communities of Matabeleland condemn all the Shonas for causing *Gukurahundi* (Lindgren 2015). What made the situation worse was that since the days of *Gukurahundi*, the government did not make a formal apology to the victims of the massacres. Dumiso Dabengwa a former commander of ZIPRA forces bemoaned the reluctance by the government to apologise, adding that for as long as the victims remained bitter, the issue of *Gukurahundi* was never going to be forgotten (*The Sunday Mail*, 22 May 2012). Nothing has been done by the government to convince the communities of Matabeleland and Midlands that history will not repeat itself.

The football fraternity has not been spared from the ethnic violence which has characterised Ndebele-Shona relations. A gamut of literature on Dynamos and Highlanders Football Clubs’ rivalry shows that the teams are supported along ethnic lines (Stuart, 1995; Chiweshe, 2011; Zenenga, 2011 and Ncube 2014b). Dynamos FC draws its support base from among the Shona speaking people while Highlanders FC is predominantly supported by the Ndebele-speaking people of Zimbabwe (Ncube, 2017). The matches between the two clubs portray battle grounds for “the performance and contestation of ethnic differences and power” (Ncube, 2017; Muchemwa, 2016). Violent clashes between their rival supporters have led to death and some injuries. Any supporter who supports his/her team on the wrong side bears the wrath of hooliganism and related acts of violence.

What has also frustrated Zimbabweans in general and the communities of Matabeleland and Midlands in particular is the failure by the government to release the findings of the Dumbutshena and Chihambakwe Commissions of enquiry set up to investigate the violence that occurred at Entumbane in Bulawayo when Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) ex-combatants clashed and the *Gukurahundi* massacres of Matabeleland and Midlands respectively. The findings of the two commissions have remained a guarded secret. Activist groups like Ibhethu Likazulu and Zimbabwe Victims for Organized Violence Trust have made concerted efforts to push for the release of the findings to no avail (Murambadoro and Wielenga, 2016). The failure to release the contents of these enquiries has heightened people's mistrust of government intentions given that were it not for the dredging of mine of water in the drought of 1992, the full horror of *Gukurahundi* would not have been fully exposed (Webner 1995). For some six months, Mugabe also suppressed The Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands which had been compiled by the Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace and submitted to him by the Catholic Bishops. Even Vice President Joshua Nkomo who had condemned state terror, demanded that copies of the report by the CCJP be submitted to him because they were a danger to national unity (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 9 May 1997:2). Upon the widespread leaking of the contents of the Catholic Commission's report, Mugabe responded: "If we dig up history, then we wreck the nation...and we tear our people apart into factions, into tribes and villagism will prevail over our nationalism and over the spirit of our sacrifices" (Webner 1998: 96, citing *The Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1997:1,4). Mugabe's approach, Webner (1998: 97, 98) argues, was tantamount to imposing state-buried memory which would not withstand popular insistence on remembrance because the Fifth Brigade "deliberately stopped the proper burial and mourning through which people are expected to cope with bereavement". History is therapy for those who suffered from a collective trauma through experiences of mass death and incarceration. Tosh (2010:36) warns: "a nation that cannot face up to its past will be gravely handicapped in the future".

During the Mugabe era, any public talk about *Gukurahundi* led to detentions. Mzila Ndlovu a member of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change-Ncube (MDC-N) was detained for uttering that the victims of *Gukurahundi* needed to be compensated by the government. Morgan Tsvangirai the founder of the MDC was labelled a 'puppet of the West' by Mugabe upon threatening to release lists of the perpetrators of the *Gukurahundi* massacres and vigorously campaigning that he would bring them to justice. The malicious hostility from government

coupled with fear of victimisation closed doors for open discussions on *Gukurahundi*. The cardinal observation is that whenever past violence remains ‘unfinished business’ relations between communities will continue to boarder on mistrust and depict a sad story of deep hostilities (Muchemwa,2016). For some of the Ndebele people, the Shona are to blame for all the pain, sufferings and misfortunes that the former have experienced since independence. Aspects of supra-ethnicity have featured in marriage circles where activist groups have discouraged inter-marriages between the communities of Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Some aggrieved Ndebeles have refused to allow their daughters to get married to men from Mashonaland. Many cases have been reported in the media about some fathers refusing to accept *lobola* payment from the Shona in-laws. Strained relations characterised by anger and bitterness have also resulted in the Ndebele ascribing marginal development of their region upon the Shona who happen to occupy top leadership positions (Muchemwa, 2016). The general feeling among the Ndebele is that the lack of development in Matabeleland is a deliberate policy by the Shona to continue instilling pain on the communities of Matabeleland (Muchemwa 2016). Lindgren (2002:19) has been emphatic that “as a result of the Fifth Brigade atrocities in Southern Zimbabwe, Ndebele ethnicity has become more salient after than before independence”. Ndlovu (2015: 105) captures similar sentiments that, “the humanitarian disaster for the Ndebele started in 1983 with *Gukurahundi* and that the latent conflicts which have continued insistently to shape the Ndebele’s sense of belonging in Zimbabwe have been exported to Johannesburg in South Africa”. As already mentioned even the 1987 Unity Accord has been considered as a placatory gesture to diplomatically silence and overshadow the Ndebele in the country’s official historical narrative. While the rhetoric and goals of unity are laudable, the absence of reconciliation over the *Gukurahundi* atrocities seems to have made everything frivolous. The above sentiments point to the gravity of the sourness of the relations.

‘Patriotic history’ and the missed opportunity for reconciliation

This section demonstrates how ZANU-PF lost a grant opportunity for creating an environment of tolerance and respect among perpetrators and victims of violence by propping ‘patriotic history’. Our argument is that for as long as the curriculum is disconnected from the politics of contemporary problems, it reflects missed opportunities for peace-building citizenship education. In Zimbabwe, ‘patriotic history’ was carefully and strategically crafted as an ideological project to silence alternative political views and shape the nature of political debate in the country. The monolithic interpretations of history by ZANU-PF in its quest towards legitimising its authoritarianism and the political

hegemony through cohesive patriotism and heroism were a betrayal to the nation building project meant to promote national healing. A strategy reminiscent to mass indoctrination was championed by government officials and public intellectuals loyal to ZANU-PF. A cabal of public intellectuals sympathetic to ZANU-PF and masquerading as political analysts had special access to state-controlled Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) and radio stations talk shows where they celebrated Mugabe's militancy as heroic and revolutionary. ZANU-PF legislatively controlled key national institutions to freely pronounce its interests whose articulation made them sound synonymous with national interests. The nationalist public intellectuals and other ZANU-PF functionaries who were considered loyal to the 'national interest' did not convey a national perspective at a time when access to accurate and unbiased information was critical for building cross-ethnic trust. The tone, diction and content of the debates were deliberately twisted, highly politicised and manipulated as an instrument of exclusionary politics to side-line the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) of 2001 gave the Minister of Information unlimited influence over programming on Zimbabwe's Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) radio and television. The beaming of programmes and cultural documentaries like *Nhaka Yedu* (Our Heritage), National Ethos or New Farmer were deliberately designed to expose perceived government opponents as "traitors", "enemies of the state" and "stooges" of imperialism (Chiumbu,2004:33). Manyawu (2013) describes how ZANU-PF saturated airwaves with Chimurenga songs meant to secure political hegemony and instil the politics of fear. As Tendi (2010:14) put it, the likes of Tafataona Mahoso, Claude Mararike, Vimbai Chivaura, Sheunesu Mpeperekwi, Godfrey Chikowore and Ibbo Mandaza were afforded by ZANU-PF an unassailable platform in the largely state-controlled media to churn out 'patriotic history'. Tafataona Mahoso wrote articles in government owned national newspapers hero-worshipping Mugabe and hailing the redistributive policies anchored on the land reform and black economic empowerment programmes. Accusations of mis-governance and human rights violations lodged against ZANU-PF were considered as gibberish and neo-liberal globalised rhetoric. The Public Order Security Act (POSA) 2002 limited freedom of assembly, movement and expression. The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) 2002 severely restricted the activities of journalists and media institutions. Zimbabwe's high level of literacy played into the hands of the ruling elite by boosting the readership of government-controlled newspapers like *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *The Chronicle* and *The Manica Post* whose editorial policies and staff recruitment and appointments were mandated to the Ministry of Information and Publicity. The closure of

private media institutions left state-controlled print media with the monopoly to churn out biased news coverage.

While glorifying ZANU-PF, they explicitly negated and nullified the contributions of other subaltern groups in the struggle for independence (Tendi, 2010). We argue that the ZANU-PF aligned public intellectuals' conspiracy of silence over certain historical episodes confirmed the government's lack of sincerity on reconciliation. Silence on the *Gukurahundi* which the MDC and civil society reverberated when emphasizing the ZANU-PF government's genocidal attributes smacked of political bigotry on reconciling ethnically induced divisions. The arrest and state persecution of public intellectuals critical of ZANU-PF like Masipula Sithole, John Makumbe, Brian Raftopolus, Elphas Mukonoweshuro and Lovemore Madhuku among others, cast a bright spotlight on the question of how Zimbabwe would deal with its record of grave human rights violations. What 'patriotic history' advocated was as significant as what it was silent on. All historical events for example *Gukurahundi* which were considered detrimental to efforts towards 'unifying' Zimbabwe and upholding nationalism were not embraced by patriotic history. The selective, exclusive, authoritarian and absolutist nature of patriotic history undermined dialogue and embraced the deceptive conciliatory approach which Mugabe pronounced in his independence speech. The abandonment of the 1980 policy of National Reconciliation which Mugabe had enunciated also accounted for the miscarriage of the nation-building project.

Discussion of Findings

This section of the study discusses invaluable insights from the educators and learners on the utility of the NASS curriculum in developing capacities and competencies which foster the inculcation of peace-building and conflict management skills among learners. Curriculum documents analysed were the NASS syllabi from Hillside Teachers' College, Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, Bulawayo and Kwekwe polytechnics. The documents we examined included the course outline whose common topics were culture and heritage, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of Zimbabwe, legal and parliamentary studies and conflict transformation and resolutions. However, these documents did not uniformly cover content, learning expectations, suggestions for teacher pedagogy and approved texts for the course. In all institutions, course content tended to give more space to the rise of African nationalism and the liberation struggle with a deliberate slant towards normalizing war and violence as signified by the topics on protests against the colonial system, oppression and torture of the African people at the hands of Rhodesian soldiers. The students were required to learn dominant singular nationalist narratives encouraging patriotism and

respect for military heroes and heroines of Zimbabwe's war of independence. In all four jurisdictions, the topics on conflict transformation and resolutions were covered to varying degrees. In the majority of cases conflictual historical moments unevenly addressed colonial relations between settlers and indigenous people in Zimbabwe and seemed to deliberately omit controversial topics like the *Gukurahundi* violence in the course outlines.

The four contexts showed that diversity appeared in terms of what to focus on and the depth to which some topics were handled. They were considerably more uneven in addressing *Gukurahundi* violence. Such a scenario, according to Bickmore et al (2017:11) represents a missed opportunity for students to investigate structural impediments to democracy and peace, or to imagine potential solutions to end armed conflict.

Zimbabwe's major challenge might be that the perpetrators of the *Gukurahundi* violence are part of the ruling elite. Given that people were discouraged to speak about the post-independence violence by the same government as a function of the nationalist monologic history, teachers fear being victimized. Both lecturers and students expressed fear for their lives in case they might fall prey to the murderous tendencies of the ruling party. The practice has been the celebration of elite memorialism and an official obliteration of such for *Gukurahundi* victims. A classic example is the banning of Owen Maseko's art on the *Gukurahundi* massacres by the Zimbabwean government, acting under the Censorship and Entertainment Act (*The Zimbabwean*, 2010, cited by Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2011:12). The study revealed that when dealing with a sensitive past, teachers needed to be selective in their choices of words lest they open old wounds and instigate violence. Thus, skill full teaching which requires particular capabilities is paramount when teachers are dealing with controversial topics. Data also revealed that some teachers had not experienced, either as students or in their own training, inclusive student-centred active pedagogies that meaningfully confront conflict and difference and so would need assistance. Bickmore (2008) observed that professional guidance was critical if teachers were to develop competences and confidence to facilitate specific pedagogies, which included structured academic controversy.

The following excerpts from interviews with lecturers demonstrate:

In the classes you will be shocked to realise that the ruling party has deployed intelligence personnel to check on what you say. There are people on government payroll whose task is to sniff out perceived enemies of the revolution. The language they understand is killing.

Some of us were victims of Gukurahundi and so we might end up being emotional when delivering lessons.

Where government curriculum guidelines neither require nor guide inclusion of difficult topics and challenging pedagogies, we also feel unprepared, we fear losing our jobs, and consequently we refrain from teaching about conflictual questions and perspectives.

The psychological burden of the past is crippling for as long as it remains buried. As such, banishing certain issues to silence is unsuitable for creating sustainable relations. Instead, through NASS new insights and processes that redefine the role of history from being exclusively instrumental for those in power should be forged.

Data from interviews with students indicated that much of what they know about *Gukurahundi* violence is from personal readings and research. The students felt that teachers were not encouraging openness and did not allow learners to express themselves freely when it came to controversial topics. The following quotes illustrate the participants' responses:

Gukurahundi illuminates the conflict between elite political interests and popular memory practices and so for as long as selective memory is considered instrumental in the making of political subjectivities, reconciliation will remain a pipe dream.

Talking about Gukurahundi is taboo. You disappear.

If Gukurahundi was a political mistake, then it should be discussed openly and freely so that we learn from our mistakes. However, as it is now, the political environment is not permitting and yet it is the truth which shall set us free.

The type of history being taught in schools is patriotic history. For our ZANU-PF government, sensitive topics like Gukurahundi are anathema.

The study of controversial topics would be beneficial to both the educators and learners because the dialogue which is promoted enhances the sharpening of our skills of analysis, synthesis, comprehension, critical thinking and problem-solving.

History is dynamic and so controversial issues may motivate learners and stimulate debate. The accommodation of learners' views erases the sense of shock and anger which may be associated with the presentation of controversial issues. Promoting dialogue between teachers and learners can enable the identification of factual gaps which might provoke additional research or investigation on controversies understudy. Discussion enhances learners' ability to engage with opposing views while articulating their own reasoned opinion.

Moreover, controversial issues and historical disputes expose learners to the controversial nature of history as an interpretative discipline in which scholars contrast their reconstructions of the past.

We have also seen how the teaching of ‘difficult history’ like *Gukurahundi* leads to cognitive gains through developing students’ skills of comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Although the wisdom of opening and directing energies to examining old wounds can be questioned, this study indicated that the historical memory-preservation process, largely springing from desires to reveal the truth about what happened is set to prevent a repetition of the past mistakes and promote the rebuilding of trust and understanding among antagonistic groups. It is beyond doubt that some process is desirable for national reconciliation through education programmes. Access to accurate and unbiased information is a crucial ingredient to ensure the success of a nation building project. Like what the ZANU-PF government did to promote patriotic history, an active but objective educational programme is indispensable for building trust and unity between the Shona and Ndebele.

Conclusion

The teaching of controversial topics like *Gukurahundi* has an immense potential to develop problem-solving, critical thinking and analytical skills among learners. There is need to be mindful of the values, attitudes and attributes that learners should possess as a result of their learning experiences. Learners should be prepared to be able to rise to the challenges of the 21st century and beyond. Positive ethics and values which need to be inculcated include peaceful resolution of conflicts and employment of sound judgement. Teaching *Gukurahundi* bears all the ingredients of an education system geared towards promoting education for sustainable development.

The NASS curriculum creates both opportunities and barriers for building young citizens’ capacities to participate in the daily work of building democratic peace. NASS historical narratives being taught in institutions of higher learning seem to reinforce consensus around hegemonic and adversarial perspectives.

The inadequate coverage of aspects of ‘difficult history’, the study has shown, could be attributed to the inappropriate utilisation of teaching methods, a vindictive political climate which breeds fear, poor attitudes of the students towards the course and the political affiliations of the teachers and students among other reasons.

However, for history to be a firm base for socio-political reconciliation, it has to be open for revision and plurality. For as long as history is instrumentally serving the interests of those in power, post-conflict healing and reconciliation will remain difficult to realise. The Matabeleland crisis epitomised by *Gukurahundi* has been left out of history textbooks as if it never happened thereby delivering a deadly blow to efforts towards reconciliation.

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