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Enemies of the State: The Symbolic Annihilation of White-Zimbabwean Identity in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

This article explores the Zimbabwean government-controlled newspapers' symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity in the twenty-first century. Zimbabwe has been through political, social, and economic upheaval in the last 15 years, and it is in this context that the media's construction of white identity is examined. Using a content analysis of online articles from *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, six themes of constructed white identity were identified. The government media's motivation for this symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity is discussed, and the article concludes with a consideration about why this construction of white-Zimbabwean identity matters.

Keywords: Zimbabwe, Symbolic Annihilation, Newspaper, Identity

Introduction

Hammar (2010) contends that the “post-2000 political and economic crises in Zimbabwe generated significant changes in physical, social and symbolic landscapes” (p. 395). How white Zimbabweans are depicted in *The Herald* and *The Chronicle*, the two Zimbabwean, government-controlled national daily newspapers, is the focus of this article. Using thematic analysis, six elements of white-Zimbabwean identity that are constructed in government-controlled newspapers are identified. Based on these themes, arguments are developed, explaining why this symbolic annihilation took place, and four implications of this symbolic annihilation are addressed.

Historical Context

Zimbabwe is an independent nation in southern Africa. Prior to independence, Zimbabwe was called Rhodesia, was run by a racist white minority government that declared unilateral independence from Britain in 1965, and practiced abhorrent apartheid policies that discriminated against and oppressed the black majority. Those racist policies led to a brutal war that was fought against a protracted guerilla insurgency and that was waged by blacks fighting for freedom, land, and a democratic dispensation. In 1980, following a negotiated settlement, Zimbabwe gained independence and majority rule: All Rhodesians, black, white, mixed race, and Indian, became Zimbabweans.

The government urged white Zimbabweans to stay and pursued a policy of reconciliation (Fisher, 2010). Prime Minister Mugabe declared, “If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally. . . . If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you” (Zvayi, 2012a). About “three-quarters of the white

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population emigrated between 1979 and 1990” (Hughes, 2010, pp. 9-10), a time period that coincided with the end of the liberation war and black-majority rule. Whites who chose to stay in independent Zimbabwe slowly began to assume their new Zimbabwean identities. Whites were never more than 5% of the total population (Hughes, 2010) and are estimated to be 40,000 people in a population that is between 12.5 and 13 million (Chinaka, 2008). Post independence, whites have primarily been involved with the farming, ranching, business, mining, tourism, and education sectors, having retained economic power even while losing political power.

Race relations improved post independence, but racial tensions had peaks and valleys in the first 20 years of independence. Whites believed that they had a place in Zimbabwe and identified as Zimbabwean. However, after the war ended and years of relatively stable independence had passed, “the calm could be unmade on precisely the terrain on which it had been produced: national identity, inclusiveness and citizenship” (Barnes, 2007, p. 634). The social reconciliation and the economic progress that occurred post independence would not last into the twenty-first century.

In 2000, the Zimbabwean government, led by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) supported the adoption of a new constitution; a referendum was held, and the government’s position was defeated. Shortly after the referendum, ZANU-PF was nearly defeated in parliamentary elections that saw the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) challenge the party’s political dominance in a significant way. In response to the “defeat in the constitutional change referendum of 2000 and its near defeat in the parliamentary elections,” the government “abandoned both its political conciliatory approach and the inclusive nationalism of the early period and instead adopted a radical, exclusive nationalist stance” (Muzondidya, 2007, p. 333). ZANU-PF felt threatened and developed a new political strategy. It was in this context as part of the renewed political strategy that the symbolic annihilation of white identity in government newspapers took place and can be explained. Further context is provided here:

Zimbabwe has been through a period of extremely intense social and political upheaval in the last decade and all aspects of Zimbabwean life have been affected by that upheaval. . . . A new political party emerged to challenge the entrenched political leadership, an agrarian land reform policy was implemented with national and international consequences, a hyperinflationary economy made living and working in Zimbabwe extremely difficult, and the social fabric of the country was torn. (Malleus, 2011, p. 130)

These political, social, and economic crises in Zimbabwe were, in part, created by and affected government policy and, therefore, messaging in government media. Pfukwa (2008) was correct in suggesting that the names “people call each other are powerful barometers of social relations” (p. 38).

Theoretical Frames

Race and Identity

Theorists often apply two main orientations to model racial identity (Scottham, Cooke, Sellers & Ford, 2010). The first one is a process orientation which takes a developmental view that describes how attitudes regarding race develop and change over a person’s lifetime. The second orientation is a content one that focuses on people’s attitudes toward their racial membership, both positive and negative (Scottham et al., 2010). Both process and content views of racial identity are useful to remember when reading this article because whites’ position in

Zimbabwe has shifted over time.

Further, Ansell (2004) points out that “whiteness and blackness as constructed categories of identity” constitute “imagined notions of ‘selfhood’ and ‘other’” (p. 7); this view should be considered when understanding why the social construction of white Zimbabweans matters in the context of Zimbabwe’s development as a democratic, independent nation that is emerging from political, economic, and social crises. Identities provide connections between groups of people, but they also create boundaries of exclusion and inclusion that have implications for political, social, and economic associations (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997).

It is important to note that “identities are not value-neutral. . . they are intricately woven with the ideological and existential concerns of a given people” (Ndhlovu, 2007, pp. 138-139). Identity is relational; identity recognizes “sameness and difference between ourselves and others . . . has meaning within a chain of relationships” (Watson, 2006, p. 506). As Narváez, Meyer, Kertzner, Ouellette, and Gordon (2009) point out, identities are context dependent and “become more or less significant, functional, or active” (p. 65), depending on context.

Media and Identity

Symbolic annihilation. Symbolic annihilation has been defined as “the way cultural production and media representations ignore, exclude, marginalize, or trivialize a particular group” (Merskin, 1998, p. 335). Media, as a cultural vehicle, provide symbolic messages to audiences about the value of certain groups (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Tuchman (1978) suggests that, in the media, the process of symbolic annihilation demonstrates to an audience that certain groups are not valued. This process “is of concern because it presents people with implied messages about what it means to be a member of a culturally valued group versus a member of a socially disenfranchised group” (Klein & Shiffman, 2009, p. 57).

As a theoretical frame to guide media studies, symbolic annihilation theory, as proposed by Tuchman (1978), has been used to study different media, such as television news and dramas, animated cartoons, magazines, and newspapers (e.g., Harp, Harlowe & Loke, 2013; Hestroni, & Lowenstein, 2014; Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Skalli, 2011; Stanley, 2012). Symbolic annihilation has been used to describe, explain, and problematize media portrayals for a variety of demographic elements, such as ethnicity, gender, age, race, and sexual orientation (e.g., Harp et al., 2013; Hestroni & Lowenstein, 2014; Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Skalli, 2011; Stanley, 2012). As such, symbolic annihilation is an appropriate guiding frame for the current study.

Assumptions. While the media play an important role in society, media effects are rarely the only determinant of public opinion and do not influence people in a uniform way (McQuail, 2000; Wasserman, 2005). When most people form opinions and make judgments, they “rely on a combination of their preexisting views and the information . . . in the news media as the mutable material from which to mold their opinions” (Nisbet & Myers, 2011, p. 686).

Meanings attached to identities are generated in society, and media are one set of institutions that play a role in deciding which version or interpretation of identity prevails in a culture (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997). Media support or undermine identities, and often, political elites have close connections with media institutions and have an influence about which identity interpretations prevail (Wilkins & Siegenthaler, 1997).

Media play an important role in the discourse of identity, and this role explains why “control of the discourse is important, and an explanation of why the media as a site and instrument is so vigorously contested” (Wassermann, 2005, pp. 76-77). Because the media play a

crucial role in developing identity and have a role in socialization, it is necessary to understand the Zimbabwean government's media strategy.

Criticism of the Zimbabwean Government's Media

In Zimbabwe, "the print media sector is largely dominated by Zimpapers, a state-controlled entity comprising two national dailies, two national weeklies and some provincial newspapers" (Moyo, 2009, p. 551). The government "is critically aware of the power of the media in the struggle over the shaping of minds of its citizens" and has tried mightily "to control this space through legal and extralegal measures" (Moyo, 2009, p. 551). Chikwanha, Sithole, and Bratton (2004) argued that "most Zimbabweans . . . get only one side of the story . . . the majority of citizens hear only what the government wants them to hear" (p. 5). Christiansen (2009) found that, in 2006, Zimbabwe had "a media landscape which was almost entirely controlled by the government" (p. 180).

Academic and institutional sources criticized the Zimbabwean media's quality. Thram (2006) suggested that the "state-owned Zimpapers—*The Herald* in Harare and *The Chronicle* in Bulawayo—are vehicles for dissemination of the regime's relentless propaganda themes of patriotism, sovereignty, and 'national values'" (p. 77). Weza (2002) characterized government-controlled media as being "the unquestioning messenger" (p. 546) of government policy. Chari (2007) echoed that concern, suggesting that it "is rare to find news reports that disparage government policies in the public media . . ." (p. 41).

Willems (2011) contended that "state-sponsored media such as *The Herald* and the monopoly broadcaster the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)" tend to rely "to a large extent on the official voice of government elites" (p. 131). Government newspapers often published press statements from government departments as news reports without any critical analysis of the messages in those statements (Willems, 2011). Chari (2010) lamented how "the press lost an opportunity to analyse the multiple layers attendant to the Zimbabwean crisis . . . abdicating their social responsibility to inform and educate the public" (p. 147). Chari (2007) also suggested, "the public media have more latitude to lie without being punished" (p. 49). Willems (2011) asserted that both "ZBC and *The Herald*, therefore, primarily sought to attribute legitimacy to the state and the ruling party ZANU-PF" (p. 131). This idea was supported by the findings of the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (2009b) that "the overwhelmingly dominant public media continue to serve as the propaganda tools of ZANU PF" (p. 1).

Recognizing this criticism and the lack of critical analysis about government policy in the government-controlled press is key to understanding the context in which mediated portrayals of white-Zimbabwean identity was investigated. This recognition was important because Zimbabwe's government-controlled media provide an essentially unfiltered voice to promote government policy and to attack detractors of those policies. This recognition was also important because government policy is context dependent, and media content both reflects and influences changing policies and contexts.

Using a thematic analysis, this study sought to answer the research question "How and why was white-Zimbabwean identity symbolically annihilated in government-controlled newspapers?" The analysis identified six themes around which the white-Zimbabwean identity was constructed in those media. A rationale about why this symbolic annihilation took place was provided, along with a discussion about why the nature of that symbolic annihilation matters in the Zimbabwean context.

Method

Text

Online newspaper articles from *The Herald* and *The Chronicle* (the only two national, daily, government-controlled newspapers) served as the text for analysis. The articles were drawn from the 2011 and 2012 archives, serving as a convenience sample spanning multiple years. The newspaper websites' search engines were used to identify relevant articles (defined as articles that discussed white Zimbabweans as a group or mentioned individual, prominent white Zimbabweans: politicians and economists). The search terms used were "white Zimbabweans," "whites," "Rhodesians," "Rhodies," "David Coltart," "Eddie Cross," "Eric Bloch," "Roy Bennett," "John Robertson," and "Trudy Stevenson." One hundred and sixteen articles were identified as meeting the search criteria.

Procedure

A thematic analysis was performed on the 116 articles. Thematic analysis may establish "data-driven codes . . . constructed inductively from the raw information" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30) and is a "method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme identified by a researcher "represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82), and those themes can be considered markers for how a group is portrayed in the media (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). Each article's content was examined twice, by one coder, to identify themed descriptors of white Zimbabweans. A second coder was asked to code 10 randomly selected articles using the identified theme categories to establish reliability for the coding scheme because the "closeness of the code to the raw information increases the likelihood that various people examining the raw information will perceive and therefore encode the information similarly" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30). The second coder identified the same themes that the first coder had found for all 10 articles, providing a measure of reliability for the coding scheme.

Findings

Themes

Six specific portrayals of white Zimbabweans were found in the thematic analysis about how white-Zimbabwean identity was constructed in the newspapers. Those themes were that whites are Rhodesians, racist, enemies, unrepentant, Machiavellian, and not authentic Zimbabweans/Africans.

Whites are Rhodesians (Rhodies). An illustrative example of this theme follows:
 . . . the overprotected Rhodies. . . We have never seen them queuing for bread or petrol neither selling tomatoes to improve family incomes or buying from our shops or commuting on our roads or participating in our national events. (Humanikwa, 2011, para. 11)

Humanikwa was arguing that all whites have been immune to the pain caused by economic conditions and that black Zimbabweans have suffered while whites have not. The invocation of the term "Rhodie" had a set of negative connotations that were familiar to the audience and denied whites a Zimbabwean identity, separating them from black Zimbabweans.

Prominent white Zimbabweans were often labeled Rhodesian. For example, Eddie Cross,

a Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) politician, and Eric Bloch, a well-known economist, were described as “remnants of racist Rhodesia who now seek ablution in crass reasoning” (Manheru, 2012b, para. 6). The writer denied Cross and Bloch the right to make social commentary or to express their opinions because they were Rhodesian, claiming that their reasoning was clouded by their identities as Rhodesians, automatically excluding their voices from legitimate public debate.

Whites are racist. The second theme was that whites are racist. A writer in *The Chronicle* (“No,” 2012) claimed, “To whites, angry over the success of our armed revolution, a good African is a dead one” (para. 20). Specific, prominent white Zimbabweans were also identified as racist: “Bennett, a former member of the Rhodesian army, dreams of returning to what he calls a new Zimbabwe where the whites will once again be masters and blacks reduced to servants, or rats, as he calls them” (“Editorial Comment: We,” 2012, para. 13). Given Zimbabwe’s history, being branded as a racist is a dangerous and damaging label.

Whites are enemies. The third theme was the idea that whites are enemies. At times, the entire white population was declared enemies, and individual white Zimbabweans were also often subjected to this characterization as an enemy. An excerpt from an op-ed article about the white MDC politician Eddie Cross served as an example:

He is a cross we have had to bear due to our good hearts when we could have nailed him on the cross along with his Rhodesian kith and kin on account of the atrocities they committed during the liberation struggle. (Zvayi, 2012a, para. 15)

Cross was still the enemy, as were other whites; “kith and kin” was a prominent phrase in government media because it allowed the audience to draw a connection between whites in Zimbabwe and whites outside the country, often in Britain and America. Those British and American whites were depicted by Zimbabwean government media as supportive of white Zimbabweans, and not the black majority.

Whites are unrepentant. A fourth theme was that whites are unrepentant for the crimes of the colonial past, the recent past, and the present. The first example below came from *The Chronicle* and discussed Roy Bennett; the second example was from *The Herald* and reflected Eddie Cross’ political comments: “He is unrepentant and mindless over the terror he and his imprudent ancestors caused on Zimbabweans since time immemorial. Bennett should be the last person to preach democracy if ever he is to speak at all” (Munendoro, 2011, para. 2).

Surprising, quite surprising coming from a Rhodie who was spared the gallows by the same people he threatens today . . . stands up today to thumb his nose at his benefactors to the extent of issuing empty threats, and misrepresenting history, testifies to the triumph of our democratic tradition and tolerance. (Zvayi, 2012a, para. 12)

The themes characterizing the unrepentant white Zimbabwean had two underlying messages: one, the whites were not sorry for their past “sins,” effectively rejecting reconciliation, and two, the threat of punishment for those sins still existed, but it was only the government’s forbearance that keeps punishment at bay.

Whites are Machiavellian. The fifth theme for white-Zimbabwean identity found in the data was that they are Machiavellian. One consistent message in the government press was that whites are manipulating the MDC for their own nefarious purposes. Media messages ranged from claims that the MDC was “a party infamous for receiving cheques from the bitter former white farmers” (Nyamurundira, 2012, para. 3) to larger conspiracy theories:

Roy Bennet fails to tell the public that, their massive support of the MDC-T is a clandestine strategy to restore the white supremacy . . . set-up a puppet government

which they could manipulate, and re-impose their failed control of resources in the country. He is a frustrated former white colonial Rhodesian who is seeking undue revenge over their broken rule in this country. (Munendoro, 2011, para. 8)

A campaign slogan of ZANU-PF's, "Zimbabwe will never be a colony again," that fits into this myth was echoed in much of the government-media examples which can be found in excerpts from three reports in *The Chronicle*: "Zimbabwe will never be a colony again. Re-establishment of white rule is now an abomination" (Munendoro, 2011, para. 10). "We want to say it loud and clear to Bennett and his kith and kin that Zimbabwe will never be a colony again" ("Editorial Comment: We," 2012, para. 14). "We want to once again remind those who miss serving their masters tea that Zimbabwe will never be a colony again so whites are never again going to be masters in our motherland" ("Editorial Comment: There," 2012, para. 8).

Whites are not authentic Zimbabweans/Africans. The final theme was about how white-Zimbabwean identity is the explicit portrayal of those citizens not being Zimbabwean or African. In an opinion piece about Eddie Cross, Manheru (2012a) claimed:

But to have to assert your rootedness against a black indigene who has no other root, no other place, no other country, no other continent to come from, sounds to me not just preposterous, but also a blunt way of provoking hurtful questions, questions that boomerang. It amounts to inventing nationality and I am ready for a debate on such an issue. After all a pig hardly asserts its piggi-ness, it just wallows in mud! Yet Cross does that in his sanitised self-history, much like his kind (para. 15).

Manheru is thought to be a pseudonym for George Charamba, a government spokesperson who has a weekly column in *The Herald* (Sithole, 2009), and he continues in the same article to dismiss Cross' claims of being a Zimbabwean and, by extension, to deny other white Zimbabweans' claims of an African identity: "He calls himself 'a white African', an oxymoron so much in vogue for Rhodesia's erstwhile privileged whites when they seek to stake a claim in post-independence Zimbabwe" (Manheru, 2012a, para. 6). Manheru makes the claim that there is no such identity as white African and that the assumption of that identity is a self-serving turn of phrase, an invention of the Rhodesian racists.

Discussion

All six identified themes that characterize white-Zimbabwean identity as constructed by the government newspapers served to symbolically annihilate whites by portraying them as "the other," as alien to Zimbabwe. This section explores why the symbolic annihilation took place, providing several possible explanations. Then, there is a discussion about four implications for this symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans in the media.

Rationale for Annihilation

Thematic analysis may focus on the directionality of the media content, and from such studies, researchers may infer the media messages' motives and intentions (Greenberg & Salwen, 1996). White-Zimbabwean identity was negatively constructed in the government newspapers (and other media) to serve strategic political purposes that were determined by the context, both historical and current, in the country and the southern African region over the last 15 years. In context, it is not unreasonable to consider identity construction and contestation as part of a struggle for political power (Wasserman, 2005). The government concluded that, to remain in

power, required it to “create enemies, define sides to a conflict” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 9), and the media were a tool for this endeavor.

Keeping this need to create enemies in mind, there were several explanations about why the symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity took place at the time it happened. In part, it was a response to the whites’ active participation in politics. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) suggested that the MDC had “support from white Zimbabweans, civil society organisations and major world powers such as the United States and the United Kingdom” (p. 952). This support angered ZANU-PF and was seen as a betrayal of the implied agreement between whites and the government that was reached at independence. McGreal (2008) summed up the implicit “deal”:

They could go on as before, so long as they kept out of politics and did not criticise publicly. That is the way it stayed for 20 years, but then quite a number of whites - some of them farmers - made a misjudgment. They thought they had the same rights as everyone else. (para. 9)

Hughes (2010) suggested that it was understood that whites should not undermine the ruling party, ZANU-PF. There were accusations against “whites that ventured into opposition politics of being ‘unreconstructed rhodesians’” (Mashingaidze, 2010, p. 23). As Zimbabwean journalist and author Peter Godwin reflected (as cited in Hughes 2010, p. 103), “We had broken the unspoken ethnic contract. . . . We had tried to act like citizens instead of expatriates here on sufferance . . .”

Kabwato (2010) provided the example of Roy Bennett, a white Zimbabwean who accepted the

call for reconciliation in the early 1980s . . . supported Zanu PF. His switch of allegiance to the Movement for Democratic Change was unforgivable on two fronts: he was white and he was a farmer. Having taken away his farm without compensation, the next level of punishment was to deny him his humanity. (para. 5)

Only part of this story played were discussed in government media: Bennett’s right to be in politics and questions about his identity.

This rhetorical strategy of identifying political scapegoats had resonance because it “employed the language of the liberation movement, appealing to a sizeable population both within and without Zimbabwe” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). This government-media rhetoric was also successful at exploiting “a narrative of race and exclusion played out and remembered from the Chimurenga,” or war of liberation (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). The discourse of the Third Chimurenga, as the period of land redistribution came to be framed by the government and its media, was mainly characterized by “constructing the government’s political opponents as traitors or “sell-outs” (Christiansen, 2009, p. 177). The government in power since 1980 had not adequately resolved the land issue, (i.e., an equitable redistribution of land, primarily from white to black people.) A radical new land policy was ZANU-PF’s strategy to survive politically, and the policy revolved around blaming whites for the land question not having been settled.

Whites were socially constructed in the government media, to link them with the black opposition (specifically, the MDC). “White Zimbabweans were increasingly 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” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009, p. 954). The reasoning for this linkage was to create doubt in the minds of black Zimbabweans about the legitimacy of the MDC as a viable governing alternative

to ZANU-PF. Reading stories about “the black component of the MDC-T rub shoulders with the Roy Bennetts and Eddie Crosses of this world who constituted a privileged class in Rhodesia” (Chubvu, 2011, para. 5) served to exacerbate that doubt in the mind of some black Zimbabweans.

If the media audience missed these messages’ “subtle” implications, the government also sent un-interrogated messages, with an explicit linkage and dire consequence, through government media. The MMPZ’s (2009a) *Language of Hate* report, produced after the violent 2008 presidential-election campaigns, provided an example for that kind of message:

I came here to warn you about the machinations of the Rhodesians. . . . they intend to come back using one of our fellow Zimbabweans, Tsvangirai, as their running dog–chimbwasungata. If you vote for Tsvangirai on June 27, you are voting for the former Rhodesians and thus you are voting for war. (Zimbabwean Vice-President Joseph Msika, as cited in MMPZ, 2009a, p. 3)

Morgan Tsvangirai was the MDC presidential candidate to whom Msika referred in the previous excerpt. Socio-historical context helps race-based messages take hold (Ansell, 2004). It was not out of the realm of the Zimbabwean audience’s experience to recall a time when black Rhodesians worked with white Rhodesians against those blacks fighting in the liberation struggle. Though the context was very different then, for some, this kind of government-media messages seemed plausible. As the MMPZ (2009a) suggested, “the government-controlled media have not only reported these offensive and undemocratic sentiments without question or censure, they have endorsed and amplified them . . . in the news and ‘analysis’ columns of the papers under government control” (p. 4).

Linking the MDC to white Zimbabweans, the government’s media messages also served another purpose, to link the MDC to whites outside the country. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) contended:

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was considered as the antithesis of “independence.” . . . MDC accommodated white Zimbabweans in its ranks and this enabled ZANU-PF to link the opposition to Rhodesian and British interests. (p. 956)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) posited that “cultural nationalism became an important project for ZANU-PF, and a means of re-asserting its anti-colonial message in the face of what it saw, and increasingly represented, as a new ‘imperial threat’ embodied by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)” (p. 952). White Zimbabweans provided the “faces” that could easily be linked to the MDC and also to Britain and ‘the West’.

A further rationale for the symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans was to explain Zimbabwe’s problems. The move toward nationalist rhetoric and the re-invocation of the liberation struggle successful shifted the focus away from “governance shortcomings, political ambitions, and the cronyism” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7) in Zimbabwean political life. As Zimbabwe’s political decline steepened, so did the economic decline, to a point where the country could no longer provide food for the population (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004). Zimbabwe was in a state of hyperinflation with price changes multiple times a day, everyday transactions taking place in billions and trillions of Zimbabwean dollars, the local currency becoming worthless, and shortages for commodities such as sugar and cooking oil that were being bought and sold on the black market (CNN 2008; “A Worthless Currency,” 2008).

Blaming whites, the MDC, Britain, and the West for Zimbabwe’s problems was essential. ZANU-PF had been in power since 1980 and could not admit that its policy failures had caused such crises, or it would have meant certain electoral defeat. Framing the twenty-first century and

land reform as the third liberation struggle meant that enemies were needed, and it was those enemies who were responsible for all the troubles that the Zimbabwean people were facing. The government media's narrative went that way. That narrative was sorely needed to convince Zimbabweans that paying 1.6 trillion Zimbabwean dollars for a loaf of bread (CNN, 2008) was someone else's fault, not the result of irresponsible and ill-considered government policy.

A final reason to explain the negative social construction of white Zimbabweans in the government media related to legal definitions of citizenship and voting. In Zimbabwe, the 2000s saw "politically charged, narrowed-down definitions of national identity and citizenship" (Mano & Willems, 2010, p. 183), with the white population being one target of these narrowed-down definitions. Along with whites, many of whom held dual citizenship, the legislative framework around citizenship had a negative impact on black farm workers, many of whom had Malawian and Mozambican ancestry. These workers were seen as a voting block that helped drive the defeat of the constitutional referendum and the near defeat of ZANU-PF in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Disenfranchising those workers, and their white commercial farmer employers, was part of the government's strategy to ensure its political survival.

Mano and Willems' (2010) thoughts on how Zimbabwean-ness was constructed in Zimbabwe encapsulated why white Zimbabweans, under the government media's construction, cannot claim belonging: "in order to qualify as an authentic and patriotic Zimbabwean, one was expected to: be black; have ancestors who were born in Zimbabwe; live in rural areas or at least be entitled to land in rural areas; and vote ZANU PF" (p. 187).

Nisbet and Myers' (2011) contention that political "identities may be best understood as forms of collective social identities situated in a political context" (p. 687) helped to explain why this restrictive construction of Zimbabwean identity and citizenship was performed in the government media. This symbolically restricted definition of citizenship reinforced the government's legislative attempts to limit citizenship. In practical terms, most whites stayed out of post-independence politics (O'Sullivan, 2000) and, as a voting bloc, held negligible power because they were such a tiny fraction of the voting population. Symbolically, however, portraying whites (and the blacks they employed on farms, a much larger bloc of people) as non-citizens was powerful. This restrictive definition of citizenship served as one part of the government media's "campaign to revive the nationalist fervor of the liberation war" (Chikwanha et al., 2004 p. vii) in the twenty-first century.

Implications of Annihilation

Having considered explanations about why this annihilation took place, this section briefly discusses four implications of the government newspapers' symbolic annihilation of white Zimbabweans. First, the symbolic annihilation of white-Zimbabwean identity represented a cynical and strategic manipulation of race for political ends that largely went unchallenged by African leaders in the region and the continent. "There was a loud silence from African leaders" (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7).

The government media's rhetoric, channeled with daily regularity, going virtually unchallenged or questioned, served to isolate "white Zimbabweans—and anyone who sided with them—identifying them as the enemy, vestiges of a racist and separatist past in which blacks were exploited" (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 7). Colonialism and the cruel racist policies that went along with the era marked Zimbabwe and the southern African region in many ways, influencing policies, conflicts, and development today. However, strategically using the

government media to fan the flames of racial hatred by manipulating perceptions about white identity is neither the way to redress past injustice nor to build a democratic dispensation. Allowing the Zimbabwean government's media to escape critique by most leaders from other democratic African nations in the region and on the continent does not bode well for the future of race relations in Zimbabwe or on the continent.

If the media tell a culture's stories (Baran, 2009) and if the story of white Zimbabweans is being told in a negative, partial way, then white-Zimbabwean stories are not being told. Untold stories are the second reason that the symbolic annihilation of white identity is important to consider. What stories are not told about whites? The white commercial farmers' experience, since being removed from their farms after the land-redistribution exercise, and white poverty are two examples of these untold stories. There was an absence of coverage about white farmers' lives after their farms were taken for the land reform; there was no examination of their anger, grief, despair, resolution to move on, and how they rebuilt their lives or continued to work in order to develop Zimbabwe.

Writing for *The Telegraph*, a British media publication, Freeman (2011) provides a glimpse into the feelings of one white farmer who was about to be evicted from his farm after years of struggling to keep some of the land through the process of law in Zimbabwean courts. At the prospect of finally being moved off the farm with his family or going to jail for "trespass" white, commercial farmer Cloete stated:

To be honest, I don't really fancy the idea of moving to Harare, and the idea of giving up farming is heart-rending. If I was going to serve a couple of years in jail and then get the farm back, it might be worth it, but that's not how it is. . . . I have never viewed myself as anything other than Zimbabwean, and that is what hurts me most. . . . We are not being looked at as citizens of this country, yet my father was born here . . . (as cited in Freeman, 2011, para. 7).

Zimbabweans do not get to read these stories that show a different side for the land-reform program and humanize the 4,000 plus white farmers and their families who lost their homes and livelihoods.

A second example of white stories not being told in government newspapers is white poverty. Hammer (2010) points out that Zimbabwe's economic problems "gave rise to a new phenomenon: white poverty" (p. 45). With Zimbabwe's rampant inflation, one subsection of the white population that was particularly hard hit was the elderly white Zimbabweans who relied on pensions and then fell into poverty when those pensions could not compete with rapid rises in the cost of living.

Most muddle through, somehow, though they live in constant fear of serious illness or major house repairs. They long ago stopped using their swimming pools. They have turned lawns into vegetable patches. They gave up whisky, then meat, and take their ageing cars out less and less. In extremis there are a couple of charities that offer discreet help to indigent whites. (Fletcher, 2009, para. 6)

Stories of white Zimbabweans suffering the ravages of economic collapse like the rest of the black population were not a useful part of the narrative about white identity for the government media and, therefore, were not told.

A third implication for the symbolic-annihilation image of white Zimbabweans is the negative impact that those constructions have for citizenship and the democracy. The "redeployment of race and ethnicity in the discourse of rights under the current dispensation has had important implications for the exercising of full citizen rights, including the constitutionally

guaranteed rights, of subject minorities” (Muzondidya, 2007, p. 335).

A new definition of patriotism was seen in the government media where “the MDC was cast as a puppet of imperialist forces, social groups deemed disloyal were excluded from citizenship (affecting whites and large numbers of migrants of Malawian, Zambian, Mozambican and other origins)” (McGregor, 2009, p. 190). In Zimbabwe, the “issue of rights and entitlements, as in the colonial period, is now being defined in terms of racial binaries: black and white binaries, without any middle ground” (Muzondidya, 2007, pp. 333-334).

Muzondidya (2007) contended that, in the twenty-first century, “the government has actively promoted rigid notions of indigeneity, rights and nationhood, which seek to exclude certain categories of Zimbabweans from both the economic restructuring processes and the nation” (p. 340). The government’s ability to pursue policies as Muzondidya described was aided by the negative media messages about whites constantly broadcast and printed in government media, closing democratic space for minorities, and “legitimizing” policies that do so based on arguments about who is and who is not Zimbabwean. The government’s “bluntly racist conception of nationality” (“Foreigners,” 2010, para. 3) affected whites’ ability to fully participate in some spheres of Zimbabwean life, and the government media served as a platform for a specific, constrictive construction of identity representations for Zimbabwean-ness and citizenship.

The fourth implication is that the government newspaper’s media strategy to symbolically annihilate white Zimbabweans makes Zimbabwe’s future more difficult. The land question is still not resolved with some redistributed land being underutilized, agricultural production still being inadequate to feed the nation, multiple farm ownership by political elites, violations of bilateral trade agreements about land repossession, insecurity of land tenure, problems securing loans and funding for commercial agriculture, etc. Global Crisis Solutions (2004) suggests that while “colonial policies on land, labor, and resettlement reveal that they were designed to serve racist ends . . . reactions to these racist policies bear the strains of racial antagonism” (p. 9). The government engages in rhetoric that “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” (Raftopoulos, as cited in Muzondidya, 2007, p. 333). As part of this discourse, white Zimbabweans have been depicted as the enemy and, by this discourse, effectively excluded by government policy from being part of any solution to the land questions that still prevail.

There appears to be an inability or unwillingness for the government to “acknowledge culpability for these unsavory dimensions of the land reform, because it would downplay the moral imperative of their claims for racial empowerment through land repossession” (Mashingaidze, 2010, p. 27). Mashingaidze argues that this silence on the government’s part demonstrates that “the suffering of whites and poor black Zimbabwean citizens matter little in official circles” (p. 27). Having developed this narrative of white-Zimbabwean identity, how can the government then seek to change that narrative without admitting policy mistakes? Media can contribute “to the raising of boundaries for inclusion and exclusion from public life” (Madianou, 2005, p. 537), and in Zimbabwe, the government media has rhetorically constructed those boundaries based, in large measure, on the construction (and deconstruction) of identity.

Conclusion

White identity, as described in this article, in government-controlled newspapers was

constructed for strategic political purposes. This symbolic annihilation served to divide the Zimbabwean population, promoting exclusion and constrained definitions of citizenship and nationhood. People feel excluded when the media, particularly the news media, “instead of being based on an all-embracing notion of citizenship . . . projects a model of belonging based on a homogenous and uncontested national identity” (Madianou, 2005, p. 537). Zimbabwe’s government newspapers contributed to a feeling of exclusion for white Zimbabweans and, importantly, millions of black Zimbabweans who supported the MDC or who did not have links to the liberation struggle. If, as Yu and Kwan (2008) claimed, “a nation is socially constructed as a result of evolving consciousness in people’s minds” (p. 47), then the government newspaper’s portrayal of white identity can be seen as being partially responsible for erecting a stumbling block to true reconciliation and nation building as Zimbabwe moves further into the second decade of the century.

Whites are, in some ways, culpable for allowing those images to take root unchallenged. Hughes (2010) suggests, “Whites demarcated and regulated their own cultural reserve” (p. 98) that was distinct from and unknown to large portions of black Zimbabwe. Further, Herbert (2000) reports “that many Zimbabwean whites have not made much effort to interact with the black population” (para. 21). As MDC politician Bennett (as cited in Herbert, 2000) argued, whites living in Zimbabwe “have to get involved and know the people” (para. 21). Fisher (2010) quotes a civil rights activist who makes this point:

Whites here are part of the problem. . . . They will not recognise their contribution to the government’s anger over reconciliation . . . they act like victims . . . it is so easy to complain about the government but they [whites] won’t join the opposition parties or the civil rights groups. (p. 194)

Hughes (2010) claims that whites turned their minds away from black Zimbabweans and “focused instead on African landscapes . . . to negotiate their identity” (p. xii). This focus allowed the government media an easier road to portraying whites as alien and enemies of the people. Many whites did not really know the black population, its culture, its customs, or the reality of its lives (Hughes, 2010). From the inaccurate, negative picture of whites that was depicted in the government-controlled media, many black Zimbabweans may be ignorant about the existence of layered white-Zimbabwean identities.

In Zimbabwe, responsibility lies with all parties to challenge the distorted media messages, and “Zimbabwe must address its multicultural nature, even within its historical narrative of conflict” (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004, p. 11). Global Crisis Solutions (2004) recommends the promotion of “open discourse on Zimbabwe’s history and its effect on the present . . . community dialogues on race and land” (p. 3) as well as the prohibition or elimination of “rhetoric that promotes racial and ethnic division” (p. 3). The limits of media effects need to be realized. White MDC politicians have been elected to national and local government office even though, as MMPZ (2009a) suggests:

“. . . hate speech” has become an endemic and poisonous epidemic that has fractured and polarized society by promoting extreme levels of political and social intolerance and hostility towards any group or individual that disagrees with the ruling party’s perspective of reality. (p. 10)

Those whites have been voted into office in constituencies that are overwhelmingly black, despite the negative nature of the news construction about white politicians’ identities.

The negative elements of white-Zimbabwean identity in the government media were crafted for political purposes without concern for the effect that those identities had on white

Zimbabweans or for the perceptions built of white Zimbabweans in the minds of the black population. It is crucial to develop space for a dialogue on issues about Zimbabwean identity, which would necessarily include an exploration of how race intersects with identity in twenty-first century Zimbabwe (Global Crisis Solutions, 2004). The Zimbabwean media, both government and private, is one logical space for part of that dialogue to occur.

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