Claske Dijkema, 8 November 2011

Research Theme

According to Western media, Zimbabwe is on the verge of collapse since 2000. Eleven years later on, the same party and the same ruler are still in power, despite contested elections, a failing economy and growing civic opposition. The coercion the party uses to keep citizens in line is rather well documented. This project aims to understand the strategies through which Zanu-PF seeks to legitimise its power. Which groups of citizens are sensitive to which kind of strategies?

Zanu-pf's use of symbolic sources for political legitimisation

Zanu-pf's legitimisation strategies intend to tap into shared experiences and sentiments of people in Zimbabwe. Firstly the founding event of the nation is the liberation war which led to the country's independence from white minority rule in 1980. The party appeals to people's loyalty to the party that liberated the country from white minority rule. Secondly, Zanu-pf presents its land reform program as an extension of the liberation struggle and the continued need to fight against anti-imperialism. It thereby appeals to a sense of humiliation as a result of colonisation. References to empowerment, sovereignty, sanctions, land reform, indigenisation and African nationalism serve to counter the sense of humiliation felt. Thirdly, as a result of nationalist struggles, national identity is an important component of one's identity. This has two consequences, people want to be included in the national definition of what being Zimbabwean means and the echo of what Zimbabwe stands for internationally is important. For example, support and admiration for Mugabe internationally (among Africans) contributes to his legitimacy locally. Fourthly, Zanu-pf draws on the respect for elders that is a custom in many African cultures. Ffthly, the reference to totems and historic lineage and the insistence on knowing "where you come from" appeal to the need to belong, and people's need for pride and positive identification. Finally, in its speeches Zanu-pf refers to a symbolic lineage of heroic ancestors like the famous heroine of the first liberation struggle (1896–1897) Mbuya Nehanda. It also presents Mugabe as a messianic figure, giving back the promised land to his people, which resonates with people's sacred beliefs, paying attention to the different religious orientations that might adhere to. Vehicles for Zanu-pf discourse since this unfolding crisis are media, school curricula, slogans, music, rallies, and national events.

The research project looks into the power of each of these legitimation strategies/ discourse in more detail. We are especially interested in the way Zanu-pf addresses youth. While the older generation is bound by the experience of the liberation struggle and the ideology in which it was framed, that of African nationalism as well as a sense of sacrifice for a larger goal, that of a free country. This is less obvious for the younger generation who is "born free". Youth in Zimbabwe forms a potential threat to Zanu-pf because it does not share the same experiences and repertoires of the older generation. When time passes, the amount of people having experienced the struggle decreases, this source of legitimisation therefore has an 'expiry date'[1]. In its discourse Zanu-pf has presented youth as problematic. It is "restless",

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[1] Dorman, Sara R. "Post-liberation Politics in Africa: examining the political legacy of the struggle, *Third World*

"under the influence of international media" and it has a "diminished sense of national pride"[2]. They are presented as possibly dangerous especially when they have been born and brought up in urban contexts.

Theory

Coercion and legitimation strategies are complementary in understanding Zanu-pf's longeivity

Coercive strategies are the argument most often put forward as explanation for Zanu-pf's longevity. They have been accurately described by authors such as Meredith[3], Godwin[4] and civil society organisations such as Solidarity Peace Trust[5] and Human Rights Watch[6]. Moore recognises the importance of the coercion as one of a series of strategies. Other factors he distincts are a lack of alternatives; ideology and allies; the election time violence and trickery, the declining support for the opposition since 2005, the cultivation and betrayal of intellectuals and finally Zanu-pf's control over the chiefs and the liberation party's international comrades. Sara Dorman agrees that Zanu-pf has pockets of support as a result of its attempts to reinvigorate the 'liberation discourse', which proved effective in some constituencies, but not in others. Henning Melber denies the effectiveness of the party's legitimisation strategies when he states that: "(..) legitimacy is a remote goal under the current circumstances in Zimbabwe, where the governing regime already lost any degree of legitimacy some years ago"[7]. His suggestion is a reminder that there is no direct relationship between legitimacy and staying in power. Moore stresses the material reasons for the support Zanu-pf enjoys among peasants: the new farmers, grateful for their plots and those residing in the communal areas where they are under the control of chiefs. The approach chosen in this research project is that coercion and legitimation strategies are complementary in describing why Zanu-pf has remained in power for over thirty years. An analysis of the coercive nature of its power however is much more developed in media and academic circles than its use of symbols. This research therefore focuses on the latter.

Ojectives and Results

The objective of the wider research project is to understand why Zanu-PF stays in power despite an economy in crisis, increasingly authoritarian tendencies and the existence of growing opposition in politics and civil society. It is a means to test the hypothesis that political rule cannot be based on force or the treat of force alone. To make the population adhere to a party's exercise of power, its discourse must resonate with people's experience and their beliefs. Preliminary interviews have been carried out in September 2010 in the capital, Harare where the support fro Zanu-pf has been dwindling for the past ten years. To get a more complete image of the way in which Zanu-PF's legitimisation strategies resonate with people in Zimbabwe, this field mission seeks to take into account regional differences,

Quarterly, Vol 22, No. 6 pp 1085-1101, Palgrave, Routledge, 2006

[2] Solidality Peace Trust, *National Youth Training – "Shaping Youths in a Truly Zimbabwean Manner"*. Report launched in Johannesburg, 5 September, 2003.

[3] Meredith, Martin, *Mugabe: Power, Plunder, and the Struggle for Zimbabwe,* Public Affairs, 2007

[4] Godwin, Peter, *The Fear, the last days of Robert Mugabe*, Picador, London, 2010

[5] Solidarity Peace Trust, Punishing Dissent, Silencing Citizens: The Zimbabwe Elections 2008, Johannesburg, 21 May 2008

[6] Human Rights Watch, Perpetual Fear, Impunity and Cycles of Violence in Zimbabwe, 2011

[7] Melber, Henning "Botwana, Namibian Zimbabwe – Anything in common? Introductory remarks in Melber, H. (ed.) Governance and State Delivery in Southern Africa, Examples from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2007

focusing on rural areas. In addition it has chosen to focus on youth support for Zanu-pf because ZANU-PF's hold onto power depends on its capacity to make youth adhere to its message and to appeal to its priorities.

The research project has been slightly adapted among the way. From the original plan to interview youth, all generations have been targeted in discussion groups. To correctly interpret what youth is saying we need to be able to compare their views with that of the older generations. Interviews have therefore been held with all age groups: younger generation (up to 30's), middle generation (40' and 50's) and older generation (from 60's).
The hypotheses that Zanu-pf's discourse resonates with concerns in people's lives and that certain groups of youth are sensitive to Zanu-pf discourse have initially not been confirmed during the interviews carried out this summer in the villages where the field study was conducted (Mhondoro-Ngezi in Mashonaland West, Gwanda North and Whitewaters in Matatbeleland South and Tsholotsho in Matabeleland North). The people that have been willing to speak out to me are those that are critical of the government and in most cases in favor of the oposition. What they vote remains unclear because it is an issue people will not state in public. This made Zanu-pf support difficultly visible. In all villages cited above however there are Zanu-pf members but they were not the ones to come to the meetings that were organised for my by contact persons. Follow-up interviews have therefore been carried out by local partner organisations to take the views of Zanu-pf supporters into account. In total 25 follow-up interviews have been carried out with zanu-pf supporters, 10 with those from the opposition or those uncomfortable stating their political affiliation. The focus groups have collected the views of roughly 35 people in rural areas in different parts of the country. The analysis of the results is a work in progress.

Methodology
During focus groups I have discussed with different age groups the issues of national identity (what does it mean to them to be Zimbabwean), how they see the country's history, their future, leadership, loyalty, party rhetoric, and adherence to political parties. I have tried to integrate ideas from the methodological approach of « life stories” which allow an analysis of the context from which people are speaking from, like what their parents do, whether they went to school, what they do in their life, what their aspirations and frustrations are. This methodology draws upon political anthropology. It proved to be difficult to combine it though with the setting of focus groups that limit the time available for going deeper into personal life stories. Focus groups seem however to be an obligatory step in creating confidence within communities.

Interview questions
Introduction
–   Tell me about yourself. [if they mention Shona/Ndbele, ask what it means to them]
–   For the record we need: Name, age, where they came from, when they arrived in the place where they are staying now, what do/did parents do? How many brothers and sisters, what do they do?

Being a Zimbabwean
–   Are they proud of being a Zimbabwean?
–   What are some of the things that they are proud of as Zimbabeans
–   What are some of the things that they are not so proud of?

Leadership
–   What are traits of a good leader? [if the mention that he has to be like a good father,

then probe how to discipline?]
–   Can they mention and example [in case of Joshua Nkomo, probe for how they see his rôle after the integration of ZAPU in Zanu-pf)
–   Does a leaders have to demonstrate strength? Responsibility to discipline?
–   Is it important that a leader has the capacity to deter/to frighten enemies [if yes, who are the enemies]
–   Has a leader the right to use force [violence]? (like a parent might use corporal punishment to a child?)
–   Which authority/leaders are important in their lives? (may be both in a positive or a negative way, like church, chief, councillor)
–   Why do they think Zanu-pf is still in power after 31 years of rule?

History
–   Where lie their roots (historically), where does the country from (historically)
–   What are some of the most important events in Zimbabwe's history (turning points)?
–   Why were they important?
–   How did these moments impact their lives?
–   Is it important to remember them and why?
–   What history should they be passed on to the next generation?
–   Where did they learn about the history of Zimbabwe. Who passed in on to them.
–   How would they describe the current generation in relation to the former ones?

Future
–   How do they see their future? [if they mention for example, better economy, probe on what it means to them, what would be different in their lives if the economy were better?]
–   What are dangers for the realisation of their future? Do they fear that one day war will come back?
–   What are sources of hope? [go in details into the meaning for them of the things they mention, for example if they say we need democracy, what does democracy mean for them, what will it bring to their lives?]

Party rhetoric [how does it resonate with people?]
–   Which concepts are important to you (pick 3)?
–   What do these mean to you?
–   Choose 3 that are less important and why?
    • Democracy
    • sovereignty/ freedom (reference to liberation, what memory of war, afraid to go back to war one day?)
    • empowerment
    • 'national liberation'
    • neo-colonialism
    • patriotism
    • land
    • change
    • good governance
    • ending sanctions
    • marginalisation

Loyalty

–   Is loyalty important for you? What does it mean? Has it once been betrayed? [if yes, in what way?] [if they are war veterans, what loyalty among them and to the party who incorporated the ideals they fought for?]
–   If they don't mention a political example, probe about loyalty in politics, example of betrayal in politics?

Peace
–   what does peace mean to them? Are they willing to make a sacrifice for peace? What would they be willing to give up for peaceful relations in the country or in the village?
–   Are they willing to sacrifice justice for peace?

Politics in village
–   In what way are political parties present in the village? (food/ seed distribution; looking for information when party rallies are held, only election time, more often)
–   When was the first time the opposition became present in your community (through party regalia, through a rally, how many people showed up? What did it change in your community?)
–   Are you member of a political party, what does it bring you in your life?
–   Do you vote for the same party as your parents? (if you don't does this bring conflict within the family?)
–   Do you discuss it if there is a political difference? If not, why not? (evade conflict)
–   Which people are important in forming your political ideas? (teachers, church leaders, educated youth, political leaders, parents, older people, other people influencing political ideas)
–   Do you get a chance to speak in a public meeting? Why?
–   Which sources of information do they rely on?
–   What do they think of GNU?

On top of the difficulty to get direct access to Zanu-pf supporters in the rural areas, it was challenging to make a distinction between a person's public and private political positions. Where did respondents say what they thought interviewers wanted to hear and where did their statement reflect their personal position?

An additional challenge in working together with local interviewers was that they reproduce cultural values and hierarchical reationships. It was difficult for two younger interviewers to approach the older generation, they did not always feel comfortable to question statements and the status that society places upon education was also a barrier for some people to express themselves freely. I will give an illustration of the latter. Two interviewers expressed their preference to speak to "intellectuals" who directly understand the questions. One of them mentioned that: "*the challenge with my interviewees in this case was the level of literacy and probably lack of facts that apply to most questions and hence not answering the question asked. However Keke [a person interviewed] is an intellect from what we gathered about him that is why you can even see some of the responses he was giving they are full of facts and relevant to questions.*" I got the impression that some of the interviewers lost interest when an interviewee did nor respond directly to the question, as if it wasn't worthwile to search the meaning behind words like: "Peace is what we need in this world" or "People must be frightened for leaders to correct what needs to be corrected". At another point one of the interviewers commented that a respondent " was a bit literate because he managed to finish his A'levels so he had a bit of stuff but was offline at some points". I encountered at several occasions people's fear of being "off line", being afraid of not saying the right thing, not realising that what researchers are interested in, is their view. Some of the interviewers

however might have reinforced these fears by complying with the value society puts on education and being literate.

Reference persons

Most of the people that I have met are men and women living in the four rural villages mentioned above. In addition I have also met some people in Harare to build on contacts that had been established before. I only provide the references of the people in latter category. I have preferred not to provide their e-mail contact as this information will be made avaible online but if people are interested in getting in contact with any of these persons, then they can contact me to establish the contact. The object of the meeting has been in all cases a discussion/interview about the above mentioned research questions and an interpretation of the research results.

- Shirley de Wolf, Director , Institute of Peace Leadership and Governance, Masvingo
- Stembile Mpofu, Director Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation, Harare
- Dumie Ngwenya, Director Grace to Heal, Bulawayo
- Nico Ndlovu, Solidarity Peace Trust
- Dumie Mpofu, Masakheneni Trust, Bulawayo
- Kenedy Mugochi, Hivos, Harare
- Maschinda Marongwe, Nango, Harare
- Absolom Sikhosana, chairmen Zanu-pf youth wing, Harare
- Kudakwashe Chakabva, ZINASU, Harare
- Andrew Moyse, Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 9 Knight Bruce Road, Milton Park, Harare
- Nosisa Ncube, Child and Guardian Foundation, Harare