

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE /MILITIA¹ IN ZIMBABWE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, 2001-2005

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ABSTRACT

What explains the re-emergence of the National Youth Service/Militia, launched in Zimbabwe in August 2001? This paper argues that, amid the intense political struggle between the ruling party and a largely worker- and urban-society-based political opposition, there was an urgent need to have in place a cheap and available institution that could be relied upon both to toe the party line religiously and to execute state supported extra-legal activities, including violence. The institution, drawn from the country's earlier political history, was the Zimbabwe Peoples' Militia, now reincarnated as the National Youth Service (NYS). This assertion is supported by the role and function of the NYS, deployed to 'police' the results of Operation Murambatsvina, the forced removal of the poor from the country's urban centres, which has been universally condemned, even by the African Union. However, if this analysis is correct, post-crisis Zimbabwe will be faced with the challenge of having to put down the NYS, a situation similar to what happened in Malawi, towards the end of the reign of the late Malawian President, Kamuzu Banda, and his Young Pioneers.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2001, at the height of the political crisis in Zimbabwe that followed the near defeat of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), in the June 2000 parliamentary polls by the one-year-old political opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), government

1 The current National Youth Service (NYS) in Zimbabwe emerged from the ashes and was built on the foundations of the Zimbabwe People's Militia, 1982-1988, and is popularly believed to be the same organisation.

re-established the National Youth Service (NYS), a reincarnation of the 1980s Zimbabwe Peoples' Militia (ZPP) (Trocaire 2004, pp 12-13). This move met with strong opposition from the political opposition, students, the independent media, churches and other opinion-making groups in whose view the political temperature was not conducive to the creation of a neutral national youth service (Zvayi. 2003; Mathuthu 2001; *The Chronicle*, 30 October 2001, p 5; *The Daily News*, 13 October 2000; Chimhete, 2001; Kahiya 2002; *The Daily News*, 6 July 2002; Nyathi 2002; Wakatama 2002).

In 1982, the Zimbabwean government had established the Zimbabwe People's Militia (trained exclusively by North Korean instructors) as the 'eyes and ears' of the national army. The ZPM later turned out to be the vanguard of the ruling party in the ethnic-based civil war and undertook partisan operations against the then political opposition, the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) (*Zimbabwe Government Gazette Supplements* 1985, pp 1-151; *Zimbabwe Defence Forces Magazine* 1988, pp 15, 17, 40-42; *The Chronicle* 7 July 1983).

The ethnic and political crisis of the 1980s ended with the Unity Accord of December 1987. However, it was subsequently established that the role played by the ZPM and other units as part of the armed forces had generated excesses which culminated in more than 20 000 people losing their lives in Matabeleland, an event that has continued to be a source of tension between the ethnic groups in Zimbabwe.

While the ZPM died a natural death in the late 1980s, largely as a consequence of economic stagnation, its contribution to the excesses was only expunged through the Presidential Amnesty Act No 1 of 1990 (Kagoro 2004). It is against this earlier background that, in August 2001, when the announcement was made, the establishment by government of a national service was viewed with open suspicion. *The Daily News* wrote:

The national youth service is doomed because the general populace of Zimbabwe recognises it as a Zanu PF manoeuvre aimed at strengthening the power base of the ruling party, especially among the youth, as it faces its stiffest challenge from the MDC.

Nyathi 2002

The presidential elections, due to be held in March 2002, were just around the corner and there was increasing political tension in the country. This environment provided further fuel to detractors of the mooted national service scheme. A significant event in the run-up to the elections was the statement by the armed forces chiefs that placed them, and the National Youth Service, squarely in the camp of the ruling Zanu-PF. On 9 January 2002 the military chiefs appeared on national television and announced that they would not 'salute' – a euphemism for 'recognise' – people without 'liberation credentials'. This criterion expressly ruled out the leader of the MDC.²

2 The result of the March 2002 presidential election has been in dispute ever since and is still before the courts.

In the series of elections held between 2001/02 and 2005, a pattern established itself – the opposition dominated the urban vote, whether at local government or at national level. This confined the ruling party to popular support in the rural areas, a fact that it later consolidated by working through the traditional chiefs.

On 21 August 2005 the government-controlled³ *Sunday Mail* reported that:

The City of Harare has resolved to re-engage 300 National Youth Service graduates for the next three months at a cost of nearly Z\$6-billion (US\$250 000) to ensure that illicit business activities (are) curbed and illegal buildings destroyed during *Operation Murambatsvina* (Restore Order) do not resurface.⁴

Mail & Guardian Online 22 August 2005;
see also Tibaijuka, para 1.1

Operation Murambatsvina had been launched, to borrow the wording of the report of the head of the United Nations Fact Find Mission, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka (2005), ‘with little or no warning, [in a] military-style “clean-up” operation that began in the Zimbabwe capital Harare on 19 May, before spreading to all urban areas of Masvingo, Mutare, Bindura, Gweru, Victoria Falls, Karoi, Harare Bulawayo, Kwe-Kwe, Kadoma and Chitungwiza, amongst others, within days’. The impact of the military-like operation was devastating. It not only destroyed thousands of urban shacks, dwellings and informal business premises but also, in the process, rendered homeless an urban-based population of between 700 000 and 1,4 million people. This represents 11,6 per cent of the population, summarily ordered to leave the urban areas and relocate in the rural areas (Olaleye & Tungwarara 2005).

The campaign drew howls of protests from local and international human rights organisations as well as from the United Nations Human Habitat agency. In a development interpreted as a response to the harsh international censure, the government appeared to relent. On 24 June a spokesperson announced the end of *Operation Murambatsvina* and the introduction of *Operation Garikai/Hlanani Kuhle*, a construction and rebuilding exercise managed by a senior military officer, Major General A Chingombe, at the head of the newly formed Inter-Agency National Operations Committee. The Inter-Agency headquarters are located in the capital, with representatives in each of the country’s twelve major cities and towns. These representatives are military officers, deployed to work closely with urban municipal authorities throughout the country.

The irony, however, as will become clear below, is that the majority of elected mayors and councillors in all the urban areas are drawn from the MDC. Their

3 Although this paper purports to criticise, the term ‘government controlled’ should not be construed as value laden, but simply as a statement of fact, accepted by both government and outsiders.

4 The same report also asserts that the 300 youths were drawn from ‘more than 18 000 graduates available from the NYS programme that was launched in 2001’.

primary responsibility is to enforce local government laws and the provision of housing, a function that has now been summarily usurped by the Inter-Agency. Put differently, the election results in the urban areas since 2000, which the ruling party has consistently lost, have been reversed by an executive decision to deploy appointed officials who are perceived to be in favour of the government. Furthermore, the presence of the national service graduates 'whose purpose is to police' the enforcement of measures taken against the 'illegal' urban population has assumed political implications that characterise the current crisis gripping the nation.

In order to facilitate the reconstruction task, a previously unbudgeted Z\$3-trillion (US\$300-million), was allocated to the building of 15 000 housing units. The task was to be completed within 67 days. The announcement was made on 24 June 2005, with the deadline for completion given as 30 August 2005 (*Zimbabwe Independent* 24 June 2005; Tibaijuka Report; *Sunday Mail* 26 June 2005).

In practice, the policing of former 'illegal squatters and traders' has been characterised by the thinly disguised use of violence. Order has thus far been maintained by simply chasing away 'illegal pavement vendors' and, where vendors are caught, summary justice in the form of beatings, followed by confiscation of goods and trashing/trampling on the merchandise, is the norm. During the evenings, mushrooming grass, plastic or wooden structures that have resurfaced have immediately been torched or physically destroyed. This state-sanctioned violence has left victims with no recourse to legal protection, only the assurance of further impoverishment. These developments also reveal a much more fundamental transformation and a change in the role of the armed forces that has confirmed the suspicions of detractors expressed before 2001. Evidence suggests that the armed forces, by deploying the NYS as the vanguard to 'enforce' what has clearly become a controversial government policy of urban clean-up aimed at urban voters, has now usurped the electoral expression of the urban voter, setting the stage for yet another round of political struggle in the country.

Given the resources allocated by government in an environment of accelerating economic meltdown, the question of whether or not the goals set out will be achieved is academic. What is more fundamental is to question both the motive for and the choice of employment of the National Youth Service effectively to enforce the banishment of informal settlers from urban Zimbabwe? This paper seeks to address the dimensions of this question in order to answer the related questions of who exactly constitutes the National Youth Service and what role/function this institution has played in the electoral processes of Zimbabwe since the tumultuous era of August 2001? In answering the latter, we interrogate the notion of what role the armed forces have played since independence in 1980 and whether aspirations of national unity through an integrated military have been maintained?

This paper argues that the armed forces in Zimbabwe have partly diverted from this mandate in 1980 in which they were expected to evolve and serve as an instrument of national unity and integration. This conclusion is drawn after

assessing the role of the NYS since its inception in August 2001. The paper concludes by calling for an urgent realignment of roles and functions for the armed forces, along the lines envisaged in 1980, once the current political impasse is overcome.

The discussion comprises three sections. The first looks at the universally accepted concept of national service and the youth. This is followed by an account of the establishment of the first militia organisation, the Zimbabwe Peoples' Militia, which lasted from 1982 to 1991-2. Finally, the paper looks at the second attempt to establish the NYS, in August 2001, asking the questions why, how and to what effect? The purpose of this discussion is to assess aspects of policy, composition, command and control, deployment and impact of the NYS in relation to the electoral process in the country.

BACKGROUND TO AN INTEGRATED ARMY AND THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL UNITY

A critical challenge facing ruling parties in post-colonial Africa is the task of creating an integrated armed force. In many instances, independence is achieved after a protracted armed struggle during which different parties, many of which tend to be based on regional and ethnic persuasions, have formed armed factions. At independence, while the political parties reach some sort of coalition arrangement, the armed factions are then required to form an integrated national force as one of the preconditions for security and stability in the new state. However, once the integrated army is created, the next challenge is how these elements can be deployed internally without impacting negatively on the evolving new nation. For purposes of this discussion, the concern is to try to understand how the emerging institutions have affected the electoral process, the route to which competing political parties traverse in their bid for office.

In 1980, in the independent state of Zimbabwe, the creation of a national army included a deliberate attempt to use the institution to address the serious ethnic and regional fault lines that had been shown up by the election results of February-March 1980.⁵ This role was, of course, over and above the usual reasons for the creation of a national army – defence and security. Against the stark reality of racial, regional and ethnic differences, the policy of national reconciliation relied on the deliberate structuring of the armed forces as one of the key instruments for consolidating the shaky internal peace. Policy makers were convinced that the social engineering was critical for the purposes of internal stability and the inculcation of a new national consciousness.

5 Twenty seats in the 100-seat chamber were reserved for whites. The Western Matabeleland Ndebele voted almost unanimously for the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) leaving the majority of more than 50 seats to the Shona-speaking Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The United African National Congress (UANC) secured 3 seats while ZANU (Ndonga), led by the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, secured a single seat.

The lesson to be learned from Zimbabwe is not unique in the Southern African region. In March 1990, independent Namibia adopted a similar approach in which one of the primary tasks of the new Namibian Defence Forces (NDF) was 'the promotion of national reconciliation and consolidation of a unified nation' (Government Ministry of Defence website). However, in both states it is important to locate how national service or militia groups are created and to what extent their presence contributes to maintaining the unique goals set out for armed forces in the post-colonial era?

The Concept of National Service and Militia

The history of national service or militia forces as part of the armed forces has been established over two epochs. The first was its emergence and acceptance as a form of organising a society for war during the French revolutionary wars of the late 18th century. At the time, surrounding European monarchs sought to invade and remove from power the revolutionary regime. Faced with these threats, a new military order was established with nationals being permanently requisitioned for military service in a process also known as *the levée en masse*. This was an effective method of stimulating national consciousness and mobilising French society. Soldiers could be marshalled and mustered at little cost but based on a 'national consciousness' that sought to preserve the sovereignty of the nation. From this point onwards, the state could call upon its citizens to discharge a military obligation without cost.

The second development that consolidated the concept of national service/militia groups was associated with lingering militarism and the process of disbanding large armies. The need to have a 'loyal, cheap and readily available national reserve' provided the motivation for re-focusing youths to well-designed programmes, sometimes known as 'volunteerism' and created around young people's career growth and development. In the United States from 1887, soon after the Civil War ended, the government introduced the bi-partisan 'industrial army' designed to provide government training for youths in a national service scheme. A similar move was also made during the 1945 post-war period under the New Deal. A common concern of these programmes was how to present them as a national project instead of a partisan scheme, exploited for political purposes by one of the parties (*Zimbabwe Independent* 1 February 2002). In Europe, consolidation of national service/militia after the French experience became an almost permanent feature in most states after 1945 and continued until it began to lose steam towards the 1960s. Finally, closer to home in Tanzania, after the mutiny of January 1964 was aborted, a national youth service which had been launched in 1963 became the mainstay of the ruling party in carrying out security related tasks. However, expansion of this scheme nation wide, as the *Jeshi la Mkoa*, led to active opposition in 1966, leading to the closure of the country's university.

Given this brief survey, we may be able to draw some conclusions about raising and maintaining a militarised youth service. The first is that the setting up of a

national youth service, militarised or otherwise, is a universal phenomenon established in the late 15th century and linked to the rise of the nation state system. The second is that, in spite of the general agreement on the above, a concern that has persisted is the susceptibility of such a scheme to manipulation by ruling parties. In most cases, parties provide an ideological focus for national service that is subjective and narrowly defined. Finally, the creation of a national service system must be linked to the long-term economic interests of the country, with factors such as human resources and skills training at the core of the decision to adopt the system.

Since the 1960s, however, there has been a general decline in militarism and enthusiasm for national service schemes and where they do exist this is because of the deliberate whipping up of emotive 'national consciousness' for purposes of political survival. As a consequence, national youth schemes throughout the world have experienced resistance from sections of society, the youth and other organisations, resulting in the best and brightest declining to 'volunteer'. The response of governments has been to institute compulsory legislation or other incentives in order to entice youths to its ranks. Finally, the greatest danger has been the role and mandate that youths are given after training, a development that either bonds them with or further distances them from the community.

In Zimbabwe the coalition government of April 1980 had all but collapsed by the end of the year. The political differences spread to the nascent attempts to force integration, leading to many of the new units disintegrating and plunging the country into near civil war. This early disturbance of attempts to maintain a factional and ethnic balance made it possible to create partisan forces without attracting too much criticism. Three units were established with the assistance of North Korean instructors – the Presidential Guards, a Ground-to-Air Artillery Regiment and the Zimbabwe Peoples' Militia.

In 1982 the ZPM was established as a para-military force of 20 000 for purposes of being 'the ears and eyes' of the armed forces against internal insurrection believed to be led by the political opposition, ZAPU. Its second task was also to act as an intelligence arm as well as first line of defence, organising local people against sporadic invasions by the rebel Mozambique National Resistance Army (RENAMO). The latter operated along amongst the rural communities located on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique eastern border. The composition of the militia, its regalia as well as command and control were very much part of the ruling party, besieged by both internal and external enemies after the collapse of the coalition government. To an extent, the existing security environment provided the rationale for such an institution existing without too much criticism.

The ZPM was intended to consist of 20 000 youths, trained for three months and placed amongst the community to act as the eyes and ears of the standing army. However, in the context of the political crisis that had seen the coalition government collapse, the militia unit reflected the ethnic and regional differences between the two major ethnic groups, the Shona and the Ndebele.

The deployment of some of these elements in the internal operations that ensued culminated in a pogrom between the two groups. In less than five years, an estimated 20 000 people, mainly from Western Matabeleland, were to lose their lives. In the words of James J Hentz (2004) '... there [was] extraordinary repression that Robert Mugabe's government visited on Matabeleland (in southwest Zimbabwe) in 1983 and 1984 ...'

The civil war was only halted by an internal political settlement reached in December 1987. Soon afterwards, the Presidential Amnesty Act No 1 of 1990 was passed, providing immunity to members of the armed forces whose participation in the pogroms was considered 'bona fide actions'. Once the regional security situation improved during the late 1980s, the ZPM died a natural death. Its demise was further hastened by the debilitating economic situation that soon saw the country adopt the International Monetary Fund (IMF) inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) by 1991. The security situation both in the Southern African region and within the country was also peaceful during the early 1990s, allowing for the gradual termination of the militia units. It was, however, during the intense political rivalry that re-emerged in 1999 that thoughts appeared to turn yet again towards reviving the National Youth Service or militia.

This event represents a failure to maintain the difficult security policy in which the armed forces acted as a national institution in the first ten years of independent Zimbabwe. Has the country learnt any lessons from this experience to apply to the new National Youth Service programme launched in August 2001?

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE 2001-2005

Reliance on militia groups to execute internal political roles as part of the armed forces is not an entirely new phenomenon in Zimbabwe, as we have noted. After a lull in the expansion of the armed forces after their deployment in the Democratic Republic of Congo in August 1999, a situation of intense political rivalry emerged within the country, spurred on by a rapidly deteriorating economic situation and events that included the rejection of a government preferred position on the February 2000 Referendum and a close parliamentary election in June, in which ZANU-PF was returned to office with only a five-seat majority.⁶ The next major challenge was the presidential election, set for March 2002. Again it was not certain that the sitting president would prevail in that contest. It was against this background then that concerted efforts gained momentum to create a national service that would 'instil a sense of belonging, patriotism and respectable citizens'.⁷

6 Of the 120 seats contested, ZANU-PF won 62, the opposition MDC 57, and 1 (Chipinge South) went to Ndonga.

7 Minister of Youth, Development, Gender & Employment Creation, Border Gezi., speaking to *Mashonaland Guardian Telegraph* 13-26 April 2001.

According to the top civil servant in the Ministry of Youth, the creation of the NYS followed extensive consultations, visits to countries with functioning schemes and the engagement of a consultant to advise the country on how best to establish this organisation (*The Voice* May 2001). Officials in the ministry, in the company of a United States consultant, Antony Forestainer, travelled to China, Yugoslavia, Israel and Canada to investigate national service schemes in those countries for purposes of establishing a local one.⁸

It appears from the available documents that plans were adopted to set up a National Youth Training Programme for 20 000 cadres to be trained before 2007 (*The People's Voice* 18 August 2002). The age groups targeted are between 18 and 30, equipped with either 'O' Levels (four years' secondary education) or 'A' levels. Recruitment is from throughout the country for a training period of three months before release into the economy and communities. The curriculum for the National Youth training is based on four subjects (Trocaire Working for a Just World pp 12-13; Ranger 2004, pp 219-220): orientation (patriotism) history; disaster management (natural climatic challenges); skills training (carpentry and agriculture and vigilance (moral education) defence (*The Herald* 13 October 2000).

However, images of graduates on national television and other evidence points to a heavier emphasis on the military aspects of the curriculum, although this is not explicitly acknowledged in the four modules cited above. Furthermore, the actual training of the youths has been made the responsibility of a small nucleus of serving army personnel supported by retired officers and soldiers as well as war veterans. This is significant, as the ruling party in the political crisis perceives the latter as loyal and patriotic. Among the 'enemies of the state' are the political opposition, NGOs, civic movements and the majority of people living in urban areas.

As regards the content of the curriculum, the famous Zimbabwe historian, Terence Ranger, has been scathing. He argues that:

All training materials in the camps have, from inception, consisted exclusively of ZANU-PF campaign materials and political speeches. This material is crudely racist and vilifies the major opposition party in the country ...

Ranger 2004, p 219

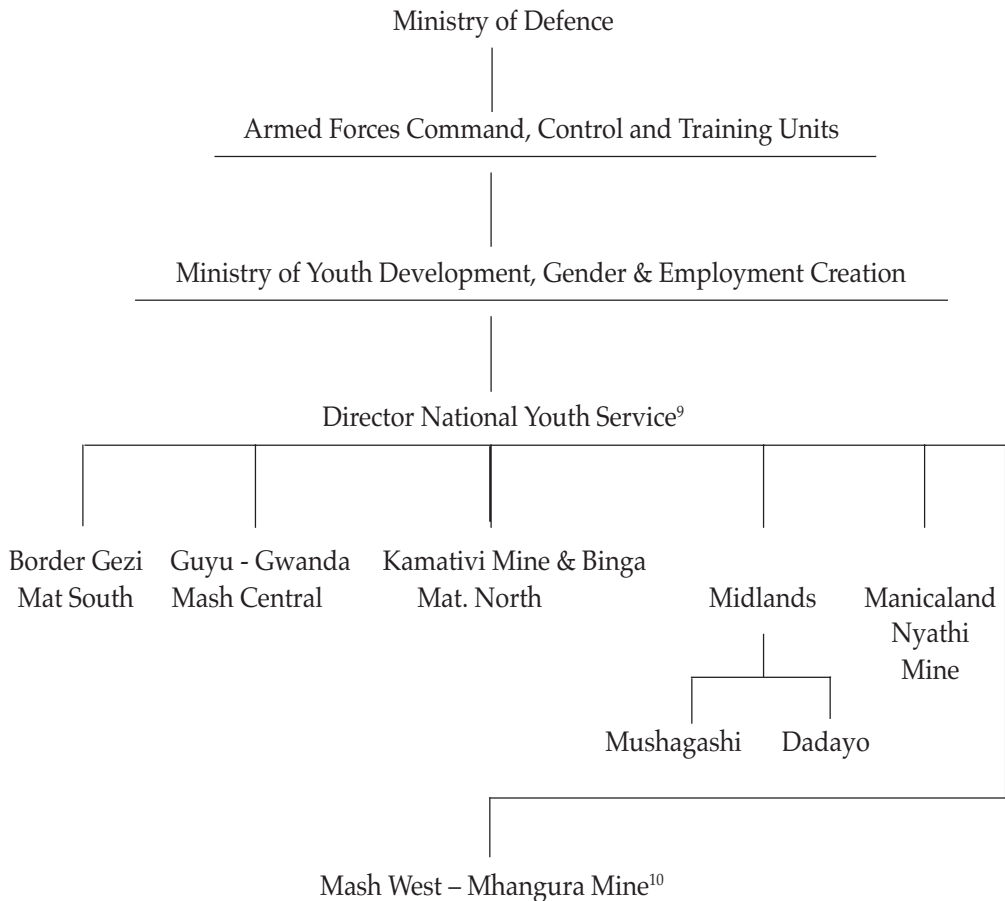
As an incentive, the scheme is compulsory for those wishing to enter government controlled tertiary institutions (universities, technical and vocational training colleges and teacher training) as well as employment within the security and defence establishment.

⁸ Among the officials were the current Minister of Information, Dr Tichaona Jokonya; James Mutero; and Thompson K Tsodzo.

IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

In August 2001 the NYS programme was launched, with just over 1 000 recruits, at the Mount Darwin Border Gezi Camp, a former 2 Brigade military camp. By December 2002 an estimated 9 000 recruits, or 50 per cent of the original target, were in training, distributed among six main camps, with smaller numbers scattered in district level centres.

The organisational structure of the National Youth Service is outlined below:



⁹ Initially, retired brigadier Boniface Hurungudo held the post, with an office in the ruling party headquarters in the capital, Harare.

¹⁰ Presentation by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Service, Dr Thompson Tsodzo, to the 3rd Executive Course in Defence Management held at the University of Zimbabwe, 7-11 May 2001.

The location of elements of the graduates has also drawn protest and intrigue and has clearly compromised the national character that must be the hallmark of the project (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, pp 76-81). Outside of the major training areas cited, operational deployment has been with urban councils, especially in the capital, Harare, where government has suspended popularly elected and dominant opposition officials. Many graduates have been deployed in townships, in commercial growth points, in ZANU-PF offices, in war veterans offices, near police stations, church schools and even at the residences of ruling-party officials (*Eastern Star* 6 May 2001).

Impact of the Deployment of the NYS Graduates

The electoral process consists of several phases: delimitation, voter registration and education, campaigning, access to potential voters by contending political aspirants, polling, vote counting, the announcement of results and the acceptance of the wishes of the electorate, especially by the losing parties. All these facets constitute the mechanism through which power is retained or transferred from interest group to interest group in a democracy. In Zimbabwe the military has either been legislated or simply mandated by the executive to participate in all these facets and the NYS has featured prominently in the execution of tasks that are normally carried out at grassroots level.

The establishment of the NYS by met by howls of protest from the political opposition. Opposition parties and human rights organisations reported attacks by the militia on striking workers and on opposition strongholds such as those in the cities during and after the now disputed presidential election of March 2002, which drew statements of solidarity and protest from outsiders, such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Officials appeared in public media calling for the disbandment of the NYS in Zimbabwe. There was a similar response to the local government elections in August of the same year. Some of the evidence relating to human rights repression is presently being considered by the African Union Human Rights Commission, whose preliminary response was to upbraid the country's ombudsman for ignoring violations carried out by the NYS graduates.¹¹ In the continuing deteriorating situation in the country, the state has found new roles for the NYS.

The electoral process in Zimbabwe from 2001 to date has been severely influenced in a particular direction – that of the ruling party – through the participation and presence of the NYS. This trend is also evident in other sectors that manifest the socio-economic and political crisis. For instance, as the staple, maize, became unavailable, legislation was passed limiting the movement of grain while authorising the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) to be the sole handler and distribution agency (SADOCC 2001; Amnesty International Report 5 April 2002).

11 A final discussion is still to take place at the African Union on this aspect and, as researchers, we await confirmation of the evidence gathered.

In order to enforce this new piece of legislation, government has deployed the NYS on all major routes and at GMB silos across the country. Any maize transported without GMB authority is impounded and forfeited to government.

Public response to the legislation and enforcement measures has been bewilderment and the moves have affected the hitherto placid relationships between the organs of the state and society. The maize shortage is occurring in a country that has traditionally been a breadbasket of the region and its people have had no experience of food shortages and have no survival mechanism to deal with them. The discovery that they are unable to shift supplies from one part of the country to the other has left the older generation confused, frustrated and angry. The same is true of large sections of the population now reduced to queuing for food handouts.

The NYS's newfound roles also include enforcing many laws relating to shortages of basic commodities such as cooking oil, fuels and foreign exchange and to perceived political gatherings and strikes or work stoppages. In rural areas teachers were seen as the vanguard of the political opposition and during the elections of March 2002 and the parliamentary poll of March 2005 they 'were temporarily relieved of their duties' by graduates of the NYS. The move appeared to be condoned by the state as no effort was made to reverse the development. Examinations were supervised and invigilated by the graduates, with serious implications for the integrity of the country's educational system in the future.

During the 2005 elections the NYS became more brazen in its treatment of the political opposition. On 3 August this year the MDC Member of Parliament for Hwange, Edward Mkhosi, was detained and beaten for 27 hours and was eventually rescued by the police, who took no action against the NYS. Clearly, government is condoning militia violence that serves a political purpose. This is the context of the launch and continued enforcement of Operation Murambatsvina.

CONCLUSION: 'WE HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE'

The current deployment of the NYS raises serious questions about the integrity and acceptability of the force as a national institution in the future and its relationship to elections since 2000. The NYS as presently constructed has been fed a diet of selective and subjective history as defined by the ruling party (Ranger 2004). The outcome of this process is an organisation that carries out without question functions mandated by the ruling party. Such a development fails to pass the test of the safeguards considered essential to the establishment of a truly national national youth service.

In so far as the NYS has been mandated to 'police' (in other words, prevent) 'illegal pavement vendors and former shack dwellers' from frequenting the urban areas, this paper concludes that this is a futile task, bound to fail and fritter away the Z\$6-billion allocated to the NYS. However, it is only when we place the role of the NYS as a political wedge against the urban electorate that we begin to understand the proletariat role that they are playing on behalf of the waning fortunes of the

ruling party. The struggle at hand is basically a socio-economic and political one that has placed the rural against the urban communities, with the state and ruling party surviving on the rural vote. To try to use strong-arm methods to address this consistent pattern, established since 2000, is to miss the point. A single example will demonstrate how futile the exercise is: only one dimension has not changed and that is the presence of the 300 NYS and the allocation of Z\$6-billion. First, the state was forced to acquiesce to IMF pressure to reduce the Z\$ 3-trillion to Z\$1-trillion, 50 per cent of which was to be secured from the market. This will result in major changes in the delivery expectations of the 10 000 units and has serious implications for the coping and survival strategies of the poor victims.

Already preliminary evidence of the failure to achieve the spectacular goals of Operation Garikai/Hlalani Khuhle suggests that the role of the NYS in the process has not been fully stated by the regime.

At the time of writing, the target cited in June appears to have been overly ambitious. Gwanda mayor Thandeko Mnkandla has given the reasons for failure to meet the original target as:

- pressure by the international community for government to live within its means, which forced 'Minister of Finance, Herbert Murerwa, to cut government's earlier commitment of 3 trillion to only 1 trillion. Half of this amount is to be raised through the more expensive financial market instruments';
- pressure was added by the absence of sufficient fuel to facilitate the construction projects, resulting in a significant increase in costs. Yet another significant increase was witnessed during the second week of September (*IRIN* September 2005).

Available evidence shows that fewer than 500 of the promised 15 000 housing units country wide had been constructed.¹² Against this background, the Acting Minister of Information, Chenhamo Chimutengwende, announced in the second week of September that there was a need to radically adjust the 60-day deadline by 'extending this to the end of the year'.

Furthermore, yet another potentially divisive civil-military relations nuance had emerged in the allocation of the new serviced plots and housing units. Preference in the allocation appears to have been given to police, army and prison service personnel who are also being provided with loans for the high deposits and proof of regular income required by the new criteria. In the process, the former urban squatters have been edged out. In a new twist in the reconstruction

12 Of the 200 units that should have been completed in Gwanda by 30 August, not a single structure was available, resulting in Minister of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, Ignatius Chombo, and Brigadier Nyikayaramba 'threatening to unleash soldiers on civil servants unable to reach the targets'. See 'Chombo threatens military action' *The Standard*, 12 September 2005.

programme of Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle, underperforming civil servants working on the construction projects have now been 'threatened with unspecified action from the soldiers' (*The Standard*, 12 September 2005). Again, this is a 'new coercive role' that has been added to the existing tasks of the armed forces. At the same meeting, a military brigadier responsible for supervising the reconstruction also accused civil servants of either being 'derelict of their duties or representing British and American lackeys' (*The Standard*, 12 September 2005).

The extension of the programme to the end of the year may have been the result of several developments. The first is that employing strong-arm tactics cast within military time lines to address basically socio-economic issues that border on political differences does not necessarily work. Anecdotal evidence from the streets suggests that the dispersed communities have not all relocated to the rural areas and are already back in the urban areas and playing hide-and-seek with the authorities. The second reason is that it may well mean the military is forced not only to extend but to expand the responsibilities of the NYS against the background of the country's alarming and accelerating economic melt-down. Until there is widespread economic revival in the short to medium term, the conditions that led to the squatters emerging in the urban areas will continue.

In these circumstances, the NYS has been selected for only one reason – its ability to mete out violence without retribution. When victims report human rights violations to the police no action is taken. Hence, the state is relying on the NYS to undertake certain functions to which no legal responsibility can be attributed. While in 1990 the excesses of elements of the armed forces forced the president to pass Clemency Order No 1 (Kagoro 2004, p 4) it is our conviction that if the NYS is not withdrawn, the country will retrace the steps it took in the mid-1980s.

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