

THE POLITICS OF ENTITLEMENT AND STATE FAILURE IN ZIMBABWE

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In 2008, the meltdown of the post colonial state of Zimbabwe climaxed in violence-ridden presidential elections. The egregious extent of the violence instigated an unprecedented departure from the African diplomatic practice of speaking no evil of fellow leaders, with one or two countries even refusing to recognize Mugabe's presidency. Although the repressive nature of the government earned it international condemnation, for at least twenty years after independence Mugabe received significant electoral endorsement and little public protest. Even when forces massacred segments of the population and violently evicted the poor from the cities, no civil society uprising emerged. This raises the question why the population acquiesced in the rulership of an inept and corrupt government. Utilizing theoretical concepts from Gramsci and Foucault, this paper argues that a hegemonic interplay of consensual and forceful power, based on an ethos of liberation entitlement that was accepted by the public in part due to colonial resentment, enabled ZANU PF to maintain a monopoly on political office under the façade of democratic governance.

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, a giant billboard went up in the South African border town of Musina, proclaiming: "We know why you're in South Africa—Life in Zimbabwe is murder these days."¹ "Murder" was more than a metaphorical expression in the circumstances. A political and economic crisis was unfolding in the country, and with it came egregious physical violence that was meted out on political opponents of the government. To ensure that he would retain power, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) president, Robert Mugabe, unleashed on the electorate a level of violence and intimidation so intense that the opposition threw in the towel and withdrew

PEACE RESEARCH

The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies

Volume 40, Number 1 (2008): 77-101

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