

The 1987 Zimbabwe National Unity Accord and its Aftermath: a Case of Peace Without Reconciliation?

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Bad governance characterized by corruption, nepotism, incapacity to negotiate differences and lack of tolerance to share political space by the ruling elite has marred post-colonial Africa's nation building processes. Zimbabwe's civil war of 1982 to 1987 was a by-product of these negative factors. The war pitted the ZANU (PF) government against (PF) ZAPU, its ally during the war of liberation. Allegations of dissident atrocities in Matebeleland and Midlands provinces and the discovery of arms on (PF) ZAPU properties resulted in its the expulsion from the national unity government. In solidarity with their colleagues and leaders and due to persecution, many former ZAPU ex-liberation fighters who had been incorporated into the national army at independence left and started fighting against the state. The ensuing war had regional and ethnic dimensions. The government was Shona dominated and derived much of its support from this ethnic community. On the other (PF) ZAPU was Ndebele dominated and was strong in the Matebeleland and Midlands provinces. Because of this, some perceived the war a genocidal orgy. The government's North Korean trained soldiers, known as the Fifth Brigade, used scorched earth measures; civilians were raped, maimed, tortured, and killed. The violence ended after a series of secret meetings, between warring parties' officials, which culminated in the December 22 1987 National Unity Accord and the granting of a general amnesty to dissidents. The peace making process was elitist ordinary people were not consulted and the dispensation that obtained alter did not address their concerns. In spite of the apparent excesses no one was tried for war crimes, there was no state apology and compensation for the victims. This indifference engendered hatred for ZANU (PF) in Matebeleland and accounts for the massive support that the opposition Movement for Democratic Change currently commands in that area. This paper attempts to dissect, critique, and analyze post-colonial states' capacity to tolerate political plurality and to harness diversity for development. The paper draws parallels between the Zimbabwean case and the post-accord scenario of South Africa, which was based on seeking forgiveness, unity, and development through acknowledgement of the injustices of the past.