Chapter 9
Zimbabwe's National Peace and Reconciliation Commission and Civil Society: Partners in Peacebuilding?

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Abstract The chapter examines whether civil society has forged partnerships, formal and informal, with the NPRC to build peace in Zimbabwe. Using Spurk's functional model, the findings of the study evinces that civil society mostly carries out parallel activities suggesting a weak partnership with the NPRC. This weakness arises from two factors framing civil society activity: confrontation; and the loss of empirical independence by aligning with opposition politics. Nonetheless, when performing the functions of protection and monitoring, independently or with the symbolic involvement of the NPRC, civil society has tended to be effective compared to engaging in facilitation, socialisation and community building.

Keywords Civil Society · National Peace and Reconciliation Commission · Peacebuilding · Partners · Zimbabwe

9.1 Introduction

Africa has been characterised by a significantly robust civil society enabled by an expanding political space, improved education and a discourse promoting democratic activism. Correspondingly, the growth of civil society organisations has been hinged on questions of democracy, human rights and the particular need for peace and reconciliation against the background of episodes of social and political schisms. This research comes against a background of democratic enthusiasm that has advanced the idea that organisations outside state institutions have a role to play in peacebuilding (Orjuela 2003; Pouligny 2005; Barnes 2009; Paffenholz 2009a, b; Spurk 2009). The emergence of non-traditional, diverse and complicated conflicts has been most notable in the post-Cold War era. This has also witnessed the inclusion of non-traditional players in peacebuilding. Thus the involvement of CSOs in peace processes has been most visible since the demise of the Cold War. To this end, Daley (2006, p. 304) notes that "Making peace is now pursued by a veritable industry of international, regional, state and non-state actors." The incessant calls for broad-based peace processes prevalent in the post-Cold war era have strong foundations

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in the record of weak performance by states in peacebuilding. The consequence of this has been the agitation for the active involvement of the CSOs not to replace but to complement the seemingly failing traditional institutions of peacebuilding. This is premised on the presupposition that CSOs are not only the reliable merchants of democracy but also of peace.

In Zimbabwe, civil society has demonstrated its value in pushing for democracy and respect for human rights. Nonetheless, the vibrancy and innovativeness exuded has gone largely unnoticed in the domain of peacebuilding, mainly because the roles of CSOs in peacebuilding have attracted minimal scholarly interest among researchers compared to their role in democracy. To that extent, Paffenholz (2009b, p. 5) observation is handy. He argues that "Although there has been a massive rise in peacebuilding initiatives aimed at strengthening civil society, these initiatives have not been accompanied by a systematic research agenda. As a result, we have known little about the role of civil society in peacebuilding." The argument becomes more accurate with respect to a functional partnership between the civil society and NPRC which has almost escaped scholarly attention with a few exceptions (for example Zambara 2018). To address this knowledge gap, this research analyses whether there is any partnership between the civil society and the NPRC and if such a partnership exists, to what extent is it encouraging complementarity than competition in peacebuilding? Several attempts to promote peace, healing and reconciliation have not been successful resulting in the establishment of the NPRC in the 2013 constitution to undertake the constitutional responsibility of transforming the country from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. With the operationalisation of the Commission in 2018, and the subsequent adoption of a five-year strategic plan (2018–2023), it is appropriate to ascertain the extent to which civil society is supporting the NPRC mandate. The study uses the framework developed by Spurk (2009) based on a functionalist approach to civil society peacebuilding, utilising the seven potential functions of civil society in peacebuilding. Their functions are then assessed on the basis of their execution with or without the involvement of the NPRC.

The first section provides the conceptual foundation of the chapter in which the concepts of civil society and peacebuilding are clarified. An attempt to explain the vital link of civil society to peacebuilding is also made in the section. The next section lays the historical involvement of civil society in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe in response to episodes of direct and structural violence. The subsequent section employs Spurk's functional model to examine the specific roles of civil society in peacebuilding. Simultaneously, the linkages and partnerships with the NPRC are also ascertained. The final section provides the concluding remarks.

9.2 Conceptualising Civil Society and Peacebuilding

The reinvigorated interest in democratic processes and practice is believed to have propelled the concept of civil society into prominence. The concept is, however, hardly new as it can be traced as far back as the political thoughts of both liberal

and Marxist scholars such as Locke, de Tocqueville and Hegel (Bratton 1994; Hyden et al. 2003). Despite this traceable long history of existence, the term civil society has attracted varied interpretations. Yet there is consensus among scholars that certain elements can be used as the basis for distinguishing civic organisations from state institutions (Moyo 1993; Bratton 1994; Sachikonye 1995; Hyden et al. 2003; Alexander 2006; Daley 2006). Taylor (1990 cited in Moyo 1993, p. 2) proffers a comprehensive description of the concept which he presents in three senses: First, a minimal sense in which there are free associations that can be empirically shown to be free from the control of the state. Second, a strong sense in which civil society (CS) has the ability to organise and coordinate their activities without the control of the government. Third, the strongest sense in which civil society can be identified as a conglomeration of associations that has the political and organisational capacity to both coordinate and influence public policy.

Basing on these conceptual constructs, a civil society organisation can therefore be identified as an association of individuals within a given society or state who seek to articulate, advance and influence public policy without the control of the state. Civil Society is thus the realm and range of voluntary organisations and associations which occupy the space between the family and the government, which ideally exists independent of the state (Harbeson et al. 1994), to articulate and pursue shared interests, purpose and values (Spurk 2009, p. 7). The CSOs are distinct from political parties in that they have no immediate aim to gain political office or to exercise political power. Inherent in this characterisation is the conjecture that the state and CSOs exist in separate environments and therefore serve different political purposes. According to Moyo (1993, p. 2) "assuming that all state apparatus are distinguishable from the wider societies in which they are to be bound, scholars have tended to view civil society as that part of society which is outside the state sphere. There is thus a presumed basic duality between the state and civil society as existing in separate social reality." Although the duality of the CSOs and the state is widely acknowledged and recognised, the supposed role of the two is complementary rather than contradictory as the characterisation seems to imply. To this end, "the state and civil society should be treated as intertwining parts of the same social reality...the dichotomy between the state and civil society is based on a false dualism which negates the fact that civil society means the same thing as a political community" (Moyo 1993, p. 2). This is important to emphasise amid an intense scholarly campaign for the expanded role of civil society to cover the non-traditional ground that includes peacebuilding. Civil society organisations straddle the ethnic, religious, professional, labour, gender, human rights, political, and student groups excluding political parties, businesses and the media (Molutsi 2000).

The activity that is known as peacebuilding is not new. Its evolution has been explained in existing works (e.g. Galtung 1976 cited in Spurk 2009; Ncube 2014; Ryan 2015). However, the concept entered the mainstream discourse of peace in 1992 when it appeared in the UN document *An Agenda for Peace*. In 1994, the application of the concept was extended to development. The UN *An Agenda for Development* published in 1994 underscored that peacebuilding offers a chance to establish new institutions – social, political and judicial, that can give impetus to development.

Since then, the notion of peacebuilding has increased in importance, appearing and dominating both literature and policy on development, security, peace and conflict. Peacebuilding is essentially the process of achieving peace. Peacebuilding is defined by the Alliance for Peacebuilding (2012) as:

> a set of long-term endeavours undertaken continuously through multiple stages of conflict… and involving collaboration at several levels of society… peacebuilding emphasises transformative social change that is accomplished both at the process-oriented level, and through tools such as negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation, and on the structural level, through the development of resilient institutions and social processes that allow conflict to be resolved through political, rather than violent means (p. 12).

The import of the definition is its emphasis on collaboration in the kaleidoscopic activities of peacebuilding. The collaboration acknowledges the involvement of both state and non-state actors like civil society to achieve the goals of social transformation through peacebuilding. Beyond, this collaboration, the goal is to build positive peace by aiming not only to proofing the society against direct violence but also structural violence hence a focus on both the processes and structures or institutions. The definition also emphasises that building peace should be a long-term activity involving political, structural and social interventions that must guard against conflict recurrence. Within this continuum of activities, we can locate the role of civil society.

Two dominant approaches characterise the debate on peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2009, p. 45). The first is liberal peacebuilding. It narrowly applies to the democratic rebuilding of states emerging from armed conflict. Its focus is eliminating direct violence or achieving negative peace. Liberal peacebuilding has also extended to democratic transitions in states under authoritarian rule. It is an approach based on the understanding that peacebuilding is based on values: the higher the level of democratisation, the higher the level of peace. The second is sustainable peacebuilding, attributed to the works of John Lederach, based on the establishment of structures, processes and training of people within a generational-long time. Its goal is positive peace, and goes beyond the elimination of direct violence but establishing frameworks and institutions that undercut the non-violent forms of social injustice. In these processes and actions, civil society facilitates the participation of citizens beyond the voting process, and it is viewed as a basic pillar of peacebuilding (Spurk 2010, p. 3). Hence there is a general agreement among scholars on the centrality of civil society in enhancing and consolidating democracy (Diamond et al. 1998; Nyang'oro 1999), and peacebuilding (Pfalzenhoff 2000; Ncube 2014 etc). Theoretically, the crucial role of civil society in transitions from destructive conflicts to peace has impelled analysts to consider civil society as the vital link in the sustainability of peacebuilding. With peacebuilding theory and practice, the involvement of civil society seems to be undisputed (Paffenholz 2009, p. 43): "…the practice of peacebuilding shows that civil society has a role to play and is an accepted player in peacebuilding initiatives."

This recognition of civil society in peacebuilding goes back to the 1990s (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006). This civil society-peacebuilding discourse is largely informed by the theorisation of the comparative advantages of civil society as agents of change in general, and the functions that civil society ought to play in peacebuilding as gleaned

from democratic theory, development discourse, peacebuilding theory and various in-the-field experiences (Ncube 2014). In essence, there are convincing arguments that recognise the centrality of civil society in peacebuilding (Orjuela 2003; Pouligny 2005; Barnes 2009). The civil society's role in peacebuilding is translated into practical peacebuilding outcomes through the performance of specific functions. Thus, Spurk (2009) proposes a functionalist approach and argues that the functions of civil society in the democratisation field should inform the civil society peacebuilding agenda. Spurk's model is a synthesis of the Merkel and Lauth, and Edward civil society role models combined to the functions contributed by development cooperation practice. The model has seven functions that expose the in-depth appreciation of civil society's role in political, social and development process. The seven functions are summarised hereunder:

- The protection of citizens' lives, freedoms and property from the actions of the government or its agents.
- Monitoring the activities and functions of the government and its institutions to ensure accountability. The subject of monitoring may be human rights, public spending, corruption and any other matter of public concern.
- Advocacy and communication involving the articulation of interests on behalf of the society and being able to create channels of communication to promote the interest of various groups onto the public agenda create awareness and encourage public debate.
- Socialisation through the formation and practice of democratic attitudes among citizens. They encourage the transmission of habits of tolerance, mutual trust and compromise in the context of the democratic process.
- Building communities through providing an arena where voluntary participation is possible. This may strengthen bonds among citizens of diverse social backgrounds and encourages cohesion while minimising social cleavages.
- Intermediation and facilitation in which the CSOs attempt to balance the power of the government by engaging it at various levels. Beyond that, it negotiates and communicates with the state on behalf of various interest groups.
- Service delivery in situations where the government falls short on providing necessities such as shelter, food etc.

The functional model is useful to develop in-depth scrutiny and appreciation of civil society in peacebuilding. In the case of this contribution, we examine how these functions are performed to complement the mandate of the NPRC.

The findings presented in the subsequent sections are based on qualitative research. 12 interviews were conducted in Zimbabwe from 13 October to 10 November 2020. Of these, six respondents were drawn from civil society organisations, three from the NPRC and two from academia. Field research was preceded by a review of literature and reports on civil society and peacebuilding in both Zimbabwe and beyond.

9.3 Historical Involvement of Civil Society in Peacebuilding in Zimbabwe

Direct and structural violence in Zimbabwe have deep roots in colonial politics. To manage the racial conflict between the blacks and whites, violence became a culture among the institutions created by the colonial government. This culture largely explains the nationalists' response to colonial rule through organise an armed struggle that enjoyed institutional backing from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 entrenched the principle of self-determination and majority rule in the Organisation's Charter. The pledge was to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa with success coming through negotiations in most countries except for most of the former Portuguese colonies and self-governing, white-ruled colonies like Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The solution to the problem came in the change of strategy from engagement to armed resistance. This was executed through the active support from the OAU's Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa which became the incubator for violent resistance to colonialism. The Committee became the bona fide conduit for arms and training for armed resistance against colonial authority. One prominent characteristic of the liberation movement was not just its confrontation of the white minority government through violence. Nonetheless, this response was rational given that colonial state-organised violence was comprehensive and brutal with the sole objective of containing nationalism by targeting the nationalist leaders, guerrillas and their collaborators and the civilians for their moral and material support to the liberation movements. Detentions, arbitrary arrests, severe floggings, curfews, killings, abductions, disappearances and torture (Sachikonye 2011), and killed including thousands murdered by the Rhodesian forces at Nyadzonia and Chimoio. These were decisive instruments in the colonial state's 'toolbox' of repression to intimidate, demoralise, humiliate and traumatise the Africans. The experiences of this period of deliberate violence and trauma have not been adequately addressed but what is certain is that it left a permanent scar on society. It is also not untrue that during the same period, civil society did not have a weak role in promoting respect for the rights of the people except a few church organisations affiliated with the Catholics.

At independence, the new government inherited the institutions that abused Africans with minimal structural changes. The reasons for continuity were largely to do with political stability and nation-building goals. The legal frameworks that sustained the colonial conquest were largely unaltered to be compatible with the new political order. The peacebuilding efforts were mainly around issues of inter-racial reconciliation which was premised on the 'forgive and forget' policy. The efforts were top-down but enjoyed support from the uncritical civil society (Ncube 2014). However, civil society concerns began to emerge after the first major armed conflicts after independence. These were recorded as early as 1980 in the assembly points dotted around the country that hosted guerrilla fighters from ZIPRA and ZANLA. Fierce fighting between the two forces first occurred at Entumbane in 1980 and spread to Gweru and Harare by 1981. The clashes were a preface to Operation *Gukurahundi*

that started around 1982 and stopped with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987. Both the government forces and the dissidents were involved in dehumanising acts. Unlike in the epoch of colonial rule, civil society footprints in peacebuilding were beginning to be visible during this conflict. The CCJP gathered information from victims and survivors of the clashes contained in the report *Breaking the Silence: Building True Peace.* The report has become the major reference point on the issue in the absence of official public documents. The organisation would return to prominence in the post-2000 period when the civil society ganged with the opposition to confront the government accusing it of human rights violations.

In the late 1980s, civil society groups such as student unions were at the forefront of steering the debate about political reforms with emphasis on issues that concern good governance, human rights in response to Mugabe's approbation of a legislated one-party state. The renewed activism among civil society, buoyed by events happening elsewhere in the world, forced the abandonment of the one-party state agenda. Indeed, the civil society contribution motivated the emergency of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) led by Edgar Tekere.

The second decade of independence is famed for introducing anxious moments among the people, more especially in economic terms. Mugabe's capitulation to capitalism demands to liberalise the economy forced his government to adopt the neo-liberal Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which had far-reaching socio-economic and political implications. Economic liberalisation was effected through a phased structural adjustment programme. The first phase was implemented from 1990 to 1995. The programme was aimed at opening the economy through monetary policy and trade liberalisation, withdrawal of subsidies among other austerity measures. The austerity measures created the basis for popular alienation and political discontent to which the government has been accused of a harsh response among the consumer associations and the hard-hit low-income groups (Sachikonye 2011). In the 1990s, CS engaged with obtaining economic challenges as they affected peace. In 1996, the Ecumenical Support Services (ESS) initiated a debate on the effects of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). It organised a multi-national three-day workshop in Harare which led to the writing of the *Zimbabwe Kairos Document: A call to prophetic action.* The document opened the discussion about a better future and a peaceful transformation of Zimbabwe into a prosperous and democratic country. In 1997, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches initiated the National Constitutional Assembly. Thus "The relationship between the church and state has been to a large degree collaborative although the church occasionally helps and capacitates civil society to confront the state on fundamental issues of basic human needs and human rights" (Maguwu 2006, 13). Later in the decade, civil society peacebuilding work revolved around democratisation and the constitutional reform agenda, through organisations such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) (Ncube 2014).

The formation of the Movement for Democratic Change out of the NCA in 1999 presented a cogent threat to Mugabe's power, especially in the aftermath of his party's defeat in the February 2000 constitutional referendum. Thereafter, radical

economic and political policy tenor ensued, marking the genesis of the political polarisation between the ruling party and the opposition that has subsisted to the time of writing this chapter. The polarisation has centred on the questions of elections, legitimacy and rights abuses. To that extent, the post-2000 peacebuilding agenda revolved around mitigating the power struggles between the ruling party and the opposition. Ncube (2014) observes that this period has seen the expansion of the civil society organisations involved in peacebuilding (examples include the Bulawayo Agenda, Habbakuk Trust, the Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT), the Zimbabwe Peace and Security Programme, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Forum, and the Zimbabwe Peace Project). The civil society organisations have held various transitional justice and peace activities that include the 2006 *The Zimbabwe We Want'* organised by the ecumenical churches – the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). The *'Save Zimbabwe Campaign'* held in 2007 was organised by the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance with civil society and the opposition. The initiatives continued throughout the period of the inclusive government up to the time when the NPRC was operationalised in 2018.

9.4 Civil Society Peacebuilding Roles in the Post-Mugabe Period

The most important constitutional development as regards peacebuilding after the departure of Mugabe from office has been the operationalisation of the NPRC in February 2018. The NPRC has a responsibility to foster peace and reconciliation in the country. The NPRC was established under the 2013 Constitution which leaves the Commission's legal status beyond rebuke. The 2013 Constitution enjoyed trilateral support from the three political parties that constituted the inclusive government that ruled between 2009 and 2013. Section 251 (1) of the constitution states: 'For a period of ten years after the effective date, there is a commission to be known as the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission...'. In terms of Section 252 of the Constitution, the NPRC has at least ten responsibilities all focusing on peacebuilding. The Commission has clear and written terms of reference and the Commissioners are guided on the mandate of peacebuilding and national reconciliation. Among the guiding principles of the five-year strategic plan is the NPRC's will to foster strategic partnerships with key stakeholders including civil society organisations and ensure coordination of partnerships in accordance with the NPRC Act. The NPRC has embarked on a number of activities since its creation operationalisation. In 2018, it commenced the outreach programmes. In 2019, it began consultations on Operation *Gukurahundi* as well as establishing provincial peace committees. Meanwhile, civil society has continued with its peace promotion functions.

If civil society failed to operate freely and unfettered because of government action during Mugabe's rule since he began to pursue the radical redistributive policies, the actions of Mnangagwa's government after November 2017 protected and guaranteed the expansion of the civil society space. Since Mnangagwa's inauguration speech on 24 November 2017, there have been legal reforms to amend laws that infringed on freedoms such as the Public Order and Security Act. Mugabe had adopted a hostile tenor toward the CSOs most of which were openly aligning or campaigning for the main opposition party, MDC. The adversarial relationship that developed between the civil society and government was based on the invisible line between the opposition and the former which the latter regarded as one and the same. The tensions were exacerbated by the perception that the CSO agenda is at the behest of the donor countries (Masunungure 2014). Mugabe's government was subsequently sensitive and intolerant to any criticism by CSOs leading to very difficult relations that survived on confrontation. But the situation in the second Republic changed in a positive trajectory with more freedoms and space for the CSOs (Mawarire/Kode 2017). How have the CSOs contributed to peacebuilding in the period? We examine the most prominent actions in the major sectors of the civil society guided by the functionalist model highlighted in the earlier section. These are protection, monitoring, facilitation, socialisation and community building.

9.4.1 Protection and Monitoring

Civil society organisations have advocated and mobilised people to participate in the process of democratic reform as the foundation for peace in the country. Civil society coordinated various policy dialogues and research projects to unpack the democratic and security sector reforms and underscored the importance of genuine national healing. Some organisations campaigned and lobbied for the fuller alignment of outstanding laws to the 2013 constitution. They also continued with the monitoring and documentation of human rights violations and abuses by the government only and not all political players. CSOs have produced reports on human rights issues, including the contentious issue of abductions. Groups such as the Human Rights NGO Forum, the Zimbabwe Peace Project that cogently appeared on the scene during the height of the redistributive policies and the subsequent radicalisation of public policy in the 2000s have maintained their advocacy on the respect for human rights. After the post-election violence that was triggered by the opposition protests against the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) alleged delay in releasing the results of the presidential vote, civil society advocacy was mostly on the response of the security forces to the violent protests where they addressed the civil and political rights of the protesters. Although a commission of inquiry was established to investigate the circumstances leading to the 1 August 2018 violence, civil society continued to expose violations.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights (NGO) Forum, a coalition of 22 organisations, produced reports accusing the security forces of harassing victims and their families,

and demanded the safety and protection of the targets (Chibhamu 2019). Equally, the CSOs have emphasised the same after the January 2019 violent fuel protests. Their activities are directly in contact with the people, raising awareness and encouraging them to participate in safeguarding human rights. The Zimbabwe Human Rights (NGO) Forum has also expanded the knowledge of citizens on the link between democratisation and peace through its briefings. The only challenge could be the limited reach to the audience because of the restrictions on physical activity imposed by COVID-19 (Interview). However, their communications to the state institutions like the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the NPRC are not direct but through communiqués and reports that are uploaded on their websites. The ZPP produces monthly reports on violations that are downloadable from its website but these are not formally communicated to the NPRC. Similarly, the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) has produced reports on what they have described as the militarisation of the state. In parallel, the Research and Knowledge Management Department of the NPRC conducts research on the same issues, namely nature, scope, extent and causes of the conflicts and the intervening strategies. The Department executes its functions by carrying out evidence-based research through data collection, storage, analysing, documentation and dissemination, and archiving. The department has been working with state universities and individual research experts but not CSOs.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network has performed the protection and monitoring function through early warning. It has been observing and monitoring electoral-related violations before, during and after elections the 2018 elections and the by-elections held since then. Civil society has also campaigned for the respect of human rights during the lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 in force since the end of March 2020 (Rivers/Ndlovu 2020). The ZPP has been monitoring human rights violations which it uses to produce early warning information in the form of monthly reports. Conflict prevention requires careful monitoring of indicators of rising tensions and taking measures to ease them (Haider 2014 cited in Rowderder 2015). Violence can be prevented if the right information is delivered to the right stakeholders, at the right time, in the right format, enabling the stakeholders to take the right actions. The ZPP does not formally engage the NPRC throughout the performance of the early warning function. The activities have been carried out outside the Thematic Committee on Prevention and Non-Recurrence, under the department of conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation, chaired by former Commissioner Patience Chiradza. The Committee has membership from political parties represented in the Parliament of Zimbabwe and civil society organisations. The weak civil society collaboration with the NPRC accounts for the failure of the CSOs systems to be transformed into a preventive response. Specific response plans have not been developed as part of the early warning efforts.

Further, civil society organisations have frequently met to evaluate the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission's (NPRC) work, the NPRC Act, prospects for transitional justice in the country and their role in the process. The NTJWG is made up of 46 Zimbabwean non-governmental organisations, including ZimRights, representing various transitional justice stakeholders, as an interface platform between

transitional justice stakeholders and official transitional justice processes. The NTJWG demanded the abandonment of the operational narrative of the new dispensation represented by the 'let bygones be bygones' pronunciation, arguing that impunity discourages efforts to build a just society. The NTJWG has challenged the government's call for the involvement of traditional leaders in the NPRC process. As the NPRC was scheduled to start consultations in Gwanda and Bindura on February 9, 2018, an urgent court application by the Human Rights NGO Forum on Februrary 6, 2017 interdicted the Commission from carrying out any work before the appointment of a substantive chairperson.

Confrontation has been the mode of executing the protection and monitoring function by most of the CSOs. The confrontation tone among CS has been accompanied by appeals for nonviolent and inclusive approaches. However, the impact of militancy has been to harden positions, engender intolerance and increase the risk of direct violence. Some CSOs have supported anti-government discourses of human rights. For instance, in early August 2020, in a pastoral letter signed by ZCBC president Archbishop Charles Ndlovu, Archbishop Alex Thomas (ZCBC deputy president), and bishops Paul Horan (ZCBC secretary and treasurer), Michael Bhasera (Masvingo), Albert Serrano (Hwange), Rudolf Nyandoro (Gokwe) and Raymond Mupandasekwa (Chinhoyi) the the Catholic Bishops Conference attacked the government for perpetrating abuses against opposition supporters through abductions and creating a crisis of similar to the *Gukurahundi* operation. This was met by an equally combative response from the government. The Catholic Bishops were likened to MDC activists hiding behind religious titles by the Minister of Information and Publicity, Monica Mutsvangwa. The Minister strongly rebuked the bishops: "Its (the letter) evil message reeks with all the vices that have perennially hobbled the progress of Africa. It trumpets petty tribal feuds and narrow regionalist agendas. That he (Archbishop Ndlovu) hopes to sow seeds of internecine strife as a prelude to civil war and national disintegration."

Civil society has exploited the media as a conduit for public discourse around issues of human rights and injustices. In an environment dominated by relative freedom and minimal fear, journalists have published stories on subjects that were previously considered as sensitive to the government. However, the media has remained divided along partisan lines, with private papers published by the Associated Newspapers Zimbabwe (*The Daily News* and *The Daily News on* Sunday) and the Alpha Media Holdings (*News Day, Independent and Standard*) clearly advancing the peace agenda from the perspective of the CS aligned to the opposition while the state-owned Zimpapers such as *The Herald, The Chronicle* and *The Sunday Mail* counteracts. The divisions in the media have been starkly open in the case of the post-election mechanisms such as the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) and the value of the NPRC itself. The private media has dismissed both initiatives as lacking efficacy, preferring institutions that can impose retributive justice on the ruling party politicians. The politicised civil society has invoked credibility questions. Their affiliation to political parties is inimical to their independent action and diminishes their influence on the peacebuilding work of the NPRC. CSOs have exploited the independent media to disseminate information and public campaigns as well as encourage

public debate on peace issues. Likewise, the NPRC utilises the state-controlled media to release information on peacebuilding activities.

9.4.2 Facilitation, Socialisation and Community Building

Politics by its nature is competitive and elections heighten the stakes. The acquisition of power is the sole reason why political parties exist. It is this process of acquisition of power that generates conflict and tensions that strain relations between the ruling party and the opposition groups. The resultant adversarial relationship imperils peace and peacebuilding. The electoral system in Zimbabwe is heavily coloured by a culture which approaches elections as a zero-sum competition. Civil society has attempted to facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the ruling party with a view to building consensus on the rules of the political game as well as on matters of national interest. Civil society however excluded from the multi-party liaison committee, an important platform to resolve inter-party disputes during the campaign period. This kind of strategy has however failed to help build confidence between the ruling party and the opposition during and after elections or between the government and the opposition or reduce needless confrontations.

The religious community in Zimbabwe remains one of the oldest and influential civil society groups. The religious leaders have spoken out against abuses and injustices in society. The church has done this through pastoral letters and sermons at churches and on social media. The priests and Bishops have invoked their moral authority in articulating their concerns on human rights and peacebuilding. The church has also continued to offer itself for conflict resolution and mediation as in the case of the offer made by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches to broker talks between the incumbent and Chamisa.

The socialisation and the rebuilding of communities' role by civil society aimed particularly to address grievances that emanated from the post-2018 election violence and alleged human rights abuses that occurred during the January 2019 protests and the arrests of organisers of the 31 July 2020 protests. Their activities also extended to building a culture of peace, to alter or shift conflict attitudes, to transform structural causes and consequences of conflict, to build social cohesion, and to mediate and facilitate state–society relations that have been strained since 2000. Civic education has been used by civil society to socialise the citizens on the culture of peace. A great deal of information and education of the public has taken place with an emphasis on the benefits of peace to both the nation and the individual. Civil society has been campaigning for a new culture associated with democratic values and practices. The intention is to encourage the emergence of political socialisation and the development of civic culture. This education has mostly undertaken through periodic workshops and campaigns in mainstream media, and targeted programs for demographic groups such as the youths and women. However, civic education has tended to reinforce the rural/urban imbalance in that CSO activities are largely concentrated in urban areas.

The desired impact of civic education on national ethos may not be realised if the majority of the people are excluded.

The CS also engaged in the capacity-building to build upon the momentum created by the community-mobilising activities by training targeted community leaders – such as traditional chiefs and the youth leadership in communities and in schools – in conflict analysis, mediation and resolution skills. The CSOs also carrying out peace education and dialogue projects aimed at information sharing, in particular with regard to human rights bills and statutes in the constitution and in various United Nations conventions. Through capacity-building programmes, civil society has come up with training programmes and structures to promote peacebuilding work at the community level; namely constituency peace monitors, peace committees and 'citizen journalists. This information is then collated and documented into reports for publicity and advocacy campaigns. The CS formulates peacebuilding mechanisms that serve as policy inputs into national peacebuilding processes, thus ensuring that peacebuilding activities at the grassroots level are linked to national peacebuilding approaches. Organisations such as the Heal Zimbabwe have also produced manuals on community-based dialogue as a means of preventing conflicts. CS through public and advocacy campaigns put out press releases, recommends and lobbies for appropriate responses at a national level by the NPRC.

With respect to community building, civil society has selected influential individuals such as politicians and community leaders for training as champions of peacebuilding. This has resulted in the establishment of peace committees made up of traditional leaders, church leaders and supporters of different political parties in different areas. Heal Zimbabwe Trust has established peace committees as well as promoted traditional methods of conflict resolution such as *Nhimbe* in provinces such as Masvingo. Meanwhile, on 4 July 2019, the NPRC completed the setting up of Provincial Peace Committees. Each established PPC is composed of between 25-30 members drawn from a wide range of stakeholders including government departments, civil society, traditional leaders and church organisations. One of the responsibilities is to promote peace within the province, create and or facilitate dialogue between groups and communities and exchange ideas on issues that may threaten peace and stability within the community (Marimbe 2019). Although civil society is represented in the committees, they continue to establish their own committees suggesting a lack of confidence in the NPRC structures. The motive behind the committees is to encourage tolerance, peaceful coexistence within local communities. As Chivasa (2017) notes, implementation and day-to-day operations of peace committees guarantee their sustainability even without external funding. He further avers that "one of the comparative advantages of informal peace committees is that all social groups in the community have equal chances of being represented, thus helping to meet the needs and aspirations of the community at large."

Although civil society is essentially seen as civil or good and inevitably contributing to peacebuilding in a positive way (Paffenholz 2009, p. 43), the performance of the roles reviewed above has not always promoted peace. Interviewees from both the NPRC and the civil society acknowledged the role of the CSOs in peacebuilding but questioned their effectiveness in sustainable peacebuilding. The

notion that all civil society organisations are inherently progressive in opposing the injustices perpetuated by governments and in advancing the protection and the monitoring function is inaccurate in the context of Zimbabwe as most of them have been negating or glossing over abuses committed by the opposition political actors but never miss the commissions of the ruling party. The contributions, activities and programmes of civil society are not entirely driven by the values of genuine local representation but reactions to external donor pressures. Except for a few programs, the lack of grassroots representation in civil society activity fails to empower citizens to act on their own other than through their benevolence. Most of the activities (except for a few outreach programmes) have been undertaken in workshops and conference rooms far removed from both the NPRC and the beneficiaries of their programmes. Similar challenges have been reported in developing countries where research has shown that CSOs tend to crowd out local efforts and actors, as donor-driven initiatives have limited the capacity to create domestic social capital and ownership for the peace process (Paffenholz 2009).

The context of Zimbabwe strongly influences the activities of civil society and constrains its overall effectiveness. Paffenholz (2009, p. 22) avers that "Civil society tends to be a mirror of society. Thus, it is not astonishing that civil society organisations are just as divided as society along power, hierarchy, ethnic or gender lines, and can show moderate, as well as radical, images and behaviours". The influence of donors aligned to the opposition political parties is a key contextual factor undermining a strong civil society partnership with the NPRC. The opposition and donors are influencing the peace activities using their political influence and material support to push for the civil society to confront the government institutions on behalf of the opposition. While civil society is part of the political community it should not be part of the partisan community (Masunungure 2014). Intra-party dynamics within the main opposition have been ignored in favour of the inter-party or government (Interview). Factionalism in the MDC Alliance and the associated violence has gone unnoticed. One wonders whether civil society peacebuilding is all about the government and ZANU-PF only.

Yet "Disregarding other cleavages and tensions in societies… has proven to be dangerous and may lead to future outbreaks of violence" (Paffenholz 2009, p. 7). The uncivil side of the CS was noted as some have encouraged undemocratic and intolerant attitudes as well as inciting people to revert to primary groupings such as kinship and tribal structures (Interview). On that basis, the observation that CSOs are diverse, including the bad and ugly (Nyong'oro 1999) is applicable to Zimbabwe. The implication is that officials with links to political actors are increasingly instrumentalising their organisations on the basis of ethnicity, regionalism and political affiliation, preaching hatred against others. The role of civil society organisations in sponsoring and advocating for protests the government has been particularly a cause for concern to peacebuilding. Civil society has become sources of affluent divisions in society. There are CSOs in peacebuilding that are alien to the values they purport to advance. Indeed, "Civil society is a powerful tool in peacebuilding, but some can also have a negative effect on peace" (Last 2008, 4). Clubs and associations outside have become vehicles for socialising young men and preparing them for violent action as in

the example of the Tajamuka/Sijikile which has incessantly gained fame for inciting rebellion against the government. Instead of encouraging peace, it has endangered it. This suggests that the CSOs' role in peacebuilding diminishes when it fails to respect the peacebuilding norms. In focusing on the role of CSOs in peacebuilding, it is critical that one examines organisations that best express the need to establish, practice and preserve peacebuilding values. The key to identifying CSOs as agents of peacebuilding is to identify those with agendas pushing for views and actions that encourage sustainable peace not those presenting themselves as anti-ZANU-PF movements.

9.5 Conclusion

Using Spurk's functional model, our research stresses that civil society has the potential to play an effective role in peacebuilding. The involvement of the CSOs in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe has not been decisive. Civil society mostly carries out parallel activities suggesting a weak partnership with the NPRC. This weakness arises from the political context in which most of the CSOs have lost their empirical independence by aligning themselves with opposition politics. Although executed independent, or with symbolic involvement of the NPRC, functions of protection and monitoring have been effective when executed. Conversely, efforts aimed at facilitation, socialisation and community building have not been as effective as polarisation, violence, intolerance and hate speech persists. This is largely because of the confrontation paradigms preferred by civil society which spoils both the peacebuilding goals and opportunities for partnership with the NPRC.

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