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Power and vulnerability: Re-reading Mark 6:14–29 in the light of political violence in Zimbabwe

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This article examined the story of the beheading of John the Baptist according to the Gospel of Mark (6:14–29) and drew lessons for the situation of politically motivated violence perpetrated by the youth in Zimbabwe. Politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe is a well-documented problem that negatively impacts on human rights. The article used the historical-critical method in its re-reading of the text in question and the 'youth bulge theory' as theoretical framework. Documentary analysis was employed to solicit data from various reports, documents and the Internet. Results showed that it was mostly the poor and unemployed youth who engaged in acts of politically motivated violence and did so on behalf of political parties and leaders. Based on these findings, it is argued that just as both Herod and Herodias abused their power by manipulating the daughter of Herodias in their plot to eliminate John the Baptist, so did powerful Zimbabwean politicians and leaders manipulate economically and socially vulnerable youth for their own political expediency.

Contribution: Drawing from Mark 6:14–29, this article presents an application of the New Testament text of Mark 6:14–29 to the politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe in order to promote responsible leadership for a peaceful and tolerant Zimbabwean society. It also contributes to the argument that New Testament texts are intrinsically political documents, which scholars should try to unpack.

Keywords: 'Mark 6:14–29'; historical criticism; Youth bulge; political violence; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

This article examined the story of the beheading of John the Baptist according to Mark 6:14–29 in the context of politically motivated violence perpetrated by youth in Zimbabwe. While the article only focuses on the violence perpetrated by youth, it acknowledges the fact that there are also other stakeholders such as the army. The problem of political violence in Zimbabwe and the extent to which it negatively impacts the human rights of Zimbabwean citizens is well-documented (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 2009; Maringira & Gukurume 2020; Mavengano & Moyo 2023; Mhike 2018; Muchacha 2016; Mwonzora & Helliker 2020; Research and Advocacy Unit 2018; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2008) among others. Zimbabwe is ranked as the most politically violent country in Southern Africa when it comes to harmonised elections (Research and Advocacy Unit 2018). This revelation was based on data collected by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project regarding political violence that occurred between 1998 and 2018 in five Southern African countries, which included Zimbabwe, Angola, South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique (Research and Advocacy Unit 2018). Politically motivated violence has mostly been experienced during the country's various elections and there is overwhelming evidence that most of the acts of violence are organised by particular political parties and others were state-sponsored (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 2009; Research and Advocacy Unit 2018, 2021). The culture of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe is believed to have been entrenched because of its history of violence that goes back to the liberation struggle and beyond, as precedence shown in the attainment of independence seems to reinforce the belief that violence yields the needed results (Research and Advocacy Unit 2018). A culture of political impunity has also helped to justify the use of political violence in this Southern African society as perpetrators of organised politically motivated violence were, allegedly, not arrested (Bradfield 2013; Chibango 2019). Meanwhile, Zimbabwe is also pursuing the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal Number 16, on promoting peace, justice and strong institutions (United Nations Zimbabwe 2023). Significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates in the country is also one of the targets earmarked for this goal

(United Nations Zimbabwe 2023). A step towards achieving this goal, therefore, entails finding ways of ending this culture of violence in Zimbabwe.

This article uses insights from Mark 6:14–29 to address the role of the youth in light of the powerful using their vulnerability for their selfish interests. The 'power' referred to in this article is mostly *exousia*, which refers to authority or right to occupy a ruling position as in 2 Corinthians 10:8–10; 13:10 (Barthn & Blanke 2000:308). *Exousia* is opposed to *charisma*, which refers to grace or extraordinary powers freely given by God (e.g., the power to cast out demons). The study of Mark 6:14–29 is also in view of the argument by Punt (2017) that New Testament texts are politically laden documents whose political narratives need careful interpretation. The article, therefore, is also an attempt to unpack the political messages in Mark 6:14–29. Much scholarly work of various disciplines inclusive of linguistics, history, social science, health, among others, has been produced in an attempt to solve the problem of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe (Alexander & McGregor 2013; Humbe, Chirongoma & Sande 2023; Mhike 2018; Mude 2014; Nyere 2016; Shemyakina 2021). Despite the existence of well-documented biblical and theological scholarly works conducted in the light of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe (Chitando & Togarasei 2010; Dube 2012; Gusha 2022; Madzokere & Machingura 2016; Matikiti 2012; Togarasei 2022), a culture of political violence, which is, sometimes state-sponsored, has continued to characterise the country. Togarasei (2022) used a gender perspective to reflect on Zimbabwe's state-sponsored political violence to submit that this violence is because of the fact that the state sees itself as a father disciplining his children in line with the biblical teaching that one should not 'spare the rod and spoil the child'. There have not been any works that focus on the dynamics of power and vulnerability in Mark 6:14–29 in the context of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe. This article is an attempt to address this gap in literature.

The 'youth bulge theory'

This article used insights of the 'youth bulge theory' to establish and consider the context of political violence in Zimbabwe as a possible result of youth unemployment. The 'youth bulge theory' refers to a situation whereby the rapid growth of a country's youth population, compared with the general population of the country, causes a significant impact on the country's economy and politics (Weber 2019). This impact is usually considered to be negative if large cohorts of youth in the given society are poor and unemployed (Weber 2019). The theory maintains that such youth have a potential to pose a threat to peace in the society as they may end up using violence to meet their perceived needs (Ganie 2020). Literature portrays the view that if the 'youth bulge' coincides with unemployment and poverty, it becomes a good recipe for civil unrest, violent crimes and political instability, among other consequences (Goldstone 2002; Goldstone, Marshall & Root 2014; McCall et al 2013; Muchemwa 2019; Urdal 2008). However, the 'youth bulge' is also considered in positive light if a country's economy is able to gainfully employ its growing number of youth while there is also a relative decline of its dependent population (Bloom, Canning & Sevilla 2003). Our interest in this article, is in the case in which youth bulges coincide with high unemployment and poverty, thereby posing a threat to social stability in the society.

The adoption of this theory as framework for this research was mainly motivated by the fact that 67.7% of the total population of 13 million Zimbabweans was under the age of 35 in 2013 (Human Development Report 2014). Muchemwa also notes that Zimbabwe has a youth bulge of people aged 18–35 (Muchemwa 2019), the age range, which the *Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013* defines as youth (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). The majority of these youth are poor and unemployed, with the unemployment rate estimated at 90% (ZimEye 2022). The 'youth bulge theory' also appeared appropriate for use in this study as it was mainly the young people who engaged in political violence (Mude 2014). Despite the youth bulge coinciding with violence, poverty and unemployment among the youth, Reeler (2015) argued that this 'bulge' did not burst because the Zimbabwean youth had access to emigration and remittances, factors that took off the pressure from the bulge. However, Reeler (2015) was also mindful of the fear factor as he stated that Zimbabwe's efficient repressive political machinery curbed dissent and kept the lid on the pressure cooker of the youth bulge. However, Reeler (2015) wondered what would happen if this fear would, one day, disappear. For Muchemwa (2019), however, the youth bulge posed a threat to political stability in Zimbabwe as long as the older men continued to occupy positions of power in all sectors of the society while sidelining the youth.

Methodology

This study was also informed by the historical-critical method. This method of studying the Bible takes into account the fact that the biblical texts were written way back in history and in a particular cultural context quite different from the contemporary one. This approach, therefore, attempts to understand the cultural context in which the biblical texts were written. Factors of when and where the text was written and the circumstances that prevailed during the writing of the concerned text are important for this methodology (Collins 2016:129). The insights of the inquiry are then applied to a contemporary context. In the case of this study, insights from an inquiry on Mark 6:14–29 were applied to the theme of politically motivated violence perpetrated by some youth in Zimbabwe.

The article adopted a qualitative research methodology in order to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Myburgh & Poggnepoel 2007) of the youth's involvement in politically motivated violence. Data for this article were collected through Documentary Analysis (Myburgh & Poggnepoel 2007), whereby data sources included various reports by different organisations, published journal articles, books and the Internet. These

were purposively sampled and the data-collection process ended when the information collected had reached a saturation point. The analysis of the collected data involved identification and arranging of emerging themes. The findings were then recontextualised based on the re-reading of Mark 6:14–29, thereby showing, as Myburgh and Poggnepoel (2007:65) put it, 'commonalities, differences and new contributions'.

Mark 6:14–29 in the context of power and vulnerability

The choice of re-reading Mark 6:16–29 was motivated by recent New Testament scholarship that focuses on the relationship between power and vulnerability in the story of the death of John the Baptist, which features characters of Herodias, Salome, her daughter, Herod Antipas and John the Baptist (Girard 1984; Knapp 1996; Betsworth 2010; Knight 2017; Lyons-Pardue 2020). This story also found in Matthew 14:1–12. Luke (9:7–9) only narrates the response of Herod the tetrarch to the rumour that Jesus could have been John the Baptist resurrected. Herod had wondered if Jesus could have been John the Baptist whom he had beheaded. The death of John is also mentioned in *Antiquitates Judaica* (V, 2), the Jewish historical writings of Flavius Josephus (37–after 100). Although none of the evangelists mentioned the daughter of Herodias by name, it was Josephus who referred to her as Salome and that her father was Herod Philip (Josephus 1981:383).

In this article, we pay special attention to biblical scholars who relate this story to power and vulnerability. Lyons-Pardue (2020) who not only focused on the story of Herodias' daughter but also on two other daughters presented by Mark, namely Jairus' little daughter (Mk 5:21–43) and the woman with a haemorrhage (Mk 5:21–43), argued that Mark's use of diminutive terms such as 'little daughter', (θυγάτριον), 'daughter' (θυγάτηρ) and 'little girl' (κοράσιον) pointed to some level of vulnerability that these little girls had, especially in the presence of abusive power. In her analysis of power and vulnerability in the account of Herod Antipas, Herodias and her daughter in Mark 6:14–29, Lyons-Pardue (2020) argued that the κοράσιον (Herodias' daughter) was merely a pawn used by both Herod (who saw John as a threat to his power) and Herodias (who wanted vengeance for having been reprimanded) while she gained nothing. She was vulnerable in the face of powerful and selfish royal parents who never considered the protection and needs of their daughter/ but used her as a means to attain their selfish and vengeful desires (Lyons-Pardue 2020:60–62). In a related study, Knapp (1996) exposed how vulnerability in the form of lack of identity could lead to manipulation by the powerful. According to Knapp (1996), in the story by Mark, the daughter of Herodias is practically a non-person as she is simply presented as a dancer and an obedient daughter who accepted to be an agent of her mother's will and who could not realise that her parents were manipulating her. Her dancing skills were transformed into a weapon of Herodias, leading to the beheading of John the Baptist (Knapp 1996:192). For Girard (1984), the vulnerable could be negatively empowered and that was why the apparently passive and harmless little girl, Salome, was suddenly turned into an instrument of wickedness. Herodias had negatively empowered her daughter in such a way that she appeared confident and empowered to make evil demands (Girard 1984:314) – the immediate bringing of the head of John the Baptist to her on a silver platter, there and then (cf. Mk 6:25).

Youth and political violence in Zimbabwe

Three main themes appear from reports and various documents regarding youth and politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe: (1) Politically motivated violence as a means of retaining power (2) Young people and politically motivated violence; (3) Youth vulnerability and manipulation by political powers.

Politically motivated violence as means of retaining power

The majority of cases of politically motivated violence occurred in the periods before, during and after general elections in Zimbabwe and were targeted at civilians who were perceived to be supporters of the opposition political parties (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 2009; Research and Advocacy Unit 2018, 2021). While politically motivated violence in connection with elections intensified with the coming of a strong opposition in the early 2000s, the acts of violence experienced in the preparation to the presidential run-off election in 2008 have been regarded as the worst since the country attained its independence in 1980. The ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (thereafter ZANU-PF) organised and unleashed politically motivated violence against members of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (thereafter MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai, who contested against Robert Mugabe of ZANU-PF (Bradfield 2013; Mwonzora & Helliker 2000). There were many reports of politically motivated killings, torture and rape, allegedly by the youth militia of the ZANU-PF party, members of the Zimbabwe's national army and veterans of Zimbabwe's liberation war (IRIN News 2008). The Zimbabwe Human Rights Report Forum (2008:73) published statistics of reported politically motivated violence and intimidation between January 2008 and June 2008 and revealed that there were a total of 8558 such cases, among which were included murders (84), death threats (44), rape (6) cases, cases of torture (689), abduction or kidnapping (111), assault (1637), political intimidation (2290), among many other forms of violence. The number of cases escalated during the campaign for the presidential re-run in which Morgan Tsvangirai later pulled out, citing organised violence against his supporters (Bradfield 2013; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2008:75).

Youth and politically motivated violence

Evidence shows that many cases of politically motivated violence involved the military and youth as perpetrators, and especially the National Youth Service, also referred to as 'Green Bombers' (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe 2009; Maringira & Gukurume 2020; Mhike 2018; Mude 2014; Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2008).

About 63% of the cases of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe between 1998 and 2018 were committed by young people (Research and Advocacy Unit 2018). Since the 1980s, ZANU-PF has used the electoral strategy of the political mobilisation of unemployed youth, mostly males, and sometimes women, whom it would send to attack opposition supporters and their property (Bradfield 2013). Mhike (2018) argued that the National Youth Service, a state-run programme established in 2001, was a bit more than a ZANU-PF party agency for mobilising and channelling youthful political participation. For Mhike (2018), this group became 'a potent tool of violence and brutality which was used against the governing party's opponents', (2018:246). The National Youth Service were rarely equipped with any party policies when they were dispatched for campaign but were given money and alcohol that served as incentives for intimidating and torturing their perceived opponents and voters (Dhodho n.d.). There were also youth from the opposition party that were reported to have been involved in politically motivated violence, but usually in retaliation against violent acts by the ruling party (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2008). The involvement of young people in acts of politically motivated violence was also recently highlighted by the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development manager, John Maketo who bemoaned that youth 'are being used to perpetrate political violence in fighting for party chefs. Whenever there is political violence, youth are at the forefront', (ZimEye 2022).

While the focus is on youth involvement in politically motivated violence, the involvement of the military cannot be ignored as they executed state-sponsored violence, for instance, in the period before the Presidential run-off elections of 2008 (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 2008). A more recent example is when the military used live ammunition and other forms of violence to dissolve protests on the streets of Harare, resulting in six Zimbabweans dying of gunshots wounds, while one later died in hospital and several others were injured on 01 August 2018, soon after the harmonised general elections (Zimbabwe Human Rights Association 2020). No military detail has since been identified and held accountable for these shootings even after the recommendations of the Motlanthe Commission of Inquiry (Mavhinga 2021).

Youth vulnerability and manipulation by political powers

Whereas the youth were involved in politically motivated violence, at the same time, they were also victims of a political system that manipulated their poverty and insecurity in life (Bradfield 2013; Mhike 2018; Mwonzora & Helliker 2020).

Mhike (2018) argued that, while many works tended to focus on these youth as perpetrators of violence, they did not see them as victims of the state or ruling party and even opposition political parties that manipulated their economic vulnerability and inadequate life opportunities. The vulnerability of the political party militias involved in acts of violence was also observed by Bradfield (2013). In order to ensure that it remained in power, the ZANU-PF political machine, for instance, recruited and indoctrinated unemployed and disaffected young people into its youth wing and then mobilised them to intimidate and attack its political opponents (Bradfield 2013). Mwonzora and Helliker (2020) strongly believed that prior to the 2008 violent political campaign, the ZANU-PF youth militia went through a political socialisation that underlined the efficacy of violence. However, Mwonzora and Helliker (2020) also acknowledged the fact that the ZANU-PF political machine also manipulated vulnerable youth during the 2008 Presidential run-off elections by promising them material rewards.

The issue of recruiting poor youth and then promise them rewards and opportunities to rise up the economic ladder was also observed by Maringira and Gukurume (2020) whose work focused on how Mugabe and ZANU-PF ensured that they remained in power by mobilising political violence in return for political benefits. They argued that as appeasement for engaging in acts of political violence, Mugabe and his party allocated residential stands to these youth, although some of these stands proved to be of dubious nature, as they would eventually be considered as illegal by the local authorities (Maringira & Gukurume 2020). Furthermore, ZANU-PF also patronised youth by subjecting them to fear, such that some would only participate in order to avoid being labelled as traitors of 'the revolution' (Maringira & Gukurume 2020; Mwonzora & Helliker 2000). Some ZANU-PF youth who committed crimes during the elections became victims of political violence after elections as some were allegedly assaulted and others killed by youth members of the MDC party who claimed vengeance against the atrocities they had suffered (Zimbabwe Peace Project 2008). These observations confirm the worry expressed by the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development which complained that political parties still continued to use unemployed and economically disaffected young people as conduits of political violence. It is observed that because of the high unemployment rate of over 90% among the youth, the youth would end up engaging in criminal activities and could, therefore, be easily lured to fight on behalf of political party bigwigs (Mangwaya 2022).

Re-reading Mark 6:14–29 in the context of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe before, during and after elections in Zimbabwe

Earlier on, we reviewed literature that focused on the relationship between power and vulnerability in Mark 6: 14–29. Guided by the 'youth bulge theory,' we interpreted the dynamics of power and vulnerability in this biblical story

in the context of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe. In particular, parallels and differences were drawn between the biblical characters and those found in the Zimbabwean political story. We also established similarities between the corridors of power, namely, Herod and Herodias, and political bigwigs and parties in Zimbabwe. In our comparison of the vulnerable κοράσιον (little girl – that is, Herodias' daughter) with the Zimbabwean youth, we observed that Zimbabwe's power-hungry politicians have often abused their power by manipulating poor youth to engage in politically motivated violence.

Power retention and violence: The corridors of power in Mark 6:14–29 and Zimbabwe compared

There are similarities between the characters of Herod Antipas and Herodias as they are depicted in Mark's story and characters of political leaders, and especially the ruling party leaders that presided over state-sponsored violence during elections in Zimbabwe. Herod threw John the Baptist into prison because he believed him to be a threat to his power. By so doing, he demonstrated that he would not tolerate anyone standing in his way when it came to power retention. In the same way, the ruling party leadership, as demonstrated by the discussion above, were determined to eliminate anything that would stop them from retaining their power (Research and Advocacy Unit Trust 2021). The same too can be applied to opposition political leaders who influenced their youthful members to engage in acts of politically motivated violence (Mavengano & Moyo 2023). While the ruling party needed elections to endorse their power, for instance, in the 2008 Presidential run-off elections, resorting to politically motivated violence, showed that it was afraid of losing that power. By manipulating the vulnerable youth to unleash violence against perceived members of the opposition political party, the power-hungry Zimbabwean political leaders resembled Herod Antipas in their characters. Furthermore, because of her careful planning, skimming and execution of plan, including the instruction she gave to her daughter (Girard 1984), Herodias is comparable, for example, to the ZANU-PF political machine whose youth militia camps were used as indoctrination schools that justified the use of political violence against perceived opposition members in order to maintain and protect their status-quo in Zimbabwean politics. We liken Zimbabwean political leaders that manipulate the youth to engage in acts of politically motivated violence to Herodias, who ensured that through death, John the Baptist was permanently silenced, while her allegedly illegal marriage remained undisturbed. In summation, it would seem that both Herod Antipas, Herodias and the manipulative political leaders in Zimbabwe share several common characteristics inclusive of the following: strong determination to hang on to power; maintaining the status-quo; silencing dissenting voices; manipulating the situation so that they get what they want; use of violent tactics to get what they want (Lyons-Pardue 2020; Research and Advocacy Unit 2018).

Κοράσιον: Vulnerable youth as Zimbabwean version of the dancing daughter

As discussed earlier on, Lyons-Pardue (2020) held that the κοράσιον (Herodias' daughter) was merely a pawn used in various ways by both Herod and Herodias, while she gained nothing out of it (Mk 6:14–29). It is from this perspective that Lyons-Pardue (2020) maintained that the κοράσιον (the little girl) was vulnerable amidst the powerful. Without condoning their role as perpetrators of violence, we viewed the youth involved in politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe as κοράσιον, owing to the features of vulnerability that characterised them, namely, poverty, unemployment and fear. Because of their vulnerable situation, they became subject to manipulation by those in the corridors of power. They became the Zimbabwean version of κοράσιον, likened to the daughter of Herodias. The fact the there was some level of manipulation (Maringira & Gukurume 2020) does not mean that these youth are faultless – they still remain responsible for their acts of violence.

A lack of identity, a feature that the daughter of Herodias had, is also a form of vulnerability which may lead to manipulation by those in power (Knapp 1996). Because she had no identity of her own, the daughter became a mirror image of her mother, her manipulator (Knapp 1996). In the same way, some of the youth manipulated by powerful politicians represented individuals who had not yet developed any personal convictions of their own. They lacked proper identity and purpose in life. When they were recruited by a political system that was determined to indoctrinate them, they easily gave in and became the mirror image of their manipulators. This explains well the effects of indoctrination that took place in National Youth Service camps in Zimbabwe: young people left youth training centres with a strong determination to unleash violence against their perceived military enemies. Like the 'nameless' daughter of Herodias, they had become the mirror image of their manipulators. As the little girl (daughter of Herodias) who returned from her mother full of confidence as she demanded the head of John the Baptist on a platter, there and then, so did the members of the National Youth Service emerge from their bases full of confidence to carry out violent activities against their perceived political party enemies. In this way, this became, as Girard (1984) theorised, a form of negative empowerment.

Unlike Herod who took responsibility for beheading John the Baptist as he mistook Jesus for John the Baptist whom he said had beheaded (Mk 6:16), Zimbabwean political leaders who encourage youth to commit acts of politically motivated violence do not, apparently, accept their involvement. When the law eventually takes its course, it is the person who committed the crime who shall be the one held responsible. That is why President Emerson Mnangagwa stated that the soldiers who shot and killed protesting civilians would be identified and held accountable, even though none has been held accountable to date (Mavhinga 2021). Despite their engagement in political violence, there is still no evidence to show that the youth have improved their well-being as unemployment and poverty levels

showed no significant improvement. Instead, the majority of youth have remained poor and unemployed (ZimEye 2022). Many returned to their original setting only to become social misfits and target of violence by avenging MDC militia (Zimbabwe Peace Project 2008). This vilification can also be compared with the daughter of Herodias, whom Christians vilified throughout the centuries for having caused the death of their hero, John the Baptist (Knapp 1996).

The youth were also the Zimbabwean κοράσιον as their vulnerability is also characterised by fear of being labelled as traitors. Compliance became their only alternative if they were to avoid victimisation and stand a chance of shedding off their poverty (Maringira & Gukurume 2020). However, the narrative might change if this fear disappeared. Reeler (2015), who questioned why the youth bulge did not burst in Zimbabwe, considered fear as one of the reasons. He indicated that the youth knew the devastating consequences of protest participation against a system known for sponsoring violence, ZANU-PF, in particular. Reeler (2015) maintained, therefore, that Zimbabwe's 'youth bulge' would burst if this fear disappeared.

Summary of findings

This article has established that the majority of cases of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe is perpetrated by young people. This involvement of youth in politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe confirms the 'youth bulge theory' that the youth bulge poses a threat to political stability. The article has liked the youth who committed acts of politically motivated violence to the vulnerable κοράσιον (little girl – that is, Herodias' daughter,) because of their economic and social vulnerability characterised by poverty, unemployment and fear. It has also been established that like Herod and Herodias who abused their power by manipulating the little girl for their own selfish interests, selfish and power-hungry political leaders in Zimbabwe have also attempted to attain or retain power by manipulating the youth such that they engaged in politically motivated violence. However, unlike Herod who took responsibility for beheading John the Baptist (Mark 6:16), manipulative political leaders in Zimbabwe do not, apparently, accept their involvement in acts of politically motivated violence.

Conclusion

The re-reading of Mark 6:14–29 in the context of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe has given us the opportunity to reflect on the dynamics between power and vulnerability. This article has also shown that Mark 6:14–29 confirms the view of Punt (2017) that the New Testament texts are politically loaded documents whose political narratives need to be studied in their proper context. Mark contrasts the power that Herod and Herodias wielded with that of the 'nameless' daughter of Herodias, such that the reader sympathises with the daughter who is presented as vulnerable in the face of the royal power. Scholars also revealed that both Herod and Herodias abused their power by manipulating the vulnerable daughter in order

to fulfil their own selfish egos. This article has applied this interpretation to the context of Zimbabwe's politically motivated violence. Findings from documents show that this violence mainly occurred in periods of elections and had, therefore, to do with power struggles. Those with power roped in party militias to perpetrate politically motivated violence on their behalf. Notorious in this engagement were reported to be the ZANU-PF aligned members of the National Youth Service and state agents who tortured many members of the opposition party, and especially in 2008. We have also established that most of the party militias and members of the National Youth Service were manipulated by their parties because of their poverty, unemployment and fear. We have argued that similarities do exist between the story in Mark and that of Zimbabwe. While youth still remained responsible for the violent atrocities they committed, the commissioning powers were also considered as answerable for manipulating the vulnerable youth. However, when the youth finally conquer this fear in them, the inevitable will happen – Zimbabwean 'youth bulge will burst', to borrow the words of Reeler (2015).

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