

The Anatomy of the Zimbabwean Problem
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Introduction

It is indeed an honour for me to be standing here tonight addressing this fine audience who I know care deeply about the events happening in Zimbabwe. I however, do not have any kind words for you tonight. I know most analysis of the Zimbabwean situation centres on the regime and its leadership and what they are doing or should do. My presentation is targeted at the ordinary Zimbabwean citizen who I sincerely believe is the only person that really matters in this crisis. As they say sometimes you have to be unkind to be kind and the truth, while painful, shall set us free. I am here to say the truth as I see it. I have deliberately chosen to say the unsaid; that which goes unreported and has been largely ignored in the public discourse. Although I am here as a member of the **Zimbabwe Social Forum (Pachedu/Sozonke)** the views presented in this paper are not necessarily the views of the forum. The Forum, which started sometime this year, has members from all political persuasions and subscribes to the value of divergent views and tolerate diversity. One writer said that perceptions are like windows; the more we open the more we can see of the world. *'If you could look through my window and I could look through your window then we would both see what neither of us could have seen alone.'* This presentation is my attempt to share what I see from my looking glasses as the key to Zimbabwe's problems. I must mention that I am a Psychologist by training and that tends to influence my thought processes and the issues that I am raising. I am also leaving a lot of questions unanswered to facilitate discussion.

The Death of Outrage

Why has the pro-democracy movements not been able to capitalise on the so many reported failures by the ZANU (PF) government. Operation Murambatsvina, failed Land Reform Programme, the economy characterized by high inflation, high prices of basic food and commodities, unemployment, the list is endless. Some people say all the necessary conditions needed for combustion to happen exist in Zimbabwe. All that is needed is a spark. Why then has there been no spark despite numerous opportunities that if presented elsewhere in the world would have brought about a change of the ruling government. Why has there been no eruption in Zimbabwe? As **William J Bennett** coined it in one of his books **"The death of Outrage"** Why has there been no outrage in Zimbabwe by Zimbabweans on the current crisis. Most pressure for reform appears to be coming from external forces rather than internally. There has been calls for the international community to intervene and for President Thabo Mbeki to *'do something'* on the Zimbabwean crisis. Such efforts as we know have not yielded any results. If anything positions have hardened and the situation continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. But seriously, why have the people of Zimbabwe not revolted against the Mugabe regime? There is something special about one who has the ability to laugh at one's situation in spite of its gravity. That person has transcended the boundaries of what others call normal and refuses provocation. Remaining calm in the face of provocation takes a lot of character. Zimbabweans have that *'collective character'* that the world has termed the *'great Zimbabwean mystery'*. Zimbabweans use one word to describe the current situation without further expounding on it. Should you ask them, how are things in Zimbabwe, the response without fail is

“Zvakaoma”. Meaning, it is ‘tough’. It is an abnormal response for one not to be outraged in the face of extreme provocation. Lets explore why?

1. The Change Equation

All the necessary ingredients for combustion to happen exist in Zimbabwe. Wrong. The change equation tells us that change equals the degree of dissatisfaction with one’s current situation plus a compelling and attractive vision for the future. The assumption has been that if we increase the level of discomfort and suffering of the Zimbabwean people, change will inevitably come. It has not despite the fact that Zimbabweans were rated as the unhappiest lot in the world (survey in June, 2006). South Africa was rated as the fourth in the world in terms of people who are happy and proud of their nationality. While we as a nation are clearly dissatisfied with our current reality, specifically the economic situation, the forces for democratic change have failed to provide Zimbabweans with a **compelling and attractive vision of the future**. While people agree on the need for change, they are unsure of where the MDC is taking them. I want change yes, but change into what. In other words, there is a lack of an ideology that underpins the call for change. Such an ideology would give birth to a **compelling and attractive vision of the future** like we had during the war of Liberation. The end state is not clear. Is it simply about a change of government or more so, a change of rulers. I hear of a new Zimbabwe but my questions on a number of issues remain unanswered. For example, there has been a lack of clarity on the political position of the pro-democracy forces on key and emotive issues like the land reform programme. Discontent alone is not sufficient as a rallying point for change. While as an ordinary Zimbabwean, I am dissatisfied with my current reality, I am not convinced with the viability of the alternative options presented to me.

On the other hand, the ruling party ZANU (PF) had a potentially compelling and attractive vision of the future given our liberation history and the primary reason why we fought a war(s). Notice that I use the word potential, because it has not been realised. If you have a vision, and people buy into that vision, you do not have to beat them into subscribing to that vision. ZANU (PF) didn’t have to do that. They failed to package their vision of transforming Zimbabwe and did not sufficiently share it with the masses. The people of Zimbabwe have therefore questioned their motives for propelling the land question at this point in time. The poor and chaotic implementation of the Land Reform programme shrouded in corruption and greed by officers in high places has made it difficult for people to buy into the ZANU (PF) vision of the future. Land reform is now simply perceived as a personal enrichment programme, rather than an economic and social transformation intervention. So Zimbabweans are caught between a rock and a hard place. A ruling government that is brutal and is not delivering, and an opposition that has not made itself clear on many fronts.

Participation in politics

Participation is one of the key elements of a true democracy. While it is an acknowledged fact that those of us in the Diaspora have been disenfranchised by the Mugabe regime, there is a general disengagement by

Zimbabweans from actively participating in politics. We are usually resigned to being armchair critics. This disengagement is evidenced in the ways people express themselves in reference to the MDC and ZANU (PF) in the external. You hear people saying '*what the MDC should do is.....or ZANU (PF) should do A, B and C to get the economy back on track*'. These statements are telling. They show a clear distancing of oneself from these two major political parties. In such cases I have always asked, so who is the MDC or who is (ZANU PF). Are these just empty political vehicles travelling to nowhere and not carrying the hopes and aspirations of Zimbabweans? Or is this merely reflecting a divided society. Why have we become commentators and spectators of our own situation? Some of the reasons underlying our failure to participate include the following among others;

1. Unconscious conspiracy (Inside the mind of a Zimbabwean)

The lack of energy and inertia to fight the regime could partly be explained by what I will term, a latent support for the ZANU PF programmes and policies specifically with regards to the Land reform program and Mugabe's position on imperialism and neo-colonialism. The opposition has worked on the false assumption that no one supports ZANU PF and has largely informed the politics of protest by the MDC and other opposition forces. This assumption is both naïve for a group fighting for democracy. There is consensus in Zimbabwe on the need for Land Reform as a way of redressing the imbalances created by an unjust colonial system. The differences we have are in the strategy and approach to implementing Land Reform. This has largely made it difficult for Zimbabweans to fight against something that one cognitively agrees with but differs on the how to implement it. It is easier to fight against something that you do not agree with. Our disagreement is not on the '**what**' but the '**how**'. Given that there are many possible ways of skinning a cat, we may not necessary fight over it, but talk about it. Which is what Zimbabweans are doing. They talk. Remember in Zimbabwean terms, talking about a problem is in some way solving it. Many Zimbabweans therefore suffer from internal self-conflict with regards to the land issue rendering them sterile/inactive/dormant in politics. They will think twice before responding to a call for mass protest.

2. Conscious conspiracy

According to change experts, if you convince the '*haves*' the '*have-nots*' will follow. Change means loss of resources, a shift in power, loss of status and benefits. According to Michievelli in his book ***The Prince*** when you introduce a new order of things, you face resistance from those that stand to lose from the status quo and you must know that you have only a few lukewarm supporters of change who might benefit from the new order. There are a lot of people currently benefiting from the status quo. Many have become billionaires and live in opulence amid poverty in Zimbabwe. So why change something that you are benefiting from. They are working tirelessly and conspiring with the regime to make change impossible. They want the status quo to remain. That includes people in the Diaspora who are billionaires (*that is until Dr. Gono decided to drop some of the zeros*) and can afford to buy groceries for their parents on the Internet and change money on the black market.

3. *Democracy and governance amid poverty*

The rural constituency has largely been misunderstood and underestimated. Through the arrogance of the political elite, they have often been used during elections and abandoned. They have clearly expressed their displeasure at the failed promises by the current regime to deliver on many fronts. An attempt to show this displeasure was expressed in the many Parliamentary and Presidential elections since independence. But they learned quickly. They now perceive politicians as an interruption to their serene and daily living. Describe them as those who come from Harare (towns) once every five years asking for their votes, cause a lot of violence and disharmony in the village and disappear in their 4X4 vehicles never to be seen for another five years. So, through a series of elections they have learned that this process is not beneficial to them in any way as it does not change their lives. Not a single bit. They are poor when the politicians arrive and they remain poor when the politicians leave for another five years. The rural electorate have therefore decided to play game. *'Give the urbanites their votes and let them go back to Harare with minimal fuss. We will not see them for another five years'* why give meaning to a process that does not give meaning to your life. They have therefore opted to vote for peace.

History has shown that there is no relationship between tyranny and the vote for or against tyranny. It is an assumption proved wrong in the Zimbabwean elections. The fact that individuals can be intimidated into voting for somebody or a party they do not want is in itself a problem. Democracy does not therefore thrive in an environment of ignorance and poverty. This has been a strategy that has been successfully utilised by the ruling party. Voting is the power to decide. The act of giving somebody the power to decide their future assumes that one indeed has power within their hands to make their own decision. This assumption is a complete fallacy. That the one getting the power in their hands to determine his/her own future indeed has their own future in their hands. In a situation where poverty is rife and ignorance abounds, elections simply become a process whereby those who hold the power to resources abuse those who do not for their own benefit. The comments that I solicited from people on the ground including a MDC candidate who lost in the elections confirm that people did indeed go into the ballot box and voted for ZANU PF. Now if this is the case, then that is democracy in its true definition - *that the majority are right even if they are idiots*. Perhaps as the saying goes, people get the leadership that they deserve?

4. *Rethinking the Instruments of Democracy*

What is needed is the radical change to the instruments for operationalising democracy in developing economies. For the continued use of the ballot box under the present circumstances can only be described as sheer madness. Why continue to do the same thing when you know that that getting a so-called partial Electoral Commission to preside over the process is impossible. When the nature of humans is that of self-preservation and protection. Why should the ruling party level the playing field?

Communism failed not because it was a bad idea but it lacked a means of operationalising itself. I think the East tried it with disastrous economic consequences. While communism a noble idea, it lacked the means of operationalising itself, capitalism a not so noble idea (essentially a selfish idea) found ways and means of operationalizing the concept. The framework for democracy as currently conceptualised has become the source of much pain and suffering for the people of Zimbabwe. The last elections in Zimbabwe are a clear case in point. As one writer put it in his book *'it was a predictable surprise'*. While Mao Tsu cautioned *'you cannot fall into the same river twice'*, Zimbabwe has fallen into the same river several times. The results of the last elections in Zimbabwe make a complete mockery of the people of Zimbabwe, but illustrate how as a developing country we have been fooled. Fooled to believe that democracy comes through an election process, that democracy comes through a box - transparent or not. Perhaps we have been fooled. If you have a system that produces a 100% failure rate, you have to begin to ask yourself whether the problem is inherently in the student or the system. Democracy as currently operationalised has indeed produced perhaps a 99% failure rate in Africa. So is it Africa, or is it the system? Perhaps there are ways of operationalising this democracy as conceptualised while allowing our people to grow and mature with it. Perhaps there are alternative ways of operationalising democracy in Africa. We must acknowledge that democracy is a concept that has evolved over centuries. Developed countries have experimented with different forms of democracy and their people have internalised and matured with it. The illusion that democracy arrives with independence and can be juxtaposed on a people and function is a big fallacy. The current framework for democracy given the poverty and ignorance in Africa needs serious rethinking. We need time and space to grow and nurture thriving democracy beyond elections. Perhaps this is the subject of another debate.

5. Humour and Cynicism - A Survival Strategy for Zimbabweans

The Internet and the streets of Harare, Bulawayo Gweru, Mutare and the Diaspora abound with jokes and humour on the political scenario in Zimbabwe. Where the scenario has become the object of observation, the seen the seer and where the suffering take scone at their plight with pride of how well they have defeated hunger, or how they have conquered hunger and disease. It takes a different mindset, of defeating your enemy without fighting, hunger without starving, and diseases without allowing it to kill you. The ordinary people in Zimbabwe are challenging the premise that you have to fight hunger with food, violence with violence. There is hope – *zvichapera* - it will end. This too shall come to pass. There is a Shona saying "*hapana chisingaperi*". Everything comes to an end. And indeed, instead of fighting the regime, risking leg and limb, fighting that which will in time come to pass, is by many seen as an exercise in futility. Many have resolved to wait and watch for the end of the regimes time. *'It will come'* you will hear them say. They label those that prevail over this insanity as lacking in wisdom and general intelligence. And for good measure, should you respond with violence people will not notice the difference between the sane and the insane. In Shona we say, *'ane benzi ndeanerake, rikaimba unodzana'* meaning, that should your own relative go mad, if he/she sings, you have to dance. I guess

Zimbabweans are simply dancing in acknowledgement that one of their own has gone mad singing. And culturally, you are obligated to look after him and dance should he sing. To this the world has scorned at Zimbabweans inability to rise against a brutal regime. In the face of such provocations as the destruction of property (houses and businesses), they did not revolt. Yes, they did not. Some even demolished their own homes to salvage whatever they can. Can you believe it? If this had happened in South Africa or anywhere else in the world, the response would have been different. Not in Zimbabwe. Instead Zimbabwe was abounding in humour and stories of *'how one tried to salvage marijuana instead of property when his shack was being demolished, how some of the evicted people cannot go back to their rural homes since they had fled the village following accusing their mothers-in-law of witchcraft.'* One of the newspapers aptly summed it up in one sentence *'police have laid waste to their homes and families have spent four nights out on the street, but yet here they are, joking and laughing amid the destruction'.*

The question remains as to why Zimbabweans are responding in the way they are to the Mugabe regime. Could this be some kind of revolution that Zimbabweans are verging against the regime? Perhaps Zimbabweans have weighed their options and are indeed responding in the best way possible. Defeating violence with peace, hence dealing with conflict in their own ways. The Shona people were the first to capitulate to white rule in the 1890's having realised that they will in all earnest not win the war. They surrendered only to rise up decades later when they felt that they were much stronger. It is actually a recommended war strategy, to retreat in the face of a strong opposition. In the face of a strong enemy, you do not commit suicide, but retreat to regroup when the time is right. Perhaps.

Language plays a major role in the way people think. Our thought processes in turn influence the way we approach problems and find solutions to problems and subsequently the way we behave. The humour used by most Zimbabweans is a way of playing with words and language to interpret the current events. As one writer put it *'Even the most serious of events have rendered themselves to some of the most spectacular jokes that I have heard or read.'* Some of the jokes will leave you in stitches but you have to be a Zimbabwean to understand them. They are so specific to the Zimbabwean context such that a foreigner would see no humour in it. It is developing to a level where it has become the way of communicating the unsaid of the current crisis. In a way the humour has developed into a second language for Zimbabweans, allowing them to talk about the painful situation without actually talking about it. Everywhere I have been, the discussions with friends and family, whether facial, telephonic, or on the internet without fail, ends up with a humorous story line or joke and you part or meet on that note. Maybe we are in denial.

The use of humour and cynicism is therefore one of the survival strategies being used by Zimbabweans both at home and in the Diaspora to cope with the current situation in Zimbabwe. Often, the humour trivialises the issue and distances it from the person. In most cases, the humour is intellectual,

creatively playing with words and abstracts from the current reality. Trivialised, **reality** therefore loses its power to demoralise and dehumanise its victim. The laughter that comes with the jokes generates tears of laughter instead of tears of sorrow. With the tears of laughter comes an inner peace that begins a process of healing. This cycle repeats itself with each tragedy that unfolds. This has been the hallmark of Zimbabwean's ability to restart and recover from disaster with spectacular results. As such Zimbabweans are often accused of having a short memory as they are seen as eager to forgive and move on. Maybe they do not forget. But the energy level to deal with the system is rather used in reconstructing one's life among the ruins. Some relative that we visited two weeks after the demolitions had already cleared the rubble and cleaned out their yard with little visible signs of destruction. This Zimbabwean mystery of non-violent culture, unparalleled anywhere in the world is the cornerstone upon which any meaningful democracy can be built in Zimbabwe.

What then are the prospects for democratic change in Zimbabwe? Is there a comprehensive programme or plan to respond to the current crisis in Zimbabwe?

I must say from the outset that I salute those that are trying to do something on the Zimbabwean issues; those that have put themselves forward in search of a lasting solution to our problems. Zimbabweans are quick to criticise without offering solutions. It is ok for you to say that what I am doing will not work, but it is more useful for you to offer a suggestion of the way forward. As Theodore Roosevelt said *"The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."*

 Towards collective responsibility and the building of a culture of tolerance and valuing diversity.

I have often asked this question and risked losing leg and limb. I know I am treading on a hornet's nest and risk all the assault. But I will pose the question anyway. Is Mugabe the real problem or more palliative, the only problem in Zimbabwe? If Mugabe goes, will that solve our real problem? In response to Gono's move to slash three zeros from the currency, the finance spokesman of the larger faction of the MDC, Tapiwa Mashakada, said the only one *"big zero" that Zimbabwe needed to get rid of to put things right was none other than President Robert Mugabe himself. It is not the zeroes that are at the core of the Zimbabwean crisis. The MDC believes it is not simply the zeros that must go. Mugabe is the big zero and he must go,"* said Mashakada in a statement to the Press taken from Zimonline. I think Mavhaire was the first to make the *'Mugabe must go'* call. If Mugabe goes, it will certainly solve the immediate economic isolation and bring back the IMF and World Bank, facilitate economic recovery and improved international relations. It will not however solve our fundamental problems as a people of Zimbabwe. There is a culture of lack of tolerance for divergent views at all levels of society. I know

of family disputes that have gone on for generations because they could not agree on certain issues or '*vakapumhana uroyi*'. I know of churches that have split because the leadership did not agree on certain areas of conflict. Political parties have split because they could not tolerate different views or agree on strategy on the way forward. In the private sector, you hear very similar stories of 'camps' in the organisation. Perhaps it is the way we deal with conflict as a people. The big zero that needs to go in Zimbabwe is therefore the culture of intolerance and the lack of unity of purpose in each and every one of us. Selfishness and individualism has ruined us aground. As long as I am in my little corner making a living I do not care and have no compassion for others who are suffering. *Zvangu zviri kundifambira*. There is need for to us to look at ourselves in the mirror and admit that Mugabe is not the only problem in Zimbabwe. That in our own ways we have individually and collectively contributed to the situation that we find ourselves in. Blaming it all on Mugabe just makes us feel better, but will not bring about a lasting solution to our real problem. Mugabe simply personifies and amplifies who we are as Zimbabweans - egotistic, selfish individuals driven by self-interests and greed. We are therefore our own worst enemy perishing in our greed - Hezvoka. You reap what you sow the bible tells us.

What roles can the Zimbabweans in the Diaspora play?

So, do Zimbabweans in the Diaspora have a role to play or can we play a role? Frankly I do not think we can play any significant role in the politics in Zimbabwe in the comforts of our adopted countries and in cyberspace. The change will not happen because we are writing articles and chatting about the Zimbabwean situation on the Internet. Yes, we can continue to play the role of breadwinners providing for those relatives of ours that remain in Zimbabwe. There is no way that people can survive on the salaries that they are taking home in Zimbabwe. So how are Zimbabweans coping with the prices of goods and services, which are in no way linked to the paychecks that people take home. The Diaspora has been sustaining and fuelling these price hikes. The Diaspora has significantly contributed to price and income distortions in Zimbabwe. You can only afford to buy a house if you are in the Diaspora or a dealer in Zimbabwe. The breadwinner role of the people in the Diaspora, has only served to delay the process of change as it ameliorates and smothers the suffering and gives a false impression that local people are coping. That unfortunately is the law of unintended consequences.

Lets Go Back Home

The Zimbabwean crisis is like a big party were the invited guests come to the table and the hosts are nowhere to be seen. My call to all Zimbabweans both at home and in the Diaspora, is to come to the 'party'. Please show up. Stand up and be counted. Whether you are an MDC or ZANU PF or whatever political persuasion, please show up otherwise this democracy game will remain a concept. I would like to specifically address the youth. You are the future and therefore have every right to demand that those entrusted with your future be good stewards. I know hopes and aspirations for some generations have been lost or are already dead and buried. We have become the subject of scorn and humiliation among nations. But the power to change is in our hands. Only we can liberate ourselves from ourselves. Be the change that you want to see. It will not happen without your participation.

Statistics report figures of up to 4 million Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. That is a quarter of Zimbabwe's population of 12 million. These 4 million are also largely the middle working class Zimbabweans driven abroad by the current economic situation. Those that remain home are either rich (business people/dealers) or poor. There is no middle class in Zimbabwe anymore. You either have money or you don't. The world over, most change has been driven by the middle working class population. With unemployment levels of 70%, it is unlikely that any call for mass stay away will be heeded. In reality 70% of the nation is already '*staying away*' so why call for a stay away. To be honest the regime does not want the people in the Diaspora to come back home. It is not in their interest. But in essence that is what we should do. Lets all go back home and make the change that we want to see. It will not happen on its own. The world is full of examples of people who went in the Diaspora hoping to come back when things change for the better but never did. "*Ko anozvichinja wacho ndiyani kana iwe ukasazviita? Who will make the change if you do not do it?*" The Cubans have been waiting for over 40 years to go back home. You cannot expect somebody else to build your won house. Lets all go back home and use our experiences and exposure abroad for the national good before it is too late.

I sincerely hope that what I have shared will widen your perceptions of the crisis in Zimbabwe and will help shape your ideas on the way forward. Perhaps this experience that we are going through, as a nation is exactly what we need. I take it as a learning process and a strong foundation upon which democracy can be built.

I thank you.

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