

Gokwe Project version 3

“WHEN THEY SLAY ME TOMORROW, PLEASE BURY ME HERE NEXT TO MY BROTHER”: AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY AS SUBVERSIVE MEMORY

French political philosopher, Etienne de la Boetie writing in 1552 makes it clear that a dictator is but just one person with “only two eyes, only two hands, and one body” and yet is able to dominate, oppress, maim and even kill thousands if not millions of people even though he can only be at one place at a particular time, but is still able to enslave, rule, and maintain absolute power over every city, every village and every person. The most critical question that begs our attention is how it is so possible if the very people—the oppressed ones—are not willing to “confer on him the power to destroy[them].”

Boetie goes further to ask:

“How has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that he tramples down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you, except through you? What could he do to you if you yourselves did not connive with the thief who plunders you? If you were not accomplices of the murderer who kills you? If you were not traitors yourselves?” (page 87 Wink)

The puzzle to this question is the focus of this paper. Many scholars and commentators who have written on Zimbabwe have paid most attention to the use of the state apparatus—the army, the dreaded Central Intelligence Organization, the Police and the Youth Militia—in keeping the regime in power in Zimbabwe. Thus, the powerful and secret weapon of using ordinary citizens as killing machines has received little attention¹ The prevalent use of ordinary citizens to violently campaign and terrorize other citizens on a large scale was an innovative tool that the regime adopted when the possibility of losing power was staring the regime in the face in June 2008. It is when it became crystal clear that even with the electoral field heavily tilted in its favor, and with an electoral commission sympathetic to its cause, state media on solidly on its side, and the state apparatus fully on its side Zanu PF was losing the election. It was in that point of desperation that the regime co-opted ordinary men, women, and youths to violently crush subdue and crush their opponents. The fight to win the election was crafted. Just as Boetie had warned in the 16th century, the regime stayed in power because ordinary people became accessory to their oppression. They were willingly co-opted to do the dirty work of terrorizing, maiming, and killing their neighbors.

While in previous election campaigns state apparatus would intimidate the population, and some ordinary people willingly participate in electoral violence, never before in Zimbabwe did the participation of ordinary citizens become such a major force in the electoral landscape. The participation of ordinary citizens used to be limited to mainly zealous, easily definable card holding

¹ See for example Norma Kriger, Dorina Bekoe trends in electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa

party members such members of the women's and youth leagues. Never before had the regime resorted to using ordinary people *en masse* to violently crush any dissent and to induce electoral outcomes. The use of villagers to kill and harass each other is a new method and is very is proving to be very effective judging by the 2008 scenario. Never before did ordinary people turn on their neighbors on such a massive scale. Never before have ordinary citizens driven thousands of their neighbors out of their homes and into the hills and cities, and created a crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This was the first of its kind.² But the ordinary citizens did not all run away to the hills or cities, nor did they all comply with the expectations of the regime, some refused to be co-opted, but more importantly, they refused to "beat the oppressors at their game [of violence]." Instead, they "changed the game."

Of great interest in this paper is to document and critically explore the spiritual and religious tools that those who did not participate in the killing, who were meant to be victims of the violence, carved in order to non-violently defend themselves against a well organized political party that had beaten and terrorized them in every election before then, and a youth militia that was well oiled and ready to kill. This project deals with the non-violent methods that ordinary citizens can carve in order to prevent their communities from plunging into the web of electoral violence.³ There is a dire need for ordinary citizens to resist the powerful temptation to become willing accessories in the state's grand project of using violence to determine electoral outcomes. Ordinary people have the difficult task of defending their communities from the vagaries of politicians and the penchant temptation of participating in terror and mass murder.

If there was any hope that in the future elections post the Global Political Agreement, there will be peace; those hopes are misplaced because each and every election year in independent Zimbabwe has been characterized by violence. And judging from reports on violence in rural areas and on the farms it is clear that very little has changed except that the regime has been given a convalescent period to regroup, refinance and reorganize during the GPA . In the 2000 elections they did not cut limbs, neither was there any mass displacement of the rural population but by 2008 they had perfected their methods of killings. This sobering reality that the regime in Zimbabwe is not prepared to let the people to democratically choose their national leaders without the threat of coercion and violence makes the burden of exploring alternative ways of resistance to violence an urgent one. Imagining a world where violence is banished during elections becomes a top priority for people who have suffered for so long.

² The use hacking of opponents and cutting their limbs method of violence was effectively employed in Liberia and Sierra Leone but was a new phenomenon in the Zimbabwean political landscape.

³ Not much academic work has been on violence deterrent/prevention methods that that can be effectively adopted by ordinary citizens against their neighbors who turn against by employing violent methods. Most of the academic work tends to focus on the root causes of ethnic conflict not violence across political party lines. Sadly, in Zimbabwe most of the work/ reports documents and tallies the death figures and the size of destruction as an after the fact procedure without offering the tools so that the violence never happens again in the same way in the same place.

The response of a small community in Gokwe provides a framework of alternative ways of resistance to the temptation of participating as accessories to the killing machines.

There seem to be a deficiency, therefore, on a sustained strategy by the democracy movement, non-governmental organization and civil society at large on how to counter electoral violence perpetrated by the state using ordinary citizens. While the regime is rounding up villagers and performing what it calls re-education exercises, and recruiting ordinary citizens to commit violent crimes, the democracy supporters are in a state of paralysis very little effort is put on finding viable and effective strategies of educating and empowering ordinary rural citizens to resist co-option by the state for violent purposes. During this cooling period of the Global Political Agreement, it would have been wise for the civic organizations, churches, and opposition political parties and the international community to start campaigns on stemming electoral conflict and violence. Most of the attention is paid on electoral security, which is quite different concern from electoral violence since it focuses on protecting electoral process from conflict and violence through security planning and security instruments. In other the focus is in providing technical assistance to electoral management bodies, non-governmental organizations and media organizations⁴. The difference therefore is that while the first strategy calls for *empowering* ordinary citizens, the second focus on *technical* assistance for the conduct election.

No Sanctuaries for You

Tough lessons gleaned from past Zimbabwean political experience, especially the Gukurahundi in the 1980s, show that no outside intervention ever comes when the regime decides to violently crush the opposition even though brutal operations⁵. In the 2008 elections, even the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) and the Red CROSS of assisting those internally displaced by the violence was curtailed. The entire opposition leadership had to either flee into exile or go underground.

Experiences in conflict areas around the continent have not been encouraging either. Evacuations in conflict situations in Africa are a privilege for foreigners only, no matter how horrific the situation has turned. Even non-governmental organizations pull out and leave the locals (even their local co-worker staff are not uplifted) to face death on their own! The UN missions and Red Cross pull out or scale back their operations in the face of danger too. Lessons from the Liberian ECOMOG/ECOWAS, UNOMIL and Rwanda's UNAMIR are hard and painful ones. Helpless citizens are abandoned to face the enemy alone, thus Africans should never count on the international community for protection or intervention once full-scale violence or war has broken out. Because of these sobering lessons the communities need effective ways to prevent violence before it consumes them. In short we can conclude that there are limits to what the international communities can do.

⁴ Jeff Fischer 6

⁵ The pattern on how the regime has consistently crushed the opposition is a sad testament of the Zimbabwean politics, to date thousands have died post independence ... say more on Gukurahundi in particular.

Worse still for many ordinary Africans caught up in the web of violence there are no safe places for refuge.⁶ While those in other countries who are fleeing violence can find sanctuary in churches and embassies or within the auspices of the Red Cross, it is not so in Zimbabwe. During the horrific wave of violence that accompanied the June 27 elections, it was a heart-wrenching experience to see soldiers hounding off the victims of violence from the churches where they had gone for safety. There was no safe place in Harare for the victims, not even the churches or embassies or the Red Cross. The soldiers followed the victims and dispersed them to nowhere!

There was no safe place under the sun; not even the church or the opposition party headquarters. Victims could be, and were, abducted from those places, some were even abducted from the hospital beds where they were recovering, and were taken back to the torture chambers. Not even the leaders of the political movement were safe anywhere, they were beaten and arrested in public, in broad daylight before the media.

Yet against this backdrop of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, there is still not yet enough outrage generated by the politicians, academia, and civil society to confront the use of ordinary people as agents of violence. After every election, when the democracy train has been derailed yet again, the focus by civil society, policy makers, opposition party politicians and academics shifts to noble issues such as electoral reform and the constitutional process but these efforts are not adequate in unseating a dictator. The use of ordinary citizens to commit violence against their neighbors needs to be critically addressed. If after every election the names of the dead are collected and tallied, the statistics of properties destroyed evaluated, and the amnesia towards the use of violence by ordinary citizens is accepted as normal then the prospect of the democracy train taking off will always be still-born. When are Zimbabweans going to be outraged with the high figures of political violence?

Daniela Krosiak, deputy Africa program director for the International Crisis Group recently summarized the problem of African elections in a very succinct way: "More repression, less democracy and no real outcry."⁷ True to Krosiak's analysis, both the 2000 and 2008 elections in Zimbabwe ended inconclusively because of the use of violence by the ruling party. When the regime was faced with the threat of defeat, they resorted to violence against their opponent to the point that on June 27, 2008 Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic change, had to pull out of the race. In the 2000 election, the opposition party did not accept the results of 20 constituencies because of the levels of

⁶ Just as there was no sanctuary for those who fled to the churches in Liberia and Rwanda there was not in Zimbabwe. See also for example Ellen Johnson; Mamdani-When Victims Become Killers

⁷ NY Times May 20, 2010 she is giving her assessment in response to what is a prevailing trend in Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda and sees a pattern of repression and politicization of humanitarian assistance. The same ugly and barbaric tactics employed by all strongman governments across Africa and same old, tired response—no outcry! You would not kill 300 people for an election in the USA and get away with it. Why in this century should one get away with killing 300 people or even less for an election?

violence that had occurred in these places. Suffice it to say that those court cases never saw the light of the day since the courts delayed hearing them for more than 5 years until the life span of parliament was over and a new election was called.

The most troubling aspect about the violence that is meted out by the regime against its people is the appalling silence of this important aspect in studies of elections in Zimbabwe. While there is a discernable pattern of the regime using violence to win all elections in Zimbabwe and its unwillingness to give up power through a democratic process is clear, most studies have focused on the problem of when it was Zapu failure to mobilize the electorate, later when it was other smaller parties the fractured opposition and perceived Western influence.

The intensity of the 2008 election violence showed that the regime was now under siege, it was cornered—never before had it faced such threat of defeat in the rural constituencies.⁸ But with the formation of the government of national unity, the regime has had a chance to regroup and with the next elections tentatively scheduled for the year 2011, if no serious work is done beforehand, this time it will be a blood bath. The next time around, the regime will be fighting for its survival and will not leave anything to chance, so the world must gear up and be prepared for higher death toll than ever before. *Violence will derail the democracy project in Zimbabwe until robust strategies of dealing with violence are devised.*

Mapping the Geography of Electoral violence in Zimbabwe

Loss of the Rural Vote

It is clear that the strategy of the regime is to focus on the rural population where 80 percent of the voters are. But most importantly the regime is targeting the most under developed areas where the living standards are precarious and many farmers depend on government handouts. It is in such poverty stricken communities that the theater of power is taking place. It is a vicious struggle for power that is taking place here as evidenced by the actions of the regime in banning and/or restricting non-governmental organizations that have been operating in these areas for years, uplifting the standard of living of the poor. But because the regime was facing defeat during the elections, these NGOs became victims of the power struggle and the case against them was that they were practicing party politics, yet it was the regime that wanted to use the food and aid from the NGOs to buy votes. These communities have been sustained by donor aid and now find themselves unable to access that aid because the regime controls who can operate in those areas—and only those with connections to the regime have access to resources such as food and fertilizer. Those who are considered members of the opposition are left to starve as a punishment.

⁸ The March 2008 results had shown the party losing even in the heart of its stronghold, Mashonaland west and central, to the extent that Mugabe's provincial town of Chinhoyi was won by a White opposition candidate.

To complicate matters further, the highest percentage of people living in these communities are semi-literate. Their level of education is just average and the regime is preying on that. Indoctrination works better especially among the youths who are semi-educated. These young people suddenly find that belonging to the bases and militia enables them to have access to power and resources they never had before.

It is because of this that I argue that the regime became infuriated with the democracy train speeding across their domain. The brutality was concentrated mainly in those areas previously known to be the regime's stronghold, thus lending credence to my argument that there are no longer any strongholds except those created out of fear and ignorance. Most of the violence happened in these very impoverished communities. It is in such backwater communities where there is less media coverage to act as a watchdog for human rights violations that the ruling political party has politicized all the traditional structures of the community, chiefs and headmen. These traditional leaders are now on government payroll and are part of the state machinery for intimidation. In the previous elections the most affected areas were Muzarabani, Gokwe, Uzumba-Maramba Pfungwe (UMP) and Mwenezi districts. These are geographically hot and arid regions where even the international election monitors are less inclined to go and monitor the elections. Such remote areas provide a fertile and breeding ground for violence and it are here that architects of violence do their dirty work without the watchful eye of the international community. The regime is cognizant of the fact that for the democratic spirit to survive, the population must at least be informed of their choices.

It is because of this view that those who are perceived to be more enlightened in the community are the first targets of violence. Teachers, nurses, pastors, and other personnel from community-based organization are targeted.

Blame it on the Educated and City Dwellers

It was for this reason that in the run-up to the June election the War Veterans rounded up satellite dishes in the rural part of Beitbridge and ordered the villagers to use them for roasting pea-nuts. It was the fear of what the satellite represented—the possibility of listening to independent media—that scared the regime.

It is also for the same reason that the regime targeted people who brought independent newspapers to the villages. All these areas became cordoned off from outsiders because of the fear that open-minded people are a threat to the status quo. What this points to is that democracy cannot take root where people are isolated from the rest of the world and where there is fear of a free flow of information.

It is in such districts that the youth militia and ordinary party members unleashed an orgy of violence against a defenseless population.

Elections will not work until the use of violence is addressed. Usually, the international monitors come a few days before elections, when intimidation has already happened, and they stay in cities where

violence is limited. Then on voting day, they cannot gauge the fear that is palpable with rural voters, and the result is that they declare elections free and fair.

The following pages will show the development and use of newer methods of violence imported from West Africa. The Zimbabwe Crisis Coalition has summed it thus: "...the state uses torture and violence to stifle public dissent and determine political processes and determine outcomes."

Re-Education Camps/Bases

The social biographies of the people inhabiting communities that critically need democracy support is that of farmers, teachers, and small scale miners and small business owners. These are the people who are rounded up by the regime to attend these re-education seminars because they are suspected of spreading opposition politics. They are the easy targets of attacks and many were hounded out of their communities during the June 2008 election campaign. It is this fear of the truth that led the regime to persecute the educated class and garrisoned the rural areas from interference from urban dwellers. The regime also cordoned off these rural communities and designated them as no go areas for opposition officials and people from outside—especially people from the cities. Carrying or reading independent newspapers is not allowed in these communities and one can pay with their life for this offense. During the preparations for the June 2008 election, these communities became a no-go area particularly for the members of the press and international visitors.

In most of these areas even the propaganda radio of the regime does not reach. This has become a blessing in disguise since many tunes in to the Voice of America's Studio 7 program for their nightly news bulletins, and for those who are near the border with South Africa it is South African radio and television stations that are the source of information. Those villagers who are more inland are fed daily with the propaganda from the regime's stations. No other TV or radio news sources from outside are allowed. Even Studio 7 is subject to jamming. The purpose of all this is to silence any voices of dissent and intimidate those who do not support the regime.

The most draconian legislation used by the regime to stifle public dissent is the Public Order and Security Act. According to this act any gathering of three or more people to discuss politics without police clearance is illegal and subject to arrest. The interesting aspect of this law is its partisan application. While youths and villagers belonging to ZANU PF can organize rallies and open bases without seeking police clearance, all other groups cannot. Under this Act, all political gatherings have to be sanctioned by the state; only church gatherings and funerals are exempt. Even a family visit has to be sanctioned by the chief or sub chief and the purpose and duration of the visit have to be outlined.

VIOLENCE: Neighbor Vs Neighbor; why this is the Regimes' most effective tool

The introduction of civilians⁹ into the politics of killing neighbors complicates the whole process of democratization. Many ordinary citizens become disillusioned with elections as a means of attaining democracy. Instead elections become associated with divisions, chaos, killings, loss of property and neighbor setting out against neighbor.

The co-opting of the rural population to maintain the dictatorship's grip on power has been its most successful weapon. It wins diplomatically, and it wins in terms of cost effectiveness and it wins hands down in terms of sheer numbers.

With many parts of the country inaccessible due to poor roads conditions, and few or non-existent telecommunication lines, including no availability of cell phone networks, using villagers to spy, harass, intimidate and kill their neighbors becomes the most effective tool of politicization that any dictator can use to hang on to power.

The effectiveness of using neighbors is that the victims cannot even dare flee and seek sanctuary among relatives in other villages and towns, as using the only available means of travel—public transport—means the spy will catch them before they can get very far. The only option is to flee to a refugee area.¹⁰

The most significant effect of this deadly weapon is that it causes the mass displacement of voters—whole villages have to flee en masse so as to avoid total annihilation. The perpetrators succeed in cleansing the community before Election Day.

The co-optation of ordinary citizens as killers strengthens the government's ideological propaganda and rhetoric that it is not clinging to power but is only holding on so that the gains of independence are not reversed. They point to the land reform program and argue that all the haphazard seizures of the farms were a spontaneous exercise by the landless that had waited patiently for land for so long, while the government could not do anything because of the Lancaster house provisions. The truth of the matter is that the government used the land reform exercise as a last resort after its stinging defeat during the 2000 Referendum.

But more importantly the use of ordinary people to commit acts of violence legitimizes the government holds to power. The ugly hand of the government in the killings is hidden such that the international community cannot point to the government as the perpetrator of violence. Hence the argument that violence is from both sides, from both government supporters and opposition party supporters, is used to cloud the real issue: that the government's supporters have immunity from persecution and operate with a blank check. The violence perpetrated by opposition party supporters is minimal as compared to

⁹ In studying the political violence reports for June 2008, one is struck by unprecedented levels of violence which occurred when a named Member of Parliament of a specific area led a group of Zanu PF supporters in the murder of victims, see especially The MDC Names and Shames Roll of Honor

¹⁰ In the June 2008 elections hundreds fled to Harare to seek refuge at Harvest House, the Movement of Democratic change offices. When the offices were attacked by the police and Army, they fled to open embassies and churches. And there again they were dispersed until finally right before the elections they were moved to Internal Displaced People center at Ruwa, under the supervision of the World Food Program.

that committed by government supporters and, judging by the number of internally displaced persons from the opposition, it is mostly done in self-defense.

But the most dangerous part of this whole strategy is that when violence by government supporters in the form of ordinary citizens is deemed to be the legitimate struggle of the masses in defense of their land and sovereignty, it undermines global support for the democratic movement because even democratic movements around the world are duped into believing that the regime is a victim of international right wing projects of regime change rather than seeing it for what it is: a desperate and discredited regime that has run out of ideas and is killing its own citizens. This has worked in the Zimbabwean case because other liberation movements around the Southern Africa region and some sections of the African-American community in the USA have bought into the regime's argument that it is defending itself against a regime change agenda. This has affected the pace of the democratization process in Zimbabwe in very significant ways. Many outside Zimbabwe have had reservations in supporting the democratic movement because they think it is against the liberation movement's ideals of land reform.

Complicate the healing process after...Rehabilitating them is costly, when villagers become killers means the whole community is poisoned and the peace process is slow and very complicated.

They are effective in destroying their neighbors, and jealous and hatred cause others to point fingers and accuse people for what they have not done. Neighbors can provide 24-hour surveillance on the activities of their neighbors and this is very effective in keeping them in check. Further, they have personal inside information about their neighbors, and are present on the voting day to spy on them. Many of the victims of the violence recounted how those who came after them were people they had known for years, people they had trusted.

Method/Patterns of violence

The regime wants the world to believe that political violence happens spontaneously or simply reflect random acts caused by unruly members of the party.¹¹ But a closer look at the situation in the communities riddled by violence reveals that the violence is premeditated and employs a certain method. They are old methods, which have been imported from West Africa. Unlike the electoral violence that happens in other parts of the world, where groups of competing parties clash and fight, in Zimbabwe there are no clashes, neither are there marauding groups from both parties. The June 2008 electoral violence had its own pattern. In every village bases were opened under the leadership of some

¹¹ This has been the tactic since with all the elections, and these perpetrators never face justice, if they are arrested they are pardoned before serving any sentences.

youth or party functionaries. These leaders reported directly to an army person who coordinated activities in the province or district.

Our interest here is not the army person, but the work of these lower level village people whose task was to round up every villager and bring them to the *bases* for what was termed re-education classes. This strategy had been used during the liberation struggle as a mobilization tool for the liberation war. Now the same war tactic used in mobilizing the ordinary citizens against the white oppressive regime is employed by the citizens against their fellow neighbors. Attendance at the base meetings is mandatory. When the villagers are brought to these night long meetings, they are taught liberation struggle songs, and are indoctrinated in politics, and those who are deemed to be sell-outs are taught lessons by being disciplined by the base leaders in public either by whipping, beatings, or other forms of punishment, such as taking away their goats and cattle to be eaten at the base. The punishment for supporting opposition politics was too high. It is here at the bases where night vigils were conducted that the attacks on those purported to be opposition party members were planned and executed.

The participants at the base meetings will agree to either call out these sell-outs in the meeting if they are already present or to send a team to bring them for a lesson. The villagers may also opt to attack their homestead and burn it down. These villagers will perform the marches and *toyi –toyi* around the villages and frog march villagers to attend the night vigils, instilling fear at campaign bases and campaign rallies (through threats, and vulgar and abusive language). Victims are also forced to renounce their membership in the opposition party. It is at these bases also that young women are required to spend the night cooking for the comrades and many have been raped here, and not just young unmarried women.

This is done to instill fear in the villagers and to make sure the entire villagers vote in solidarity come Election Day. Most of the killings and destruction of homes were planned and coordinated from these bases. The villagers went a rampage and left a trail of mayhem and destruction wherever they went.

Cutting limbs is a new method that has been imported from Sierra Leone. The signature tactic of hacking people's hands, arms, feet or legs was a new innovation in Zimbabwe and the question that every victim of such barbaric and cruel act was asked: long or short sleeves? The choice was to either be left with short or long limbs hanging on your body! The amputations left victims permanently disabled and unable to fend for themselves but more importantly unable to cast their vote so as to teach them a lesson not to vote for an opposition candidate.

Burning homes and hacking farm animals, burning granaries

Whipping victims with barbed wire until flesh dripping with blood is ripped of the body

Burning the back (behind) so that the victim cannot sit anymore

Burning farm animals to death, nailing sticks on victims through mouth and bottom

Dismembering the victim such as cutting the tongue of the dead.

Enough is enough: victims defend themselves through non-violent methods

The SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY OF THE VOTERS

This section documents the extraordinary work that poor and voiceless villagers did in organizing against the culture of violence that had torn their community apart for years. This was a work of courage and great sacrifice on the part of the villagers whose community was ravaged by violence. For in every election that the people of Gokwe South had gone through, homes were burnt down, many lost their valuable belongings through fire, and some were injured while others lost their lives. But the people did not give up; they yearned for a life with dignity and freedom of expression.

The men and women of Gokwe are simple peasant farmers with very little formal education. During the 2008 Harmonized elections these villagers demonstrated the possibilities of a violence free election when villagers refused to be used as killing machines against their neighbours.

The area had been rocked by intense brutal violence in the two previous elections. One of the community leaders and democracy activist who made a difference is Mafuta a 41 year man. He only attained primary education.

Through the leadership, courage and persistence of a simple community leader in the form of Mafuta the community came of age and said NO to the cancer of violence that had plagued the community in the previous elections.

Mafuta had escaped death by a whisker in the previous election of 2005 and went hiding in South Africa. He was attacked by local ZANU PF youth, young men that he knew him by name, young men who grew up in his village but were protected by their affiliation to the then-ruling party in violent acts. The brutal attack occurred in broad daylight at the shopping center, a small business place with about four small shops, a school and a grinding mill. The youth had become notorious for attacking anyone they suspected to be supporting the opposition party so no one among the people who were hanging around the shops dared come to his rescue. Witnesses who were present concur that the reason why many who sympathized with Mafuta did not come to his rescue was their fear not only of the youth but of the ruling party. They were afraid that if they intervened in the fight they would be thought to be members of the opposition party. Mafuta narrates that he fought back with stones and whatever he could find until they broke his arm and knocked him down. Mafuta tells of his fierce anger at the betrayal by his own people who failed to come to his rescue while he was brutally attacked. He could understand that the youth who attacked him thought they were serving their party, but what about his neighbors who let him be brutalized? Some eventually came and ferried him home where he spent two nights being nursed by a local neighbor since the clinics were given strict orders not to attend to any opposition party sympathizers.

When his condition began to deteriorate, he was taken to the hospital in the city for treatment. He was later informed that the doctors were not permitted to record the cause of his injuries. The injuries could be recorded if he agreed to lie that he got injured when he fell from a cart which was ferrying wood. Had he not been taken to the city and given medical fees by the opposition party Mafuta could have succumbed to his injuries and died like many other poor villagers who are beaten and denied medical attention. Or had he remained in the villages for a long period, his attackers could have re-grouped and attacked him again. His salvation was the few who came and ferried him from the shops to this old man's house, where the man bandaged his wounds and managed to control the bleeding. Mafuta's story is only one of the few stories with such a positive ending when many other fellow villagers like him died of wounds inflicted during violent campaigns.

When the 2008 elections came, Mafuta was ready for them. He realized that if democracy was to have a chance the youth were a critical component of the process. He mobilized the youth in his village and strategized in advance. PART OF THE STRATEGY THIS TIME WAS TO ADVISE THE MEMBERS of the community to accept positions from ZANU PF, everyone in the village bought ZANU PF MEMBERSHIP CARD, PEOPLE ACCEPTED T-SHIRTS, EVERYONE ATTENDED ZANU PF MEETINGS. People declared in broad day light that they were all ZANU BUT AT NIGHT AND DEEP DOWN IN THEIR HEARTS THEY KNEW WHO THEY WERE. He instructed the youth to infiltrate the ZANU PF youth who had attacked him in the previous election. This time he encouraged youth to attend ZANU PF meetings in the ward and in the district. Whatever was required of them, they obliged and participated. He also worked very hard with a few courageous neighbors in organizing and mobilizing the villagers to vote with their conscience even though the head-man had recorded all the people prior to the election. But the greatest opponent that Mafuta and the community had to deal with was fear—Fear ruled in Gokwe. No one would dare attend or even talk about opposition politics openly. Very few opposition meetings and rallies happened in the open because they needed to seek permission which was never granted. The opposition could only campaign neighbor to neighbor using word of mouth.

The villagers attended the compulsory ZANU PF base meetings as usual but deep inside they knew that they were going to vote their conscience. When ZANU PF local leaders realized that the opposition was gaining ground they became desperate and vicious. They rounded up villagers and those with opposition party T-shirts were forced to surrender them. Death threats were issued to the local opposition leaders. No one was allowed to wear or display any party symbol except that of the ruling party. No posters or any other campaign material was allowed in the village except that of the ruling party. Each villager was expected to monitor his or her neighbor, since on polling day they were all expected to arrive at the same time, wait for each other in a line behind their head-man, and then one by one cast their vote as they had been registered in the head-man's book. What is of interest here is that for an international election monitor, these small nuances will escape the eye, as everything happening at the voting booth has been carefully choreographed in advance and the people are not exercising their democratic right but are headed to the polls like cows—to do what is expected of them by the politicians. Part of the requirement that they all assemble and cast their vote at the same time is to make sure that no villager decides not to cast a vote for the party.

His party was at a disadvantage. ZANU PF local politicians did not need to seek permission to hold their rallies and meetings. The youth would just round people up and bring them to the meeting place. The chief too was expected to ring the community bell on any appointed day for all villagers to be addressed by a ZANU PF politician. In other words, during the election period the lines are blurred between ruling party and community. For opposition party leaders and their members, there is no space for calling meetings or campaigning. Those who gather without police clearance are subject to arrest under POSA law even though there are no police stations near enough from which to seek clearance. The ZANU youth can just go and report that an illegal meeting took place and you are arrested, or they come and disrupt the meeting and beat the people up. Death threats were issued against Mafuta for defying the local ZANU PF leadership and for causing the defeat of the ZANU PF candidate in the March 2008 elections. He was threatened with retaliation for his active role in organizing and mobilizing people for the June re-run elections. The base meetings were becoming regular and all villagers were now expected to attend daily.

When Mafuta realized that there was no more democratic space to organize and campaign for their candidate, he began to work underground. And then something that changed the course of local politics happened. His younger brother died from natural causes. As is the custom, neighbors from far and near, and relatives from across the political divide congregated for days for the funeral wake.¹² Mafuta maximized on this gathering to encourage people to stand for what they believe in and to vote their conscience come Election Day on June 27. On the day of the funeral, he decided to speak before the huge crowd assembled and give his farewell too. He publicly named his nemesis, the local ZANUPF leaders—the chairperson of the Ward and the secretary of the party. He told the crowd that in case he disappeared, as was the case in other areas where opposition leaders were being abducted, his relatives must not look anywhere else, but must lay the blame at the feet of these two ZANU PF representatives.

According to the witnesses who were present, that moment became a turning point, since in African Shona culture once you are accused of plotting to kill someone and then it happens, you are the target of an avenging spirit. What Mafuta did marked them out in public so that they would carry the axe on their heads and be tormented by it if and when he was murdered. The important thing about African funerals is that you cannot talk back to the one who is addressing the mourners. So Mafuta maximized on this to say what could not be said in any other public setting—he was not accusing them in this case, but preparing for his own death. He went on to instruct his relatives to bury him right next to his brother, since he had already been marked out for death by the local ZANU PF leadership. Pointing to the ground next to his brother's grave he boldly told the mourners that he was ready to die for what he believed in—democracy!

The Dark clouds gather around Mafuta

Attack on the Next Village

¹² The funerals and church services are the only gatherings that are not covered under POSA law.

The violence did not stop because Mafuta had spoken out against the local ZANU PF leaders, instead they got furious and prepared for a more brutal campaign. The local ZANU PF leaders called for reinforcements from the others Wards so that they could deal with the Mafuta problem once and for all. A date for the big rally was set and the local head-man was tasked with ringing the community bell so that everyone in the village would attend. But the brutal events in the neighboring Ward to the western side sent chills to those who were being rounded up to attend the rally in Mafuta's Ward. News filtered in that ZANU PF youth had attacked MDC youth at a wedding and in defense the MDC youth had overpowered them and beaten them. The ZANU PF youth called for reinforcement of the soldiers who were camped some miles away and the soldiers came with trucks and burnt the village down. The young MDC supporter who was getting married escaped to another village but many others were beaten by the soldiers.

When the news of what had happened at the western village reached Mafuta's village people were terrified. They were terrified that if violence broke out, whether Mafuta's group won would be inconsequential because the violence that the soldiers would inflict would be beyond measure. So Mafuta was forced to dig deeper and find a strategy that was to save him and his village from the brutal violence not only of the ZANU PF youth but of the army. The weekend for the rally was approaching, ZANU youth had already called for heavyweight leaders from the district to come and address the rally, and the ZANU youth from the districts were coming too.

Mafuta's youth were becoming agitated too, readying themselves for the big fight since they knew that whether they decided to boycott the rally or not, the ZANU youth would come after them. They sent word to the village that elderly men and women, the sick, those who are nursing babies, and young children were not to attend the ZANU rally unless they were able to run to the hills. The whole village was gripped with fear!¹³

When the Saturday of the rally came, the head-man rang the bell and every villager, young and small, mothers and fathers, and the elderly trekked up to the shopping center and gathered for the rally. Mufata's day had finally come, he had survived the brutal attack when they left him half dead in the 2000 elections and this time around they were not going to let him go. His fate was sealed. The problem with the new wave of electoral violence that engulfed the country in 2008 is that a whole neighborhood was punished for the sins of one person. So it was clear that Mafuta was not going to be punished alone, but his whole household, his wife, and children, his cattle and dogs were all going to be burnt together. It had happened in many other places such as in Murewa, Uzumba and it was happening in Mt Darwin.

Mafuta's youth did their homework of arming themselves with clubs, logs, knives, and chains. They were incensed when they went to look for Mafuta and found the house locked and him nowhere to be found. They thought he had run away and left them at the jaws of their killers. Mafuta had not fled the village

¹³ Several of the interviews confirmed that word got to them not to attend if they could not run, but still decided to attend than risk the fury of ZANU youths who were going to toyi-toyi door to door looking of those had absconded. By absconding one was deemed any opposition party member.

but had taken his small chair and gone to sit with his neighbor at a vantage point in his neighbor's yard. When he saw the youth milling around his homestead he went to address them. Together they agreed that it was better that they should take the first step of going to the rally rather than waiting for the ZANU youth to finish the rally and come toyi-toying to kill them. Mafuta pleaded with the youths to leave behind all the knives, clubs, and spears they were carrying because the party they supported was a non-violent party.¹⁴

When Mafuta arrived with his youth in tow, there was great celebration at the rally. The whole ZANU hierarchy was seated at the front on chairs while the rest of the villagers were seated on the grass and on the rocks. ZANU PF youth were not seated but had formed a bow at the edge of the rally. These rallies are a theater of power. Mafuta strode in and sat on the grass right next to the leadership at the front. His youth, though, instead of sitting down, joined the standing ZANU youth. At this point, the speaker interrupted his speech to welcome Mafuta, the man they had all been waiting for. He made slogans, DEATH WITH..., FORWARD WITH... and the villagers responded. DEATH., FORWARD...,

Mafuta Strategy Saves the Village

The speaker then announced that Mafuta was a prodigal son who had finally come back home and could be forgiven only if he renounces his party, a puppet of the British and Americans. He was asked to stand up and make the slogan. Mafuta stood up but refused to make the slogan just because "this was not a party rally as far as I was concerned but a development program rally."¹⁵ He explains that since the head-man had rang the bell that is used only for summoning people for a community development meeting he had come not for a ZANU PF rally, but for a community meeting. He further explained that since the bell rang by the head-man is not for a particular party but for the community, the villagers had also come in that understanding, thinking that the issues under discussion were of community interest not party politics. He argued that it was not proper to use a community bell to summon people for partisan interests since the community has people from different parties and on that "score I refused to make any ZANU PF slogan."¹⁶

Mafuta explains that at that moment something he cannot explain happened to him and he was surprised by what he said next. Instead of sitting down he turned and faced the crowd and asked to know if there were any war veterans present at the meeting and if so that they should stand up. He

¹⁴ In the interview he stresses this point that the MDC does not allow its members to use violence except as a last resort in self defense. Some interviews though admitted that they left all the big weapons behind but concealed their knives under the big coats they were wearing for winter.

¹⁵ Interview on Jan, 11, 2010

¹⁶ Mafuta Interview Jan, 11, 2010

asked them how much the regime had paid them to come terrorize and kill them?¹⁷ He pressed the question until they responded that nothing had been given. He turned and asked the local notorious chairwoman of the ZANU PF party to stand up. Addressing her he asked how much she has been paid so far in organizing beatings and violence against her neighbors. The woman was silent. Mafuta seized the moment and asked if Mugabe or any of the top leaders of the regime had ever come to her homestead whenever she had bereavement in the family. The woman said no! Mafuta asked, if the top leadership has never come then who has? The woman replied that it is her neighbors. He then asked her why she wants him, a neighbor who will be by her side during the most difficult and dark moments of her life, and would even bury her when she dies, should be killed? Turning to the hundreds of villagers gathered he instructed them never to attend any funeral that will happen at her house, he vowed that no one was to give her food during this drought season since she advocated for the brutalization of her people, and all her food and funeral assistance will come from Harare where the powerful are. He told the neighbors that they should never ever give this woman a plate of sadza, neither should they offer her a cup of water no matter what the circumstances are since she had chosen the Party over the suffering of her people. By this time the crowd was no longer silent but had been emboldened and some were ululating and publicly affirming the veracity of what Mafuta was saying.

What Mafuta was doing in this case was appealing to the traditional custom of “izandla ziyagezana.” The local leadership of ZANUPF will have to from now on bury each other and supply each other with food since the community earmarked for death will no longer participate nor support them. Politics of death and food are effective in a context where there are no credit cards and people are utterly dependent upon their neighbors for all assistance, and where there are no ambulances but your neighbors carry you with their carts to the nearest clinic. In a context where burials are very expensive, living in peace with your neighbors is a must so that that they one day help you bury your loved ones with dignity and expect the community to converge in number. It is an anathema for one to dig the grave of their own kin when the community shuns them. In short, neighborliness is your *social security*. In an environment where there were no longer any banks and everyone, employed and unemployed survives from hand to mouth, killing your neighbors is akin to killing your lifeline.

Emboldened by the crowd he turned and faced the young men, the secretary of the party who was perched on a chair, taking notes of the proceedings. He asked him to come forward and read aloud for the crowd to hear what had been written. It was a hard moment for the young man because he had not been faithful in his note-taking. Mafuta reminded him that it was him who had broken his arm in the previous elections and now he was writing negative information about him, misrepresenting the facts.

It was at this moment that Mafuta’s youth charged forward asking if Mafuta would give them a chance to mete out instant justice to the young man and Mafuta emphatically refused. He was adamant that “no one deserves to be beaten for political reasons.” The youth obeyed and he calmed them down.

¹⁷ National leaders of the war veterans had issued statements that they were ready to go back to war if people did not vote for Mugabe and were leading the brutal campaign in the villages of abducting and killing MDC activists.

Turning to those who had terrorized other villagers, confiscated party regalia from opposition party supporters, and violently seized their neighbors' property, he reprimanded and ordered them to return the property as soon as possible. Witnesses present vouch that at that moment the perpetrators did not raise their heads, but remained with eyes glued on the ground.¹⁸

He went on to ask if what he said was against any political party or offensive to anyone. This surprised the many villagers, who normally would not have been given the opportunity to speak in any rally but come, sit under the scorching heat, listen attentively for long hours and trek back home without ever saying a word, or even having a bite to eat the whole day. This time one by one the villagers regained their voices and without prefacing their speeches with the slogan of "DOWN WITH SO AND SO, FORWARD WITH SO AND SO"¹⁹ spoke of their fears and their deep yearning for peace. Many spoke of how the enemy and politics had come to divide their once united community. They spoke of the need to live together as neighbors and support one another and not allow politicians to divide and use them.

While the villagers were taking turns to speak Mafuta never sat down. He kept his position until those who had something burning in their chest had all let it out. He then gave back the young man his notebook and instructed him to send the correct record to his superiors. The community was never to be the same again.

All the headmen who had attended the meeting were summoned to the chief's place many kilometers away where they were grilled on why they had allowed Mafuta to address the rally. They were instructed to never again let him speak in public. Across the country, violence was engulfing many communities, and thousands of people were fleeing to the cities. Morgan Tsvangirai decided to withdraw from the election since the price people were paying for his election was getting too high.

- Providing leadership to the community—which is very critical and essential
- Insisting that community development meetings be separate from party political meetings/rallies
- Challenging the War Veterans to declare their promised payouts for killing machines—
CHALLENGING THE CULTURE OF POLITICIANS USING PEOPLE AND THEN DUMPING THEM AFTER

¹⁸ I interviewed the man whose two wives had been terrorized and asked to remove in public MDC T-shirts they were wearing and confirmed that the perpetrators have been ashamed of meeting him since then. The man was not present at the meeting because at that time he had fled from the village to seek shelter in another town, where unfortunately he became a victim of violence and suffered broken ribs.

¹⁹ Zimbabwean political slogans have since the liberation struggle been full of hate speech advocating for the killing of the opponents and instill fear among the ordinary citizens when recited at mass rallies.

THE ELECTIONS—SO MANY UNFULFILLED PROMISES..AND SOME KILL AND MAIM AND FIND THAT THEY FACE THE AFTER EFFECTS ALONE.

- Opening up the meeting to the whole community—a radical step indeed since in these meetings only the top table leadership speaks/ addresses people
- Insisting that those who are responsible for violence—who took other people’s property must return it...or else...? Those who had taken the t-shirts etc to return them immediately. Justice must be done!
- Mafuta does not clamor for any electable position in the democracy movement but yearns for justice and the day his children can be able to choose a leader they want without any threat and fears of the violence of the past
- Where do we go from here? IF A FEW INDIVIDUALS CAN DO IT THEN THERE IS A SURE POSSIBILITY THAT DICTATORSHIPS CAN BE ENDED THROUGH PEACEFUL AND DEMOCRATIC MEANS. If MAFUTA and the new young councilor plus the youth group so few and so illiterate can do it, why not those with so much networks across the globe, why not the church ????

TIME TO ACT NOW!

The church can lead the moral outrage campaign and counter the justification of the killing of people that the regime openly encourages (they argue that the country became independent through the barrel of a gun and not ballot box which is false!)

How come there is never any public campaign by church leaders before and after the violence, for example the symbolic gesture of religious leaders visiting families of those whose loved ones died as victims of electoral violence. What would it mean if even one person had died and the whole Christian community stood in solidarity with that family—regardless of party affiliation—and had a public service for them and honored them and said this kind of criminality must be banished from their land? In the Bible, the Book of Lamentation is a powerful testament of a nation enraged because of senseless killings. Why have there not been an outcry, an outrage and national lament on the 300 who died in the last election? That is where we have to begin, if we cannot as a nation lament for 300 souls, what else will we ever lament for then? If we cannot lament for those who died, will we ever do justice for the thousands who were displaced, wounded and permanently handicapped? Will their fate be sealed so quickly and so easily that justice will be denied them just because all that happened to them was in the name of elections? If the moral leaders of a country are not outraged, then we can understand the cynicism of international election monitors and observers who always without fail declare our elections free and fair even with dead bodies still piled in mortuaries and graves still fresh in the cemeteries.

The Government of National Unity must push for strong legislation against electoral violence. Political crimes are currently not criminalized and many perpetrators of these crimes know very well that they will get a political pardon once the elections are over since it’s an established tradition that after every

brutal election, pardon and amnesty are given. There must be a strong campaign against these pardons since they are encouraging a culture of impunity in the Zimbabwean political landscape. Everyone knows in Zimbabwe that if you belong to ZANU PF, you can get away with murder from one election to the next.

Judging from the experience of the 2000 elections when the Movement for Democratic Change challenged the results of 20 constituencies because the elections were marred by violence, a mechanism for speeding up the court process must be set up. In the 2000 elections only a few cases were heard before the Courts and the rest never got to see the light of the day until another election took place in 2008. Justice was not only delayed but denied in these cases.

Beyond the legislation, the political parties must be made to sign a pledge of non-violence before every election since it is clear that violence in these elections is not a result of clashes among members of different political parties but violence is perpetrated by the government against ordinary people at their homes and are either abducted, beaten and are coerced to attend political rallies. . In short, violence in such cases is directed and orchestrated from above. There is a pattern to this kind of violence and ruling party candidates with full protection of the law are the instigators. The law must spell out the consequences for non-compliance and maximum sentences must be imposed on political violence offenders irrespective of level of hierarchy in the party or government. Moreover, party candidates who use violence against their opponents must be disqualified so that the scourge of violence can be rooted out of our electoral politics. Violence must never be accepted as a method of gaining political power. Those who are violent are not fit to be community leaders, let alone national leaders and this must be made clear to all who are aspiring for political office. If this scourge of violence is not banished from our villages and cities, it can spiral out of control and consume the whole country and even the perpetrators who flame the waves may not be able to control it once it runs out of control, and the violence may consume them in return.

A Justice, reconciliation and healing commission must be set up that will investigate and prosecute those who committed violence. Perpetrators who pillaged their neighbor's property and cattle must be brought to justice and forced to return whatever was stolen. A Compensation Fund must be set by the government and paid to the victims and survivors.

Memorial must be erected in communities where democracy activists have sacrificed and died for the love of freedom for their country. These memorials may serve as a reminder to generations that democracy is a costly exercise and may also serve to shame the perpetrators who want the names and their deeds forgotten by the community.

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