

Who is Zimbabwe?

Andrew Breitenberg, Harare, Zimbabwe 2008

We walk through the crowded streets of downtown Harare and witness firsthand the long rows of shops standing empty. Occasionally we pass one with its doors open and wander in to discover the owner and a few friends having tea. I ask them if they have anything for sale and they reply that they haven't had stock in two months. They tell me that they open the shop for a sense of normality. When I ask them if there is anything at all available in Zimbabwe they laugh, with genuine joy and say, "oh yes! sunshine."

I spend an evening with two couples who are pastoring a church in the suburbs of Harare. We listen to their own cry for normality. Inflation is measured over hours now and all newly printed currency (10 and 50 million dollar notes) expire in June. One of the women tells her story of yesterday's shopping trip. She had heard that there was a delivery of milk in the supermarket and went to find out the price. 250 million dollars, or approximately \$2.50 US. She ran to exchange money on the "parallel" market and queued for two hours finally managing to get 300 million for \$3. She immediately returned to the store only to discover that the price had been reset at 350 million. She did not buy milk. Her four young children haven't had any for weeks. My friend and I bring two duffel bags full of food into the kitchen. We have brought as much as we can carry on the plane from South Africa. When we open them the two mothers reach for each other and begin to weep.

One of the men explains that his construction business bought 400 billion dollars (\$4000 US) worth of supplies two weeks ago. They delayed delivery by two weeks and finally he had to go and collect everything at the warehouse. When he arrived they told him he'd have to "top-up" what he's paid based on inflation. Another 500 billion. His entire monthly salary doesn't pay for the petrol he needs to go to work and back for that same month. He says the real pain comes when he looks into the eyes of the man extorting him and doesn't find a flicker of humanity - no recognition that right and wrong play a part.

Zimbabwe

Ruling Party: ZanuPF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front)

President: Robert Mugabe, born 1924

Mugabe and his party have ruled since the country's independence in 1980

Main opposition party: MDC (Movement for Democratic Change)

President: Morgan Tsvangirai, born 1952

The MDC have just won a parliamentary majority in the 29 March elections.

The results of the presidential vote have not yet been released.

Failed State: Zimbabwe

HIV/AIDS: 25% of the population is infected

Zimbabwean Dollar: as of 26 April 2008, Official exchange: \$1US = Z\$30,000; parallel market rate: \$1US = Z\$100,000,000

Hyperinflation: as of April 2008, 165,000% (Financial Gazette)

Agriculture: land reforms turn white farmers off their properties weekly.

At most 200 of the 4,500 farms owned by whites at independence, are still held by the original owners.

Economy: power failures every day, drinking water spoiled, unemployment at 80%, widespread famine in most rural areas.



Tapiwa Mbwanda, 58 years
Hurungwe East MDC Organising Secretary
Tapiwa was beaten, stoned and stabbed to death at his home in Mhereyenyoka, Karoi. CIO (Intelligence) agents from Harare attended the post-mortem in Karoi, removed his body and took it to his home, ordering the family to bury it immediately.
The post-mortem report was taken by the CIO.

The country is in the advanced stages of decay - a ringing shout slowly fading over time. Every day something breaks down, dies or is deliberately destroyed. Against a backdrop of lush vegetation and fertile earth, Zimbabwe's people are wearing away, frail against the battle of attrition. The most startling decay is that of the ruling party, ZanuPF. Under Mugabe's sanction, the MDC headquarters have been raided several times since the elections. ZanuPF have failed to release election results, amplifying the tension on the streets. Many have begun to call the increased military presence a "silent coup" as voters are intimidated into supporting Mugabe in a potential run-off election. Meanwhile in the rural areas of the country, MDC supporters are being violently attacked. In at least 10 documented cases supporters have been killed, forced to hang themselves or beaten to death, and then buried immediately by their families at gunpoint.

F. M., 38 years
F was beaten by 12 soldiers with chains and fan belts.
Reason given was ferrying MDC supporters to pre-election rallies.
His son was also severely beaten.



L.M., 62 years
Brother of the deceased Tapiwa
Mhereyenyoka, Karoi
Bashed on the head with a rock and left unconscious.



D.F., 45 years
Mbwadzi Village
D was tied to the door of his hut and set alight.



T.L., 38 years
Mutekede Village
T was burned with plastic for "being MDC"



On Friday afternoon I visit Dr. Francis Lovemore, the primary care physician at the Counseling Services Unit on Raleigh Road in downtown Harare. The CSU typically deals with patients suffering from psychological problems. In the past 3 weeks she has received up to 10 patients a day that are victims of this post-election violence. Some arrive and must immediately be hospitalized due to severe bodily damage.

I phone her ahead of time and set an appointment for 12:30. I arrive and find her standing at the door to the center, visibly upset. She immediately asks if I'm the American journalist. The word spoken – journalist – hangs like a noose in the air. Before I can explain that I am only a writer here to listen, she quickly tells me that the MDC headquarters are being raided and hundreds of people are being arrested. Because of the steady flow of traffic between her counseling center and the headquarters, she assumes they will come to her next. I explain that I only have 2 days to be here in Harare and she welcomes me in for 10 minutes to speak with one of her colleagues. Zachariah Gobi takes me upstairs past an entire waiting room full of ZanuPF victims. They look relatively healthy, if not tired and shaken. The halls are dark. We sit in an office and I open up a binder sitting on the table. The first image is a close-up shot of a man's bashed mouth, lips swollen and few teeth remaining, taken 24 April 2008.

The atmosphere is very tense as Gobi explains the current situation and the risk of accepting these MDC supporters that have survived ZanuPF brutality. The center is in danger of being shut down because they are helping these victims. Dr. Lovemore has been jailed on more than one occasion - a lonely voice fighting with heroic effort to care for those that support regime change in this desperate African state.

As we pass the waiting room on our way out, all eyes turn to us and a counselor calls out for patient number 24. I pray that no plain-clothes officers have seen me as I drive away.

The next morning I get a call from Dr. Lovemore. She has arranged for me to visit with patients who have suffered the worst attacks and survived. They are staying at a medical facility/halfway house under assumed names; few are aware that they stay here to heal. I interviewed four of these patients over the course of three and a half hours last Saturday afternoon.

N.M., 32 years
Kotwa, Mudzi North Province.
N was accused of being an MDC member.
His shop was looted.
They beat his hands and back with branches and iron rods.



T.H. 44 years
Kotwa, Mudzi North Province.
T was beaten on two occasions before escaping.
He was beaten with clubs and branches.



Norris,
Kotwa, Mudzi North province,
250 km from Harare.

“When we arrived to vote, the voting station officer asked us if we needed help to vote. Many raised their hands in fear. I was one that did not raise my hand. Our vote is our own. They took note of all those who did not raise their hands. When the voting was counted they wrote the numbers on the outside wall. MDC had received 210 votes in my province. That was the number that they tried to round up. One man for every vote against ZanuPF. When I was beaten there was about 30 of us.

6 men approached me all ZanuPF. One of them was a police officer and told me that he had a case against me. They pointed their guns to me and said come to the police station. When we arrived there they told us to lie face down on the ground. It was me and 20 others. That was when they began to beat me. They put the heel of their boot against the back of my neck so that I couldn't turn. I tasted the earth. They struck us with rough branches from a tree. This is why there are so many punctures. I was vomiting blood. My urine and everything still contains much blood.

Some of the men who were beaten were extremely close to death. The ZanuPF Youth didn't want any of us to die on the premises so they forced us to get up and return to our homes. We were not allowed to help those who were close to death. These men made movement from fear for their lives.

I made it to the hospital but they would not treat me because they knew why I had been beaten. A man I do not know took me to Harare in his car. It happened 18 April. I don't know where my family is. My wife is 31 and I have 2 children, 4 and 8 months.

Tondirai,
Kotwa, Mudzi North province

“I was informed that the ZanuPF Youth were coming 'for peacekeeping.' I ran to my village and found soldiers beating people in the street. I got to my home without being seen and took my family into the bush. There we spent three days. I finally left them to go home and get things we needed. The ZanuPF Youth were waiting in ambush for me. They shouted, “You have MDC smoke in your head! We will replace it with ZanuPF smoke.” There they began to beat me. They threw



**I will
never
retreat.**

me into one of their vehicles and we went to the station. On the way there we met a war vet and when he found out who I was he made me get out of the vehicle. I was again forced to lie down and beaten afresh.

A ZanuPF crowd in the distance heard me crying out and thought it was ZanuPF being beaten by MDC. As they approached, the men who were beating me thought it was MDC and fled leaving me on the ground. I crawled to the bush before the other ZanuPF crowd arrived.

I went to the police and reported the case. They gave me a report so that I would be treated when I arrived to the hospital but the hospital would not treat me. Those who were supposed to treat me were the same ones who had caused the beating to happen.

All the ambulances sent to my province did not get through because ZanuPF knew that they would find us there.

I have a wife, 38 and 5 children.

D. D., 46 years
Nyamandandara Village, Mudzi North.
D was beaten with iron rods by a Zanu PF MP and the ZanuPF Youth.
He sustained two broken arms and left leg,
as well as many broken ribs.



Danius,
MDC district organizing secretary,
Kotwa, Mudzi North province

“My child ran into the house and screamed that Zanu PF Youth were at our neighbor. I ran out to see what was happening down the road. When I returned I found the front half of my house on fire. We managed to put it out but I knew they would return. I went to the police down the road 25 kilometres and informed them that ZanuPF Youth had come and burned a part of my house. They arrested me on false charges that I had stolen a ZanuPF vehicle. They let me go later that day.

I returned home that evening and I saw ZanuPF Youth approaching with branches and clubs. I took my family into the back of the house. They were outside the house shouting. I knew then that I had to run out and meet them so that they would not get my family. I said goodbye to my wife and told her to escape through the back when I ran out the front. I went out and was surrounded by them.

They beat me until I thought I would die. Both my arms are broken in many places up to the shoulder. My left leg will not work again. Two of my ribs are smashed. My family escaped.

When they were finished they looked down at me and said, 'tonight we will come back to kill you.' I could not move but I knew I had to leave. Later my nine-year-old daughter came from the bush behind the house and I shouted to her, 'I am dying! Run and get the neighbor.' My neighbor came and brought me into the bush. I was alone, my family did not find me. I stayed there through the night. The next afternoon my neighbor came back and they put me into a car that took me to Harare.

I will never retreat. They have already crippled me. They tell me that I've sold the country to the whites for voting MDC. It has been 14 days. I have no news of my family. My children are 20, 14, 9, 6 and 4 months.

They take. They burn Zimbabwe. We are dying.

The last evening I went with friends to the Book Café, Harare's last speakeasy. Here the mic is open to anyone and any opinion. You could say that all who voice are willing to face jail the moment they step off the stage. A reggae collective called Transit Crew was on fire that night and we danced, black and white together like it was the last day. A man sang Bob Marley's Redemption Song and the entire place was silenced. The enormity of hearing that song in that city overwhelmed the jubilant crowd. My beer cost Z\$200,000,000. The joy cost nothing. The joy was freely, adamantly given.

Tandi, Kotwa, Mudzi North province

"Four of us were walking together and we saw the ZanuPF Youth approaching. We ran but they caught me and forced me to the water. 'You have to surrender your information to us. You are a son of ZanuPF. We baptize you in the name of ZanuPF.'

I was drowning. My mind started to go dark as I prayed to God. I do not know what happened but suddenly the men holding me under the water were gone and my feet found the ground. I lay on the bank of the river coughing and choking. My friends found me and took me to Harare in a man's car.

We are punished because we do not accept ZanuPF as God. This is why we are punished. Many days in a row we go without food. Sometimes we are forced to drink standing water. They take. They burn Zimbabwe. We are dying.

T.K., 41 years
T was nearly drowned in a river near his village.
He was "baptized" a son of ZanuPF and left for dead.

you are living:
the darks are dark but the lights are very bright

where one is weak another is strong
the darkest hour is just before dawn

zimbabwe, I am honored to witness your hope

