

Preventing a Genocide in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Great man and women have spent much of their time studying Genocide and some have died while doing so, leaving others to continue carrying on the work and who similarly, have died also. We too, are in the danger of falling victims, and we in turn end up being statistician in genocidal matters and die still, trying to find our ways in the jungles this heinous sin.

In the recent past the story of mass killings of people in Africa has become the subject of considerable volume of academic work. These writings have begun to explore the complexity of genocide in shaping various African social formations. The general emphasis in this literature has been to tell the story of what has happened, especially with the case of Rwanda, and how the world has perceived and responded to these heinous killings. While this literature has been quite useful in elaborating the extent of damage it has done to a peoples' group, our conscious responsibilities have not been expanded to the formulation of measures that guarantee that the condemned activities in Rwanda maybe be preventable, never to be seen again, and that there be wider be protection of people when ever these circumstances do occur.

Typically, genocide has been presented to the world as a game of numbers, a game of numbers where it calls for the killings of a thousand people, before anyone take a watch at the scene. In the case of a relative Zimbabwe it is a question of definition.

The question to ask is, was there ever been a genocide in Zimbabwe, were there signs to show that a genocide was going to happen in Zimbabwe. The subject genocide, if it remains humanly insensitive and continue to narrowly classify, ethnic cleansing that pariah regimes perpetuate in terms of death, disregarding the deliberate political induced violence upon a people, as axis of genocide. We might be faced with a situation where we will become the robot machines that come into action in barely circumstances.

Background

The events that characterize genocide in Zimbabwe begin in the early 1980s when a notoriously trained 5 brigade was formed to combat what Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, then said, combating malcontents when there was little civil unrest in Zimbabwe at the time. The brigade of 3500 men uphemirically known as 'Gukurahundi' *meaning the rain that washes chaff before the spring rains, Zanu-PF *youth brigade, CIO and Police support Unit, then unleashed in late January in Matabeleland North. Within weeks, the troops had murdered more than two thousand civilians, beaten thousand more, and destroyed hundreds of homesteads. The impact on the communities they passed through was shocking.

Most of the dead were shot in public executions, often after being forced to dig their own graves in front of their family and fellow villagers. At the same time as 5 brigades was sent into the area the

Government had introduced a strict curfew on the region. This prevented anybody from entering or leaving the area, banned all forms of transport, and prevented movement in the region from dusk to dawn. A food curfew was also in force [1] with stores being closed. People caught using bicycles or donkey carts were shot. No journalists were allowed near the region. This situation means that it was very hard to get news of events out of the region, and hard to judge the truth of the early accounts. However, as some people managed to flee the area, stories of the atrocities began to filter. By the end of 1984 when the brigade was withdrawn twenty thousand people had died.

Why is Zimbabwe a special case to look at? It maybe the regime's calculated plans to exterminate political opponents. A regime that trains an army specifically meant to obliterate opposition political voice, arms youths with weapons of war, hunts responsible citizens in the middle of the night, gouge and butcher them at will, erects bases and compounds of torture where rape and gruesome acts of torture are committed, can surely amount to a case which esteemed scholars might want to question the motive behind, perhaps call it the genesis of a genocide.

What has been clear over the years is that; political instigated violence targeted to a certain political section or party, may end up targeting a people's group as in the case of the Matabeleland atrocities in the early 80s, or the whites in the subsequent late 90s. What scholars are faced with is an entirely new approach to committing criminal acts against humanity, as the perpetrators know the subject has been narrowly defined.

There are indeed serious arguments about why the regime in Zimbabwe and its treatment of the population might not constitute genocide. The lack of intentions to eradicate a clearly defined ethnic, religious or racial group as such, as the UN Convention on the protection and punishment of genocide states, being at the forefront. However, there are also reasons why scholars of genocide and mass violence should deal with the example of Zimbabwe. The first is the political and moral one. We have to get away from the credo that only genocide amount to a truly terrible atrocity that merits our attention. The death of several thousands people either by the passivity of its government must constitute genocide.²

Scholars agreed that the axis of hate speech through media, training militia groups and other Special Forces or arming people in a bid to obliterate their voices has been documented as the chief drivers in committing acts of atrocities. German, Bosnia and of late Rwanda experienced this, although it all ended up targeting certain people's groups. The difference in Zimbabwe's case is that the assaults are targeted at individuals and political groups, with the exception of the Matabeleland atrocities that centered on the Ndebele.

The primary targets in the later case are leaders and officials of opposition parties. Many have been killed, maimed or have had their property destroyed. Their Supporters have come face to face with the brutal large groups of armed militias who roam the rural areas, disrupting the lives of rural people, abducting and torturing opposition supporters and professionals like doctors, teachers and nurses. In urban centers the army and Central [2] intelligence organization which has largely remained biased has carried out genocidal acts.

Preventing a Genocide

While the intentions of the regime to engage in genocidal acts are clearly defined in Zimbabwe, the nation has not passively sat and appealed to outsiders to deal with the crisis. People centered interventions came to the fore as it became apparent that many lives will be endangered and family lives destroyed forever.

Like the German and most recent Rwanda. The media took centre stage in perpetuating genocidal acts. Civic organizations in Zimbabwe became weary of that and thus moved to counter the state sponsored propaganda by establishing media monitoring watchdog organizations, such as the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ), the Media Institute of Southern Africa Zimbabwe (MISA-Zim) Amani Trust, Lawyers For Human Rights, Human Rights Forum, who distributed information alerts as well as documenting and chronicling events taking place in the urban and countryside where bases and torture camps had been set. They provided sordid details of information that fed into the international communications channels. Private radio station working in and without the country also came in hand as the situation deteriorated.

It should be noted though that the level of political intolerance by the Mugabe regime was turning to systematic means of silencing dissent at whatever cost, and more appropriately to the vices of genocidal acts such as witnessed before in Matabeleland. Matabeleland atrocities were largely political, hence the reasons why Mugabe is still not indicted at Hague to this day. Yet the facts still remains that this was one heinous act committed upon a people's group. The facts are that 20000 innocent civilians lost their lives and whether this fits the definition is another thing. The facts are that since 2000-2008 more than 2000 people have been killed and were it not for the civic organizations I have alluded to in this paper; they could have been more than that.

We take note of Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka's words addressing the issue of the media in propagating genocide; could not be made to speak or sing at any time of the day. It began its monologue early in the morning, first playing 'God Save the King.' The box went silent some time in the afternoon, resumed late afternoon, then, around ten or eleven in the evening sang 'God Save the King' once more and went to sleep. Because the box spoke incessantly and appeared to have no interest in a response, it soon earned the name [in Yoruba] as 'oromagb'esi [that is, "One who speaks without expecting a reply."] At certain set hours [, Soyinka continues], the box delivered THE NEWS. The News soon became an object of worship When the hour approached, something happened to . . . [the men of the family and their male neighbors]. It did not matter what they were doing, they rushed to our house to hear the Oracle.

The media encouraged by Akuza (a group with the President loyalist), played a major role in inciting genocide by convincing many Hutus that they themselves would soon become victims of genocide mounted by the Tutsis.

In the industrial world, Nazi Germany pioneered the use of newspapers and radio broadcast to promote genocide. Although the actual mass murder of the Jewish people was never directly mentioned in official German government propaganda, Josef Goebbles prepared the way by instructing editors to abandon every last shred of bourgeois sentimental attitudes towards Jews and to impress on the public

that the destruction of the Jews would not be a loss to mankind. We have had similar lines in Zimbabwe where the former Zimbabwean Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, employed the like instructions and sentiments like that of German Julius Strider, who felt certain groups of people have to be destroyed in the interest of mankind.

After a decade of gross human rights violations and the atrocities of the early 1980s, people are generally agreed that Zimbabwe needs a transitional justice system and process that would guarantee maximum accountability for the committed atrocities with a view to facilitating sustainable national healing and just peace. The argument for a just transitional; process is premised on the argument that families and relatives of those who disappeared need to know what happened to their loved ones and have a sense of who is responsible.

There are also strong views that the alleged violence and political murders of the past ten years as well as the massacres of the early 1980s cannot simply be swept under the carpet under the pretext of preserving national cohesion and unity during the transactional period. Claims are that perpetrators of the worst abuses must be brought to justice, and if individuals are to be forgiven, it must be done publicly as part of a transparent truth, justice and reconciliation process. The central objective of the proposed transactional justice process should be seen as an instrument that holds individuals, public and private institutions as well as officials who may have been responsible either because they directly caused harm, contributed to the creation of a climate of hate and repression or failed to take appropriate steps to prevent direct violence from occurring.

As people move away from the fields politics of Zimbabwe and fractured histories, we can see the continuing effects of the political violence period in the daily lives of the Zimbabwean people. Poor economic performance, exacerbated by the alleged sponsored violent political instability, has manifested itself in chronic human insecurities. To outsiders, it is often difficult to appreciate what the political instability in Zimbabwe translates to in human terms. For the majority of Zimbabweans, the social-political instability means increasingly inadequate diets, lack of income, forced displacement and destitution. [3]

There is great cause of concern Zimbabwe when one considers the high numbers of survivors in the country. Many of these are survivors from the 1980s violence and the multiple impacts on people in physical, psychological and material terms have been enormous. People have been tortured, seen their dead ones murdered or abducted, had their houses burnt. No efforts have been made to alleviate their plight and those who cause the damage have been not answerable. The possibilities of healing or repairing the damage in this situation remain slim and require the input of resources and good will on the part of the international community, and scholars in genocide in particular.

Way Forward

As envisaged in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document of the United Nations, the international community has the prime responsibility to protect (R2P) populations from imminent and massive human rights abuses and other humanitarian crises, such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. R2P is a new international doctrine obliging the international community to intervene

in order to prevent gross human rights abuses once a State fails in its duty to protect and shield its own population from grave breaches of international law.

Governments should no longer be allowed to hide behind the citadel of the waning doctrine of sovereignty and non-interference merely to shield perpetrators from punitive measures. Since the Matabeleland massacres in early 1980s, it has increasingly become clear that the government of Zimbabwean President Mugabe has become a danger to human security in all material aspects and respects. Thus, more peer pressure must be brought to bear on him and the regional bodies and governments in the region.

This paper also proposes that there be wider recognition of the need to capacitate civic organization in and around in early warning methods so that they are better equipped to bring to the fore any form / genesis of violence of the later.

There are some things that individual genocide scholars, as well as their professional organizations, could do to reach more teachers and students in genocide education that might help close the gap between research and education. One principal goal should be to break down the two culture split between scholars in the humanities and those in history, psychology, and the social sciences. They should try to publish more critical articles and books explicitly addressed to the need for more in-depth discussion of prevention in genocide courses, and at museums and memorials. Wherever possible, critical articles should be submitted to journals, symposia, and other media likely to be read or seen by adherents of violence as well as genocide researchers. Efforts should be made to organize national or regional conferences on teaching about genocide with a focus on prevention. Calls for papers should be sent to a wide range of scholars, including those who are strongly inclined toward and those who are drawn to a more . [4]

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