

# Towards peace, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe: Theatricalising political violence through *Rituals* (2011)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reconciliatory possibilities of the theatrical piece *Rituals* (2011) penned by Stephen Chifunyise and directed and produced by Daves Guzha. The *Rituals*' theatrical piece memorialises as well as condemns a culture of violence demonstrated during the 2008 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. Through "ritualized" performance, a community embarks on a metaphysical journey focused on exorcising the ghosts of political violence still haunting individuals, communities, politicians, and the nation as a whole. These day-to-day modes of healing and reconciliation, dramatised through *Rituals*, suggest that communities can create platforms for peace, cultivate tolerance and permit dialogue to prevail if victims are brought face-to-face with perpetrators of violence with the hope of ironing out political differences. It is going to be argued in this paper that although the political drama in *Rituals*, centralises politicians as major culprits that fomented violence, its failure to go beyond political meta-narratives constricts its capacity to explore the complexities of violence in Zimbabwe. These complexities are informed by factors such as lack of voter education, existence of age-old grudges, and fragmentation of community values, among others. Another critical strand to be explored in this article is one that interrogates *Rituals*' potential to reach out to the wider audiences at grassroots levels, since the political drama in *Rituals* speaks to the "upper class" and intellectual circles, thereby foreclosing critical debate and "voices" that should emerge from "below" which are communities many of whom were directly involved. By adopting a down-top methodological approach, the article seeks to place communities at the forefront in confronting questions of violence, peace-building and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:**

rituals, theatre, peace, reconciliation, Zimbabwe, political violence 2008

**Introduction**

On the cover of the DVD of the theatrical piece *Rituals*, it is written: “An excellent rendition of the very complex process of allowing communities to heal the rifts in their midst while the macro conditions which caused the rifts in the first place, have gone away” (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2011). The above quotation centralises the issue that this paper intends to explore – which is that, for genuine peace, healing and reconciliation to prevail in Zimbabwe, communities should be directly involved. Through the analysis of the theatrical piece, *Rituals*, it is going to be argued that in the 2008 post-conflict era, the process of negotiating peace and reconciliation is not a preserve for the elite class but that it should start with communities that bear the “scars” and “wounds” of political violence. It is also going to be argued that the macro-conditions that caused political violence in 2008, have not completely disappeared but are still lurking in the shadows. They occasionally come out to inflict pain on those people holding opposing ideas. As the nation approaches the 2013 general election, there is need for communities to expose the perpetrator hiding in the “shadows”, in order to teach him/her that “never again” shall Zimbabwe subscribe to the “gospel” of political violence. The entry point to this paper proffers a historico-theoretical backdrop which seeks to: (1) provide a broader historical account and theoretical approaches under-girding the questions of conflict, peace and reconciliation; (2) acknowledge that questions of violence, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe cannot ignore international and regional trends. The historical background is preceded by an analysis of the importance and limitations of African traditional methods in promoting peace and reconciliation. A special reference shall be made to the communal-ritualistic model that focuses on ritual methods and their traditional and cultural imperatives in promoting healing, peace and reconciliation. The paper will zero in on the dramatic text of *Rituals* to find the extent to which it debates issues dealing with healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. It is also interesting to find out the degree to which the sensibility of the director has been infiltrated by official meta-discourses that can force him to muzzle critical “voices” from ordinary people. Last but not least, the paper will elect for cross-cultural methods to explain the benefits of merging different approaches to confront the complex issues of healing, peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

**Peace, healing and reconciliation: the broader historical context(s)**

Questions to do with peace, truth, healing, justice and restitution are problematic. This is largely so because there has been a tendency by the ruling elite classes to impose state controlled mechanisms to promote peace and reconciliation that are monologic and de-

terministic in stature. The result is a top-down methodological approach that “tunnels visions” and neglect traditional and culturally sensitive methods of renovating impaired social relations. In fact, Huyse (2008) notes that in the 1940s and mid-1980s, the answer to questions of violence, peace and reconciliation was self-imposed “silences” and prolonged periods of “undecidability” that discouraged the idea of re-visiting and confronting painful experiences, memories and legacies. It was believed that talking about painful experiences was like opening up old wounds with the consequence of dampening the spirit of reconciliation. Another dominant strategy encouraged by the elites was to “close the chapter” reflective of painful memories through historical amnesia and denialism (Rwafa 2012). However, as more people demanded justice from past wrong-doings, there was a paradigm shift in terms of understanding the concepts of peace, healing and reconciliation and their practical manifestations. For instance, to fight the contagion of impunity, a legal foundation was laid in the form of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) and the Geneva Convention of 1949. The International Criminal Court was also established, and its mandate is to prosecute people that are found guilty of fomenting or committing crimes against humanity such as massacres, genocide or holocaust. The legalistic frame instituted by ICC understands peace as more than mere absence of war or violent conflict. Peace, healing and reconciliation entail key concepts of justice and social stability that communities would need to cultivate. Therefore, through teaching, researching and propagating, “peace, healing and reconciliation studies” (Malan 2009: 13) can be endorsed by the collective work of people addressing the subterranean causes of conflict and violence. Understanding the tapestries and circles of violence can open possibilities of understanding epistemic conditions that generate it.

Much criticism has, however, been levelled against the ICC for being Eurocentric and racist in dealings with “people of colour”. In fact, the African critical canon lampoons the ICC for lacking balanced representation between whites and “people of colour.” The ICCs lack of balance makes it apply law selectively, and thus, compromises its standards and impartiality. The foregoing argument is one that the African Union used in order to shield Omar Al Bashir who committed crimes against humanity in Sudan’s Darfur region. However, although it was necessary for the African Union to prove that her “voice” must be counted internationally through defending a besieged African leader; ironically, her action may suggest that African leaders can just kill ordinary people with impunity. More so, the meta-narrative promoted by AU about violence and questions of justice and accountability in Darfur, is reflective of an elitist “top-down” methodological approach that drowns the “voices” of ordinary Darfurians on what type of ruling was supposed to be meted on Omar Al Bashir. The reality is that when the African Union finally succeeded in helping to negotiate peace between Northern Sudan dominated by Arabs and Southern Sudan dominated by blacks, the Darfur genocide had already squandered thousands if not millions of precious lives that could have contributed immensely to the development of Sudan. The classical case of Omar Al Bashir brings to the fore the critical question on how to balance the demands of justice against the political demands of a regime in power (Huyse 2008). An attempt to answer the above conundrum invites two theoretical fronts.

The first is a “victim-oriented” approach based on legal principles of retribution and restitution. The “victim-oriented” approach is premised on the understanding that society has a moral and legal obligation to prosecute perpetrators of violence, since retribution and restitution is exactly what most victims want. In a similar fashion, Sontag (2004) argues that since pain is untransferable, intrinsic and unique to an individual, there is a special need to heal the wounds of victims and restore their dignity and self-confidence. Thus, bringing victims face-to-face with perpetrators of violence allows perpetrators to publicly acknowledge their past sins as well as afford them a chance to ask for forgiveness. This will help the victims to confront their “internal fears” with the hope of cultivating self-dignity and self-respect. ‘The second is a ‘perpetrator-oriented’ approach, based on the understanding that if the perpetrator of violence is made to account for the crimes that s/he committed; this will help to up-hold the principles of justice as well as bring peace to victims who need to live beyond the horrors of violent, past experiences.

## **Peace, healing and reconciliation: the African traditional paradigm**

The paradigm shift in transitional justice has opened “discursive spaces” within the forte of what in African traditional and cultural discourses is referred to as “indigenous, home grown, locally owned, culturally embedded” (Huyse 2008: 6) mechanisms. In Western epistemology, the term “traditional” tends to suggest the existence of deeply ingrained normative structures that are fixed, unchangeable, and therefore, incontestable. However, as viewed through African spectacles – whether social, political and economic – the term “traditional” is transcendental because it reflects that past memories are a repository of valuable collective knowledge systems. The reality is that African traditions cannot be said to be culturally inert or static; they are known to respond to changes resulting from several factors – both internal and external. At this point, it is pertinent to posit the question: How justified is the label “traditional” if mechanisms of promoting peace, healing and reconciliation in Africa are subject to continuous change? Thus, if change is allowed to take place within the cultural “spaces” of African traditional institutions, then these “spaces” must be viewed as fertile grounds for promoting long-lasting peace, healing and reconciliation. There are principally two ways that critical issues of justice, peace, healing and reconciliation are approached in African traditional context(s). The first one lies at the level of individuals and local communities. Through “community-based” methodology, it is understood that healing the wounds of victims and survivors is the responsibility of the whole community. The second method is focused on social repair, which implies the restoration of broken relationships between members of a group and between communities. Both systems consider reconciliation, accountability, truth telling and reparation as effective methods to achieve healing. In addition, the Penal Reform International (2002: 112) presents a broad-based methodological approach to questions of justice and peace in Sub-Saharan Africa, and this implies that:

- The focus is on reconciliation and restoration for social harmony.

- The emphasis is on restorative penalties.
- The problem is viewed as that of the whole community or group.
- The enforcement of decisions is secured through social pressure.
- There is no professional legal representation.
- Decisions are confirmed through rituals aimed at reintegration.
- The rules of evidence and procedure are flexible.
- The process is voluntary and decisions are based on agreement.
- Traditional arbitrators are appointed from within the community on the basis of status or lineage.
- There is a higher degree of public participation.

A closer look at all ten points formulated by Penal Reform International (2002) reflects that much emphasis is placed on individual and community participation. Traditional and community participatory methodologies acknowledge that participation is not something grafted onto or inserted into a developmental paradigm. Rather, participation is an open and transactive method recognizing “voices” of the ordinary people in conceiving and implementing practical solutions to issues dealing with peace, healing and reconciliation. This way, the tendency by political elites to impose solutions from “above” without wider consultations, is brought under crisis. Imposing solutions from “above” subscribes to the “political elite theory” (Hamber and Kelly 2005: 40) that views peace as a process that comes when it is in the interest of political leaders to take necessary steps. This theory underestimates the potential of ordinary people to effect or block transformation. In Africa, community-participatory methodologies manifesting in the form of ritual ceremonies have the potential to challenge political elitist theories.

## The ritualistic-communal model

Although Western justice systems claim to be based on truth, reparation system and accountability, the question of restitution or restorative justice is observed, to a lesser degree. Contrary to this, in some traditional African philosophy and belief systems, a person who died through violent means will always come to demand justice from the family or person who has killed him/her. This calls for the implementation of both retributive and restorative justices. For instance, in Zimbabwe the spirit of the murdered person manifests in the form of *ngozi* (vengeful spirit) demanding both retributive and restorative justice from the family of a member who committed the crime of killing. The ritual that is done – *kuripa ngozi*, is part of the process of cleansing the spirit of the murdered, and restoration of the dignity of the murderer and his/her family. Through *kuripa ngozi*, peace, healing and reconciliation is promoted through both the family of the victim and that of the perpetrator. In a similar fashion, Huysse asserts that:

The specificity of the *mato oput* ceremonies in northern Uganda and that of the efforts to reintegrate former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, is the use of ritualistic ingredients – stepping on an egg, washing away the evil past with holy water or oil, drinking the juice of a plant or a tree, evoking the ancestors, provoking trance (Huysse 2008: 68).

Ritual performance is cathartic; its psychological and therapeutic dimensions are based on understanding one's "inner" and "outer" feelings of guilt, shame, insecurity and self-hatred. When subjects of violence evoke the spirit of ancestors through ritual performance, they transcend physical boundaries to enter into the metaphysical realm, where it is believed that there is no pain and no violence. Healing and spiritual atonement take precedence as victims and perpetrators confront the "self" and their weaknesses in order to fight against the condition of hopelessness. In Mozambique, African people believe in the atonement of the spirit of a person who died violently. Igreja and Dias-Lambranca aptly capture how Mozambicans appease the spirit of a murdered person.

People in Gorongosa, as many other parts of Africa, live in a social world that traditionally practices [sic] the belief that the death of individuals through traumatic acts, or the breaking of taboos such as the killing of human beings without metaphysical and/or social legitimization, is an offence that requires immediate redress through atonement rituals. If wrongdoing is not acknowledged, the spirit of the innocent victim will return to the realm of the living to fight for the justice (Igreja & Dias-Lambranca: 2008: 14).

At Gorongosa, the traditional role of *Magamba* spirit mediums is/was to testify against perpetrators of violence who caused havoc during the civil war. It is believed that if the spirit of the dead is not appeased, it will come back and avenge the death. Thus, the need to re-visit the past is done with the express aim of finding out the injustices as well as acknowledging the wrongdoing, so that restoration and restitution can be effected. Igreja and Dias-Lambranca (2008) assert that one critical aspect about the *gamba* healer is that he/she is responsible for reviving hope by counselling victims of the civil war. In fact, the discursive "space" that is created for the victim and perpetrators of violence, provides an assurance that at least there is new life and hope after violence.

In Rwanda, the 1994 post-conflict scenario was characterised by the establishment of the *Gacaca* (meaning "justice on the grass") communal courts systems, whose mandate was to prosecute people accused of inciting violence that ultimately degenerated to genocide, responsible for the decimation of 800 000 lives of Tutsis and some moderate Hutus. Ingaelaere (2008) writes that the objective of the *Gacaca* was/is to promote truth, accountability and reconciliation. The major strength of the *Gacaca* is that it is a local institution owned and administered by the locals. Its philosophy is based on the belief that for true reconciliation to prevail, it is the community that must be centrally involved in trying the criminal cases of the killers. However, despite some significant achievements made by the *Gacacas*, Mamdani (1996: 4) argues that this traditional court system in Rwanda exemplifies "the pursuit of justice without reconciliation". What Mamdani (1996) seems to be suggesting here, is that the ideological fault lines of the *Gacaca* are that its selective application of law creates possibilities for existence of hard feelings among some Hutus. For example, Nkiko Nsengimana (a Hutu) quoted in Martin (2002) feels that the *Gacaca*



is not impartial because it is controlled by the ruling elite class that is predominantly Tutsi. Alluding to the failure of the *Gacaca* to effect justice on Rwanda Patriotic Front (RFP) soldiers led by Paul Kagame (who killed Hutu refugees at Kibeho camp and the forests of Congo), Nsengimana (Martin 2002: 13) comments that: "... The death of a large number of Hutu populations goes far beyond the framework of 'vengeance' and blind repression... what we're dealing here with are crimes against humanity". The weakness of having meta-discourses cascading from "above" to affect the way the *Gacacas* operate, is also noted by Lemarchand (1998) when he argues that the prospects for genuine reconciliation through the *Gacacas* remain bleak, especially considering the fact that the verdicts of these traditional courts were/are overwhelmingly biased on the side of official "truths". Ingaelaere 2008 is a bit off the mark when she argues that one overarching and omnipresent opinion that accompanies the *Gacaca* process, is that the "truth" is absent. The reality is that "truth" is present and yet that "truth" is tailor-made to suit the ideological ends of the ruling elite who are predominantly Tutsi.

The limited "truth" available to the public is seriously compromised or tainted by the defining parameters of what "truth" can be, methodologically and ideologically, within Rwandan culture with its historical baggage marked by ethnic conflicts. To put it differently, the available "truth" has a high degree of instrumentality as it is sought through confrontation along group based (mostly ethnic) lines, not deliberation or dialogue. A revisionist stance proffered by Ingaelaere (2008: 56) is that in post-conflict Rwanda, "truth" is "partial" in the sense of "incomplete" and "deformed", but also "one-sided" and "one dimensional", lacking a broad based contextual anchoring.

In the following section, it is interesting to delve into the text of the theatrical piece *Rituals* (2011) to find out the extent to which its director/producer has used the traditional methodology of ritual performance to symbolically represent community "voices" in dealing with critical questions of peace, healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. It is also cogent to find out the extent to which the director's sensibility has or has not been infiltrated by "official" versions of "truth" about the political violence that rocked Zimbabwe during 2008 presidential elections.

## ***Rituals* (2011): exorcising ghosts of 2008 political violence in Zimbabwe**

The theatrical piece *Rituals* begins by showing visual images of newspaper cut-ups. Two of the newspaper read *Teaching political tolerance through drama*, and *Rooftop marks a mark in Kenya*. The idea of theatre being used as a tool for teaching political tolerance contextualises the platform that informs the discourses of *Rituals*. This is echoed through the opening remarks proffered by Stephen Chifunyise – the playwright, who outlines the aims of the project that conceived *Rituals*.

When we make this contribution, our aims are that we want to be part of dialogue of national unity, part of a process of national healing, part of the questions that need to be asked, so that we can really

have a people-driven national healing process. I went around and collected views from the people. This is part two of 'Heal the wounds' project (Chifunyise, 2011).

In his remarks, Chifunyise raises critical issues that if national healing in Zimbabwe has to be meaningful, it must be a broad-based exercise that carries the "voices" of Zimbabweans of all walks of life. A people-driven national healing involves sounding out views of people, many of whom were affected by violence. If communities are involved, they have the privilege of "owning" their narratives reflecting the realities of violence, and this can make them come out with ways of healing the wounds of the victims. Machakanja (2010: 8) points out that in Zimbabwe "...there are arguments as to whether the national healing and reconciliation project should be led by politicians, given the politics of partisanship that have characterized the political landscape of Zimbabwe since its independence". The production of *Rituals*, with its drive towards a "people-oriented" methodological approach, seems to confirm the fears and scepticism that many people hold about the capacity and "genuine-ness" of Zimbabwean politicians in tackling questions of healing and reconciliation. In Zimbabwe, experience has shown that healing and reconciliation promoted at a national level, have tended to be dominated by the elite class that uses state power and resources without considering the views of the majority of people. Cultural and traditional ways of promoting peace, healing and reconciliation are side-lined. Against this backdrop, theatre can be a very effective cultural tool to tell Zimbabwe's political leadership that ordinary people can mobilise themselves in order to articulate their feelings about ways of approaching critical issues of peace, healing and reconciliation. The communality of *Rituals* is captured through the poetic vibrancy and eloquence of the drum beater who presents to the audiences, community elders that take part in the ritual of exorcism:

Welcome to Nyazema Village. Welcome to the village between the mountain of Penhalonga, the mountain of Chimanimani and the mountain of Mutare. I welcome you Shumba, Nyati,--mashuma. I welcome you Member of Parliament, Sarudzai (*Rituals* 2011).

Naming and mapping topology for Africans is a way of showing that landscapity is a culturally charged act. It centralises and focalises the geographical location of a community as well as capturing the spirituality of local people – some of whom are introduced through their totems such as *shumba* and *nyati*. Ironically, the Member of Parliament who is the "eye" and "ear" of the political leadership is simply introduced by her name as Sarudzai. That has a cultural purpose. Like in the Bakhtinian (1984) carnivalesque, the act of calling a Member of Parliament by name is meant to "de-naturalise" and "de-essentialise" the intimidatory political aura that surrounds Sarudzai. It is a brave acknowledgement that Sarudzai comes from the community; from the ordinary people who should speak to her without fear. In narratives of *Rituals* Sarudzai's actions that triggered political violence in 2008 during presidential elections through labelling and stereotyping members of the opposition parties, are condemned. Labelling and stereotyping constitutes to what Rwafa calls "epistemic conditions for violence" (2012: 315).



## Violence and its epistemicism: (re) enactments through theatre

Studies of genocide and massacres around the world reflect that victims are killed through language of stereotyping before they are physically eliminated. Through *Rituals*, Sarudzai is accused of marking out people so that they can be politically persecuted through her acts of name calling. Symbolically, Sarudzai is the embodiment of the official “voices” that called upon youths to label people with divergent or opposing ideas in preparation for their political persecution. For her part as an instigator of violence, Sarudzai is condemned and humanised through the speech given by the drum beater:

Elders of this land, let’s speak to our Member of Parliament Sarudzai sitting there (pointing at Sarudzai). You all know what she did in June 2008. She called her parents witches ‘varoyi’. She called all of us names in this village, ‘zvimbwasungata’, ‘mabhanditi’ because we did not belong to her political party. I know some of you have refused to shake her hand. Some of you have even refused to talk to her but now the time has come. The time has come for everything to be settled (*Rituals*, 2011).

It is evident from the above speech that, when Sarudzai selected terms such as *varoyi*, *zvimbwasungata* and *mabhanditi* she was conscious about their political ramifications. Drawing lessons from the armed struggle, a person labelled as *muroyi* (witch) was viewed as counter-productive, any enemy to the revolution and therefore, marked out for death. Although an abomination to call one’s parents *varoyi*, Sarudzai saw it fit to smear the names of her parents in 2008 so that they can be politically persecuted. The evil spirit of violence had overwhelmed her to the extent of wishing her parents dead. Sarudzai went further to call community members *zvimbwasungata* (collaborators) and *mabhanditi* (bandits). In the discourses of *chimurenga* (war of liberation), *zvimbwasungata* were viewed as the worst enemies of the revolution because they lived among the people and the comrades and yet, sold out to Rhodesian soldiers. The term was also used to refer to black soldiers who fought on the side of the Rhodesian forces. Similarly, *mabhanditi* is a derogatory term that was used to refer to black soldiers who were used to undercut the revolutionary cause of the black people in Zimbabwe. However, for *Rituals* to attribute name calling to only one political party, especially in the context of 2008, is to present a skewed picture. It is true to say that members of the opposition party created their own nomenclature to negatively label those that they perceived as their enemies. For example, during the 2008 political campaigns, it was common to hear members of the MDC party referring to the ruling ZANU PF party as *ZANU yaora* (ZANU is rotten), and to call for the elimination of the “Cock” (*Jongwe mupoto*) – one of the symbols of the ZANU PF party. As hinted through the label, the elimination would go further than winning through the “ballot box”, but also through political violence. However, if put on comparative basis, it is said that during the 2008 elections ZANU PF caused more political havoc than MDC, and that this caused Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw from the presidential race. To acknowledge that in 2008, both parties MDC and ZANU PF should be accused of fomenting political violence, albeit to varying degrees, is to resist the reification and reductive symmetries of a (single) grand political narrative (Titlestad 2004) that can emanate from either of the two

political parties. A comprehensive healing and peace process should start by addressing the root cause of violence in Zimbabwe, permitting victims and perpetrators to open up dialogue as well as agree that the “ghosts” of political violence still linger, and that they should be eliminated once and for all. The issue of opening up dialogue is supported in the draft constitution where development and implementation of national healing, unity and peaceful resolution of disputes is said to be important in facilitating dialogue among the disputants (The Sunday Mail, Feb 26-March 2, 2013: D9).

One of the critical areas that have not been explored effectively by the *Rituals*, concerns the role of the youths in Zimbabwe’s political landscape. It is not a misnomer to say that in Zimbabwe; youths are abused politically when they are told that inflicting violence on people with opposing ideas is part of the “national project” of defending one’s country. In return, they are given trivia such as beer and money to buy cigarettes. What can be said is that there is no effective youth policy that can re-channel the energies of young people towards productive areas such as agriculture. In the context of *Rituals*, a ZANU PF youth is visually captured denying that they were used as *youth militias* during the 2008 election campaigns. Such banal denialism does not help to cultivate the spirit of peace, healing and reconciliation. Actually, it exemplifies the subterranean workings of the culture of impunity that has dominated Zimbabwe’s political landscape. Within the spirit of healing and reconciliation, one would have expected the youth to confess and make resolute decisions that as youths bent on positive development, they will “never again” bow down to the self-serving interests promoted by political leaders – whether MDC or ZANU PF. The “never again” philosophy adopted by post-conflict Rwanda, can inspire Zimbabwean youths to discourage ideas that lead them into committing political violence. In fact, the “never again” philosophy is steeped in the “grassroots mobilization theory” (Hamber and Kelly: 2005) premised on the understanding that if community members mobilise enough opposition to war and conflict, political leaders will have to pay attention. However, while in Zimbabwe grassroots mobilisation can be an effective tool to counteract ill-advice from the political leadership, one should also not underestimate the power of political leaders to infiltrate and influence how community leaders handle political issues at a local level. Actually, in Zimbabwe, destroying the cohesive functioning of communities has been a deliberate, strategic policy to make communities comply with the political demands of the leadership. Moreover, in Zimbabwe, the power of politicians is evident through acts of muzzling the processes of voter education so that people get limited information about how they can exercise their freedom to select political candidates of their choice. *Rituals* can be criticised for not showing how lack of effective voter education in Zimbabwe has contributed to high incidences of political violence in 2008. In fact, the type of education that most youths received during the 2008 general election included the use of “hate speech” that was orchestrated with the aim of creating epistemic conditions for political violence. It is redeeming to note that in the draft constitution there are sections that reveal that government should develop mechanisms for early detection of potential conflicts and disputes for the establishment of possible preventive measures (The Sunday Mail, Feb 26--March 2, 2013: 9). Yet, having a constitution is one thing and sticking to terms is another thing. For, experience

has shown that a lack of will power to effectively apply the terms of the constitution by Zimbabwean political leadership has led to selective application of law in which those holding opposing ideas were targeted. Traditionally and culturally, one way of preventing potential violent conflicts is to dramatise the disastrous effects of violence through the mode of exorcism and cleansing known in Shona as *kutanda botso*.

## **Kutanda Botso as restorative justice**

The ritual of *kutanda botso* mainly practised by the Shona people, is focused on appeasing the spirit of a person who has been killed. This practice is deeply embedded in the African philosophy and belief system that the dead have a special bond with the living. If killed, a person would always come back and seek traditional justice to restore peace and stability. The killer or murderer has to seek for forgiveness after undergoing the ritual ceremony of *kutanda botso* to cleanse the blood of the dead, and exorcise the ghosts of vengeance that would otherwise haunt him/her for the rest of his/her life (Gombe 1986). *Rituals* dramatises the act of *kutanda botso* when Sarudzai is told by the community elder, VaShumba that "...it is time for you *kuti muchitanda botso*. My daughter, this is the time to remove what you said and what you did. Go there change and we begin". The protests by Sarudzai's personal assistance are rudely rebuffed, and she is told in unequivocal terms: "What we are doing here is not politics. We are doing a ritual and you have no part in it." The poetics of "ritualised" ceremony calls for community participation; it is not the hard core politics or the "dirty game" practised by politicians in which the faint-hearted cannot survive. Contrary, *kutanda botso* aims to rehabilitate the perpetrator and heal the wounds of the family that has lost a member through violent means.

For the process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation to take effect, Sarudzai must be dressed in rags. The metaphor of "from riches to rags" embodied in the character of Sarudzai – which is the central motif of *kutanda botso*, serves to warn would-be murderers or killers that the dead will not be silenced forever. When Sarudzai comes out of the changing room, she is a spectacle of ridicule dressed in tatters. Wearing rags is part of *kutanda botso*. In fact, traditionally, the subject of *kutanda botso* is expected to go begging for millet with which to brew beer for the appeasement of the anger of a parent who died before her child asked forgiveness for an offence inflicted on her (Hannan 1987). The ritual is especially done to appease the spirit of the offended mother, traditionally viewed as *mutorwa* or the married one bearing a different totem and "blood line". In the context of the Rituals, Sarudzai is expected to undergo the ritual of cleansing through rolling in the ashes. She is also expected to go to every household in the community, and kneel down to pronounce that she was foolish in 2008. Despite strong protests from her personal assistant, Sarudzai chooses to be caricatured and reduced to a spectacle of humour by wearing tattered clothes. Furthermore, to show her willingness for participation, she is captured by camera motion dancing wildly as the "ghost" of political violence is being exorcised. Through song and dramatic performance, Sarudzai is satirically reminded that she is not destined to become a life-long beggar, *handina mwana anenge rombe* but that

the ritual is a cleansing and healing process with a vision for creating a “new” future for her. However, there are some critics who think that taking a metaphysical route to solve political issues which require a legalistic approach, is an expression of banal escapism. Their argument is essentially “Western” as it does not aim to rehabilitate and incorporate in the community both the victim and the perpetrator of violence (Tutu 1996). In fact, in African philosophical thought, the concept of “self” can only become important if viewed through the cultural prism of community and collective participation. Thus, when the personal assistant told Sarudzai that she should seek permission from the party to go with the ritual, Sarudzai tells her without shame: “I’m doing this for myself, my family and my community”. The liberatory discourses underscored at this level by Sarudzai can suggest that since 2008, she has been fighting hard to cut the “umbilical cord” that fixates her to the supra-narratives of impunity and denialism. In Zimbabwe, these meta-narratives pre-suppose that for the process of peace, healing and reconciliation to carry substantial weight, they must cascade from the political leadership via the ordinary people. Actually, in this power matrix, ordinary people are viewed as *tabula rasas*, or a “gullible mass” waiting to be spoken to or receive orders from the political leadership on issues of peace and reconciliation.

Citing one of the major weaknesses of peace initiatives in Zimbabwe, Machakanja (2010) argues that although in Zimbabwe a Ministry of National Healing was established by the Government of National Unity with the aim of preaching the “gospel” of peace and reconciliation, its outreach is weak and heavily patronised. What can be said is that the Zimbabwean leadership is still more uncomfortable if national healing is initiated by local communities, than if it were to be promoted by a group of intellectuals commissioned by the government. In the same forte, one can “hear” and “feel” the destabilising echoes of official patronage through Chipo’s (personal assistant) intimidatory speech uttered while cautioning Sarudzai:

The party security committee will never allow you to carry out the ritual. Just think what will other senior members of the party say when they hear that our senior member went to a village, begging to ordinary people that she is sorry, and that she was foolish. Which of these villagers are going to vote for you in the next election? (Rituals, 2011)

There are some internalised fears, sense of guilt and shame that Zimbabwean officials who fomented political violence in 2008 bear. For example, for their unpalatable behaviour during 2008 presidential elections, some party officials fear to be exposed by the international media. If it happens that way, the officials will be vulnerable for legal prosecution. This is what Chipo fears when she asserts: “...go ahead with your ritual but you’ll definitely make headlines. Any newspaper will make the headline, SABC, Aljezeera, CNN...” Chipo thinks that the ritual of *katanda botso* is debasing, and yet traditionally, it is viewed as the most appropriate way of wading off misfortune. Metaphorically, Chipo punctures the “underbelly” of official arrogance when she reveals how some members of the ruling class can feel a sense of guilt and shame if they are associated with traditional practices. But this shame is a veil of pretence that is meant to divert people’s attention from the reality that towards election times, some officials in Zimbabwe are known by their habit

of making discrete journeys to the *n'angas* (native doctors) for all sorts of rituals and traditional practices done in the spirit of winning elections.

In a dramatic twist, *Rituals*, brings onto the stage new realities and challenges of implementing peace, healing and reconciliation. These new realities are subtly captured through the dramatic acts of the elder Nyazema, who tries to hijack the ritual of *kutanda botso* by asking some sexual favours from Sarudzai. Through the acts of Nyazema, the *Rituals* is condemning the unscrupulous ways of some community members who can use their positions as elders to advance self-serving interests. Thus, however pristine a traditional practice can be, it can have destabilising elements that work “below the surface” to undermine its collective effort. In fact, Chow (1993) notes that the distinctive identity of collective “voice” is the ontological nature of its fractured self. This implies that a community’s collective “voice” is not as homogenous as it claims to be. Ordinary people in the community can have narratives that are by themselves characterised by internal contradictions that tend to undercut their efforts from within.

This discourse of incapacitation can also manifest itself at a national level, where some powerful people can use money and material resources to defeat the course of justice. In this case, victims can be bribed to give a false testimony of what exactly transpired. If they are too difficult to handle, the victims can be threatened with different forms of violence and abuse. Yet, it is now written in Zimbabwe’s draft that for peace to be promoted truth must be told about “... past violations as a means to reconciliation, making amends and obtaining justice” (The Sunday Mail, Feb 24--March 2, 2013: 9). In Zimbabwe, political violence and intimidation makes it difficult for some victims of 2008 to break the silence by revealing the atrocities that were perpetrated on them. Since the perpetrators are among the community members, and are walking freely, there is a general fear that as the nation approaches the 2013 election, these same elements can re-surface and start to use their experience to commit more political crimes. Actually, there is not much that is being done to totally eradicate the culture of violence and impunity in Zimbabwe.

## **Rituals and the poetics of retributive justice**

Apart from *kutanda botso*, *Rituals* also deploys other forms of healing and peace-building that involve retributive justice. In the language of healing, peace and reconciliation, the term “retribution” is used to refer to a form of justice in which the perpetrator of violence deserves to be punished for the crime committed. Through the theatrical piece *Rituals*, the character of Murambiwa symbolises youth *militias* who in 2008 were deployed in rural communities to intimidate as well as unleash violence on people who held opposing ideas. During their daily patrols, Murambiwa meets a young girl and rapes her. In order to cast away the spirit of violence, Murambiwa is asked by community leaders to pay a goat to the girl as retribution for the crime of rape that he committed. However, Charity – the elder sister to the girl, thinks that only a goat is not enough. Considering the gravity of crime that Murambiwa committed, paying a goat would just be a mockery to the girl and her family. Although community elders insist that the idea is to rehabilitate both the victim



and the perpetrator, Charity thinks otherwise. She declares that Murambiwa should be reported to the police so that he can face legal prosecution. Charity views legal prosecutions as the most effective deterrent against future reprisals that can lead to human abuses and gross human violations (Huyse 2008). As evidence, Charity uses a tape recorder to capture all the proceedings at the community court. Through the character of Charity, the *Rituals* reveals “cracks” and “fissures” within the African traditional jurisprudence in which individuals can intimidate victims by making reference to the ancestors in order to instil fear in the minds of victims, and thereby defeat the course of justice. Actually, one elder tries to cover up the unfairness of his ruling by declaring that “what we are doing here is guided by the ancestors”. At a meta-level, *Rituals* is also dramatising the gender politics played out through the implementation of traditional customary law. Through this law women are under their husbands, and viewed as “minors” who should not question decisions that their husbands make even if these decisions have the potential of jeopardising the family (Vambe & Mpfariseni (2011). Like any other system, community justice systems are not incontestable and beyond moral and ethical reproach, because these systems can be abused in the name of tradition and customs by people with hidden agendas.

Another form of retributive justice dramatised through *Rituals*, is at a family level. One member of the Dlamini family is asked to buy an ox as retributive price for the crime that he has perpetrated to another family member belonging to another party. In 2008, it was common to witness violence among members of the same family simply because they belonged to different political parties. The ritual of buying an ox, therefore, is an attempt to unify family members by discouraging the divisive spirit that threatens to tear the family apart. Also, the ethnic dimension that is brought to the fore through introducing the Dlamini family, whose ethnic origin is Ndebele, points to the reality that during 2008, political violence was practised by Zimbabweans of different ethnic origins.

*Rituals* ends with narratives of off-screen characters who opine that for the spirit of peace, healing and reconciliation to prevail in Zimbabwe, community participatory methodologies should be promoted. The nexus for promoting peace starts with the individual via the community and then the nation. The healing process is not an event; it is a process that permits dialogue to exist between the victim and the perpetrator of violence. Cultural performance such as *Rituals*, creates platforms for the “voices” of the ordinary people to be heard. In other words, a theatrical performance such *Rituals* can make ordinary people break from the cocoon of “self” and “state” imposed “silences” or censorship by suggesting alternative methods of healing and peace building suitable to their communities. The haunting and harrowing stories dramatised through *Rituals* can suggest that it is possible to pass through horror by critically debating the culture of violence and impunity prevalent in Zimbabwe’s political landscape. Also, to dramatisise peace, healing and reconciliation is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of existing methods with a view to create new approaches and methodologies that are not monolithic, but those that elect for the importance of cross-cultural perspectives.



## A call for cross-cultural perspectives

Cross-cultural perspectives call for broad-based methods of healing and peace-building that encompass both traditional and modern ways of promoting justice. In the words of Huysse (2008: 5).

The centre of gravity moves from the courtroom to the hearing, from the judge to the local civil society leader, from a fixation on individual guilt to the search for societal patterns in atrocities, from legal retaliation to ritual reconciliation, from the internationally driven retributive impulses to the full acknowledgement of the opportunities the local context offers.

From above, it is pertinent to argue that although cross-cultural approaches are not “absolutes” and incontestable, at least they attempt to bring to the fore a holistic picture of the dimensions of justice that build a spirit of genuine peace, healing and reconciliation. This methodology can be effective in the Zimbabwean environment “poisoned” by political suspicion. We argued that to rely on “purely” traditional methods can invite the prejudices of individuals as well as promote some obscurantist cultural values that simply refuse to die. Yet, there is also a risk that a peace agreement that mandates legal prosecutions of the modern type will kill the prospects of rehabilitating both the victims and the perpetrators of violence. Actually, the Draft Constitution clearly spells out that one of the objectives of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission is to ensure that healing should rehabilitate individuals, and not to open up old wounds, in which case individuals are always demonised or vilified for the sins they committed in the past (The Sunday Mail, Feb 24-March 2, 2013: 9). In Zimbabwe, for cross-cultural perspectives to bear fruits, cultural expressions as such as drama, theatre, film and music should highlight how lack of effective voter education, age-old grudges and fragmentation of community values have impacted negatively on promoting peace and reconciliation. This area has not been effectively explored by *Rituals*. The implementation of cross-cultural methods also implies the use of audience participatory approaches. Although *Rituals* was conceived out of wider consultations, the visuals of this theatrical piece manifest the presence of a sizeable number of audiences, and yet does not tell or show us how it was received by community audiences, some of whom were greatly affected by political violence in 2008. This brings to the surface the critical questions of representation and participation. In the case of *Rituals*, the question of participation is suggested through its dramatic text, rather than through the comments and physical manifestation of audiences that have received this theatrical piece to critically debate its political and ideological underpinnings. Traditional and modern ways should pay heed to the feelings and opinions of community audiences, located in space and time, if cultural messages are to be communicated effectively. Still, if merging traditional methods with modern methods of promoting peace is viewed as the best option, the critical question that can linger is how to balance the two approaches without compromising the effectiveness of each of the two methods? This is a question to ponder for future research on theatre and visual representation.

## Conclusion

This paper explored how *Rituals*, uses community participatory methodologies to debate issues of conflict, healing, peace and reconciliation that still pose enormous challenges to Zimbabweans, since 2008. We have made an exploration of the historical contingencies available to address the question of peace and reconciliation. It was found that politicians the world-over have a tendency of imposing state sanctioned methodologies that fail to address the root cause of violence experienced by communities. The legalistic and dominant narratives promoted by the ruling elite class are challenged by African traditional ways of promoting peace, which focuses on community participation. The communal-ritualistic model was taken as an example that African communities can use to heal the wounds of the victims. The model portrays traditional rituals as restorative and retributive justice, which could habilitate both the victim and perpetrator of violence. This was contrasted with Western legalistic methods that are too impersonal to promote amicable social relations during the post-conflict era. The paper went further to analyse the text of the drama *Rituals* to find out if it debates the issues of healing, peace and reconciliation. It was argued that although the drama uses community participatory methodologies of *kutanda botso*, the drama has not elucidated clearly how factors such as the existence of age-old grudges, lack of effective voter education and selective application of law have contributed to the escalation of political violence in 2008. It was suggested that for a comprehensive approach towards healing, peace and reconciliation to exist, there is need to merge traditional methods with modern approaches. Of course, this has to be done without compromising or diluting the effectiveness of either of the two methods.

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