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**‘Torn Apart in Zimbabwe’\*:  
Geography of Poverty, Inequality, Protest and Repression.**  
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**African Youth as Non-Citizen: the state has disappeared.**

In 2011, Herbert Jauch and Deprose Muchena edited a book; *“Tearing Us Apart: Inequalities in Southern Africa”* and argued that Southern Africa’s political economy was characterized by systemic entrenchment of all forms of inequality, tearing whole communities, people and societies apart. Fast forward to January 2019, Zimbabwe’s urban areas goes up in flames and the party-state machinery claims it is an ‘MDC Alliance/Western world’ conspiracy. They cannot see that it is rising poverty and inequality that are the core drivers of the protests. One of the most important phrase that summed up the ‘turmoil and tenacity’ that gripped Zimbabwe in the week commencing the 14<sup>th</sup> of January was a social media ‘meme’ which said the following words: ‘residents of Borrowdale are concerned about what is happening in their neighbouring country Zimbabwe’.



**Fig 1.0 No longer in the Barracks: Policing by the Military?**

In very few words this phrase summed up what can be called the ‘geography of poverty, resistance and revolt’ in Zimbabwe where wealthy areas remained calm and the urban ‘ghettos’ erupted with barricades. We at Gravitas have been consistently arguing that Zimbabwe needs to build an inclusive economy in which all citizens participate, create their material lives and fulfil their dreams. When the dams burst after the 150% fuel increase the mayhem that ensued; the unsightly burning of tyres; the wide-scale looting; the violent crackdown by the state; the ZANU PF militias that roamed freely; the midnight abductions confirmed by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the live bullets that topped off the orgy were all targeted at the poor of urban Zimbabwe. The ruling elites were not so impressed that the urban poor can try to resist so brazen primitive extraction, so they can gallivant the world in hired jets, spoil their wives with Gucci

bags and import more Bentleys, Rolls Royces, Bugatti Veyrons and go for shopping in Manhattan, New York. Apart from the lingering electoral legitimacy questions the meme we sighted above speaks to the rising poverty and widening levels of inequality, and thus, represents a potential powder keg not only in Zimbabwe but

across Sub-Saharan Africa. From the popularity of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and swinging of younger voters to the Democratic Alliance (DA); the run around in Kampala where Yoweri Museveni is playing a game of brinkmanship with Bobi Wine; the eruption of urban Sudan (Khartoum) against the tyranny of Al Bashir; to the very tense pre- and post-electoral landscape in Kenya and finally in Zimbabwe the African youth has simply become a non-citizen. Why do we say this? The economics pursued, has created Mbeki’s ‘two nation theses’ and seem to entrench what Mamdani called the ‘bifurcated state’ but this time centered on class rather than race. From the slums of Mathare in Nairobi, Caledonia in Zimbabwe, Cator Manor in Durban and Mutenderi Compound in Lusaka, the urban and rural poor are condemned to the vagaries of perpetual poverty and inequality. They are not citizens in the ‘New Africa’.

To make matters worse, the education they get is useless and not fit for purpose; the lucky ones go on to acquire degrees, certificates, diplomas and remain largely unskilled and unemployed. For those from the rural hinterland who migrate to the urban areas, most find themselves in the urban slums where to quote Franz Fanon, ‘they live on top of each other’. The urban poor often get involved in the low paying informal economy, petty crime and when push comes to shove they spread their bodies for a few *shillings*, so they can survive for another breadth. Ngugi Wa Thiongo summed it up in *The Devil on The Cross*. When Katswe-Sisterhood in 2018, pressed the panic baton on the scourge of rising poverty levels in Epworth driving the girl child into sex work, they were arrested for spreading falsehoods. Oblivious to the authorities is how poverty has condemned some of the supposed citizenry to being the ‘wretched of the earth’. This is how the arrogance of privilege has blinded Zimbabwe’s elite.

### **The Geography of Protest: re-reading Frantz Fanon**

In Zimbabwe, the recent protests can easily be mapped by geographic location. That the protests were intense in specific geographies associated with the urban poor and the ‘barely’ working class is a direct consequence of the existing political economy that is systemically unequal. The riotous protests were found and concentrated South of Samora Machel contrasted to the affluent suburbs North of Samora Machel (Harare North), that enjoyed a peaceful stay-away. In Bulawayo, they were concentrated in the Western suburbs, in Mutare and Masvingo in the Southern Suburbs. The elite hob-knobbed on social media or their usual social spaces with very limited threats to their security

and their only major outcry was the closure of shops and the internet shutdown.



**Fig 2.0 Youthful Eruptions Across Urban Zimbabwe**

The response from the military-nationalists targeted those suburbs South of Samora Machel and the so called rogue soldiers and police, albeit teargassing the povo from army helicopters, deployed in army, police and many other unmarked vehicles, were found in Epworth, Kuwadzana, Chitungwiza, Nguboyenja, Nketa, Nkulumane, Cowdray Park and many other suburbs that the urban poor and working class are found. The affluent suburbs did not record this deployment and the closest experience of state brutality they experienced during the shutdown was the closing down of the internet and the empathy they shared with their kith and kin on the other side of the 'Boundary Fence'. Army barracks and police station armouries were emptied of guns and bullets and the Joint Operations Command (JOC) made the nation's urban areas zones of military operations to pursue the poor youth who ransacked a sack of potatoes while the looters of Chiadzwa, tenders at ZESA and who emptied the RBZ of hard currency accompany the President on international trips. Such is the class definition of looters and national security.

### **Privilege Intoxicates Absolutely**

Lord Acton cautioned about the intoxication of absolute power, and we at Gravitas note, how privilege has intoxicated, absolutely, Zimbabwe's elite. Whether, in government, civil society and private sector, this elite class yearns so much to use their analyses of law and order on an impoverished citizenry forgetting that all other civil forms of airing their views has been closed. Even when some of the recruited 'wannabee Black Business Class', in actual fact fixers or runner boys, were allegedly caught causing mayhem South of Samora, they claimed in their defence, that 'they were clearing the roads of boulders and burning tyres (read the urban poor) as matter of national duty'. What an irony? The arrogance of privilege has become sickening of Zimbabwe's elite across the whole spectrum of society.

In the comfort of their privileges, they have become so oblivious to the heightening levels of poverty and inequality, and how this has squeezed the urban poor and working class to be the 'wretched of the earth'. Those in support of the establishment, blame the urban poor and working class of being taken advantage of the MDC-Alliance, Civil Society and some Western Donors. They forget that the poor and working class have their own agency

based on lived realities. For those 'rational' elites on the opposite side of the establishment or 'non-aligned' (read, so-called objective), they make simplistic analyses of law and order, willfully blind (as a matter of class?), to the structural violence being meted on the underclass by the ruling class.

They forget that poverty, 'gnaws like a horde of rats' and a 'hungry man is an angry man'. This group blinded by its privilege advances virtuousness and holiness only for elite power games within the pro-democracy movement, but inadvertently creates a false equivalence, thus promoting the status quo. They suffer from Trotskyism and cannot in the 'midst of the rubble' find the 'building blocks' besides blaming everyone else except themselves. To critique the opposition is a matter of conscience, constitutional democratic right and even national duty but to then stretch this into thinking that the opposition must gather, under its girth, men and women who are more holier in deed, thought and act than the ones that the revolutionary of Galilee gathered, in the 12 he had, is to be locked into a very self-gratifying 'chardonnay talk' while Rome burns.

### **Elites 'Secure in Comfort': The Income Inequality**

But here is the other side of the story our African elites, across the political divide: they drive swanky cars, live in posh houses, have access to free or cheap fuel, get access to state tenders which they share generously amongst their comprador class. Then to add insult to a festering anger they post pictures of million-dollar vehicles, all 'white parties', boat and yacht orgies and they brag about this loot brazenly - some boasting of walk in shoe racks that will make Imelda Marcos green with envy. But the story goes further. Our country's elites earn an enormous amount of the country's income. They build mansions in hills. They import beer and wine from abroad and brag about this openly. That today I am 'drinking a teachers' pay'. And that during the weekend we spent money at Club Sangayi that can buy a second hand Japanese import car: 'Honda Fit or Toyota Vitz'.

It goes further, those employed in the international development/humanitarian, sometimes 'rights NGOs' and in the private sector earn in partly or fully in hard currency depending on organisation, thus giving them a cushioned landing. Some of the elite earnings when compared to an ordinary government worker or private sector worker are beyond ridiculous. One Manager at a 'humanitarian' NGO, Senior Civil Servant or Private Sector earns enough money in one year that a teacher will never earn in 50 years (yes - that's half a century). Take for instance, a senior manager taking home a net salary of US\$60,000 (Bond\$210,000) per annum and a teacher earning Bond\$4,800 (US\$1,371) per annum, when cross rated at a parallel market rate of 3.5 (the real market rate) at the commencement of the shutdown.

In essence it will take a teacher 43 years and 9 months to earn what a senior manager earns in one year, ceteris paribus. Flashback this to before the devaluation of the Bond and RTGS, say January 2018, with the same earnings, it would have taken a teacher 12 years and

6 months to earn the same; yet, a year down the line the gap has more than tripled. When you take the security guards, domestic workers, unemployed youth who survive on hustling the comparisons become gory. The privileged elite send kids to schools that charge between US\$2,000 to \$5,000 a term and openly gloat about how their kids are now playing hockey, squash, tennis, chess, badminton and all sort of tomfoolery amidst sipping bottles of Glenfiddich and all other sorts *crème de le crème* of fine scotch. When you check on their backyards they are cross breeding exotic dogs and the food these pets eat further betrays their class privileges.



Fig 3. o Pet Grooming Elites ?

Coming to government expenditure, the IMF was so shocked to discover that 40% of the wage bill is going to the honorariums and emoluments of top managers in government. And when they get sick they are flown to South Africa and even India all on the tax payer. Then Professor Mthuli Ncube, to extract more, borrows his polices from the era of Chile's tyrant Pinochet in which austerity was for the poor and redistributed to the elite. Make no mistake, the 2% tax and fuel increase are not for the national interested but to; (1) to raise money for wages especially for party-state elites and (2) to raise money to repay debt to International Financial Institutions that they gorged on and then (3) re-start the borrowing and orgy again. Some have been quick to point that the ZANU PF 'cockpit' is in turmoil. This is for all to see but look closely. The competing factions are not doing it for the national interest. This is an intra-elite and internal party contest to have the power to control the national treasury. One of the most dangerous precedent that was set in Zimbabwe in the end of the *Mugabe days* was for the men in uniform to taste the sweetness of the national treasury. Now the whole barrack wants in into the looting game. We have argued before that the reason why the security apparatus must be subordinate to elected power is because the people's power resides in the constitution and elected representatives exercise that power delegated at each election. Subvert that constitutional republic and you are ruled by one with the gun powder and grenades.

**Social Injustice Breeds Radicalism and *Barricades*.**

There is no greater violence than the indignity of poverty and disease authored by the few in power against the many, and when avenues of political reform via elections are blocked the elites are only heating the oil that will cook them. The violence of poverty confronts you everyday and every night without remedy; it humiliates and strips dignity from men and women; and it reduces the citizenry to beggars of *Oliver Twist* proportions; makes fools of our country's youth and gets them 'sticking' on hard drugs; makes the nation a breeding ground of scoundrels who sell 'miracles' in the name of healing; elevates butchers into political office who exchange money for favours; makes nearly every citizen a 'crook' trying to bargain this and that advantage and above all violence of poverty makes millionaires of men and women of no known occupation and skill other than licking the bottoms of political gladiators. Such is the state of affairs that has become a summary of our republic and the powder keg will blow us all to smithereens. Maybe, we may need to heed Nelson Chamisa's call to 're-think our national values system'.



Fig 4.o Who really rules Zimbabwe?

One thing we learnt from Zimbabwe's week of mayhem is that the youth of the country are no longer citizens of this republic and to them the burning of a building, the looting of a shop, the stoning of a police car is because they are not sharing in the economy that most us, the elite, are doing. The old saying from Martin Luther King Junior rings high at this time: if we want peace; we need justice. And in the case of Zimbabwe we need social justice and freedom. And when we say freedom we don't mean it in the parochial sense of 'liberal freedom'. No. No. We mean freedom broadly and structurally defined – political freedom, economic freedom, cultural freedom, freedom from repression and freedom to fulfil their dreams.

Therefore, reforms that are informed by the 'arrogance of privilege' and condemn the majority of the citizenry to the vagaries of poverty and inequality will only breed instability. It's clear that 'strongman politics' or 'command developmentalism' can never be a panacea to the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. Maybe, for the government it could be time for them to think about pro-poor centered growth and not elite centered growth only. Omano Edigheji's 'Democratic Developmental State' model, is worthy considering if we are to avoid further eruptions. And here we must end with a note from Frantz Fanon's *Black skins, White masks*: "But man is also a no. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No to exploitation of man. No to the

butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.” Until this happens the barricades will continue going up.

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\**Tearing Us Apart : Inequalities in Southern Africa* – 2011.  
Herbert M Jauch & Deprese Muchena (eds.)

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Co-Editors of *Gravitas*

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Homes For Gulags [16.01. 2018- midnite.no cant sleep.]

Decomposing floating limbs  
Whipped to volcanic festers  
On the menu card  
Barbed wire for straws  
Lips kissing the black boot  
Buttocks up in the air  
Wrapped by a thousand spears  
This is my home, the Gulag

We must worship at it's feet  
Chains making love to the tongue  
Chairs and rail roads straight  
Into the heart  
Bleeding no more  
Scraps of bones embracing  
On rifle butts,  
Snuffed into silence  
This is the Gulag, I call home

Iron Clubs, fire spitting clouds  
Electric clippers  
In comrade Dracula's hands  
Hugging my water soaked testicles  
Tears no more  
Wrists around the cold steel bars  
Feet burning into the mouth  
This is the Gulag, I call come

Rotund guttural voices  
Drunk on our sweat  
Necks like balancing rocks  
Planted in our eyes  
Gunpowder for cornmeal  
Raise what flag ?  
This is the gulag, I call home

Wheelbarrows feeding on flesh  
covered in slogans  
barricades swallowing the voice  
nails digging into the empty pots  
...drink poison for breakfast  
in this house of stone, *Zimbabwe*.  
....the beret shouts  
i call this home, this gulag

in solidarity  
Tinashe L Chimedza

dreamland no more [18.01.2018]

we own too many ghosts  
water their putrid bellies  
wash their stenching feet  
feed their mangled silhouettes  
kiss their razor sharp fingers  
make rose beds for them  
give milk to their young

and they hunt us at night  
....pulverise our souls  
drive spikes through our feet  
sing aloud of their exploits  
last night.  
in dark lanes decorated with human hecatombs  
whispers of the hungry  
with pit bull horns  
charged at me for being a citizen  
clanked steel around my head  
fed me words, for water

the ghosts hunt again  
...no longer tremble at the sight of hearts  
and feed, feed,  
we feed them  
only the barricade  
....will kiss them into mist  
in *Mabvuku, Tafara, Nkulumane, Dulibadzimu...Sakubva/Chikanga*  
not in *Borrowdale*  
where they walk on marble cobblestones  
squeezed from the people's vaults

Tinashe L. Chimedza