

Vanhu Vekwedu Vanotya Mwari (Our People are God-fearing): The Valorisation of Zimbabwe in Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave's *Wenyasha ndeWenyasha*

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Abstract

Zimbabwe experienced negative publicity between 2000 and 2008 as a rogue state and ailed state. However, in her album “Wenyasha ndeWenyasha” Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave, a gospel musician contested the negative images to say, Zimbabwe is a blessed country, and that Zimbabweans know and love God, and thus God loves and blesses Zimbabwe. In this article, we describe Zvakavapano-Mashavave's positive image of Zimbabwe, and highlight her celebration of the country's natural and human resources. We also illustrate her conviction that Zimbabwe is part of the divine plan to liberate the continent of Africa, and draw attention to some challenges that emerge from her portrayal of Zimbabwe.

Key words: Zimbabwe, crisis, Pentecostalism, gospel music, Diaspora



Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave

Introduction

The “Zimbabwean crisis”, that is, socio-economic and political challenges between 2000 and 2008, witnessed a marked rise in the movement of citizens out of the country into neighbouring countries and beyond. This “Zimbabwean Exodus” instigated considerable soul searching by the nation’s creative artists. Gospel musicians and church leaders were actively involved in this process. At the height of the “crisis,” the image of Zimbabwe suffered significantly. Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans came to signify suffering and hopelessness for many, and many holders of Zimbabwean passports endured humiliation at the hands of hostile citizens in Southern Africa and beyond (Chidori 2013). However, Fungisai Zvakavapano-Mashavave, a gospel musician adopted a “proudly Zimbabwean” posture in her album, “*Wenyasha ndeWenyasha*” (2012) wherein she celebrates Zimbabweanness, critiques the Diaspora and challenges the negative portrayals of Zimbabwe. And therefore, she effectively becomes Zimbabwe’s ambassador, using her Pentecostal identity to construct a new and empowering image of the nation to confirm Bakare’s (1997) contention that music plays an important role in Africa.

Hence, in that context, this article describes Zvakavapano-Mashavave's reconstruction of Zimbabwe to suggest that she succeeded in projecting a liberating and proud image of Zimbabwe. And furthermore, as some critics (cf Palmberg 2004) charge that gospel music is apolitical, we argue that gospel music has always had a distinctively political role in Zimbabwe, and contextually, Rwafa, Viriri and Vambe (2013) have also suggested that Zvakavapano-Mashavave's gospel music is associated with liberation theology as Magosvongwe (2008) discusses her approach in relation to the themes of emancipation and empowerment. And while we appreciate such insights, we proceed to highlight aspects of Zvakavapano-Mashavave's social location that enable her to articulate nationalist sentiments and contend that she has succeeded in challenging the negative portrayals of Zimbabwe and in turn has advanced national pride and identity, as we also draw attention to some of contestable assertions she presents.

Pride Lost, Pride Regained: Setting the Scene

Zvakavapano-Mashavave is not the first Zimbabwean artist to extol the country. In the 1980s, the fervour associated with independence saw many musicians celebrating the country. Paul Matavire's hit song, "*Mwari Wakada Zimbabwe*" (God Loved Zimbabwe) projected Zimbabwe in idyllic terms. Another musical group, the Children of Nandi, also had a popular song, "Meet Me in Zimbabwe" which topped the charts in 1986. These songs portrayed Zimbabwe positively, suggesting that God had favoured the nation, and in particular, Matavire described the popular tourist resorts, such as the Victoria Falls, the Great Zimbabwe, Matobo National Park (Matopos) and others as he conceded that he had no choice but to celebrate Zimbabwe, since it was natural for one to be proud of his/her identity. And thus, Matavire appealed to the Shona philosophy that every drum proclaims its greatness whenever it is beaten, thus, "*chagara chinoti pangu pangu, pangu pa Zimbabwe.*" (When one is faced with competition or adversary, one promotes his/her own interests or priorities).

The first two decades (1980-2000) generally went fairly well for the fledging nation. Zimbabwe attained rapid progress in social service delivery, uplifting the lives of the black majority. It became the pride of many in the region, with Zimbabweans being associated with educational advancement. The country's manufacturing sector was expanding and many people from neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Malawi and Zambia came to buy basic foodstuffs in Zimbabwe. Some Mozambicans also came to seek employment as casual labourers. The country's international image was a positive one: the policy of national reconciliation was recognised as a master-stroke that created racial harmony. This was well before the notion of South Africa as a "rainbow nation" became fashionable.

Zimbabweans experienced a lot of battering because of the massive socio-economic and political difficulties during the period 2000-2008. As the economic hardships multiplied, some citizens lost their pride. They no longer experienced Zimbabwe as “home” and the centre of peace, love and security. They were alienated. Others joined the “Zimbabwean Exodus” (Crush and Tevera 2010; McGregor 2010) where many struggled to cope. Xenophobia was a reality in South Africa and Botswana, while many who went further afield experienced racial segregation.

Due to the harassment that most people travelling on a Zimbabwean passport faced, some dubbed the green Zimbabwean passport, “the green mamba.” Like the dangerous snake, the Zimbabwean passport had one “marked for death.” To avoid fitting into the stereotype of a “hungry, fleeing Zimbabwean,” some travellers resorted to using passport covers. Consequently trading in passport covers became popular at the passport offices in Harare as some citizens felt ashamed to be identified with Zimbabwe.

The transition from being “proudly Zimbabwean” to being “ashamed of Zimbabwe” had deep psychological effects. Zimbabwe, the resilient House of Stone, became for some “the Zimbabwe Ruins.” The coming of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 ushered in an era of renewed optimism. The three partners to the GNU, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriot Front (ZANU PF) and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties, demonstrated a new sense of cooperation and patriotism. In turn, this mobilised citizens to feel the positive vibes. The GNU had the immediate effect of freeing Zimbabweans from hyperinflation and political violence, as well as injecting a sense of optimism at the national level. At the personal and family levels, many felt favoured by God, hence the popularity of gospel songs that promoted this type of theology. A renewed sense of belonging was ushered in. There was booming trade in the national flag, with many motorists in urban centres displaying it on their cars. The pride that was once had now been recovered! It must be conceded, however, that the GNU had many contradictions of its own (Raftopoulos 2013).

“Welcome Home”: Zimbabwe as a Beautiful, God-chosen Country and Zimbabweans as Hard-working People

Zvakavapano’s album was released in 2012 and in an environment saturated with national optimism and pride. However, as we have outlined above, she was painfully aware of the vicissitudes that her compatriots had (and many continued to) experience/d. She was sensitive to their shattered pride and loss of self-esteem. She knew that many Zimbabweans had been labelled, “*makwere-kwere*” (foreigners) in neighbouring countries and that their sense of belonging had been eroded. Her rallying point was that God loves Zimbabwe. Where critics dismiss Zimbabwe as a Godforsaken country, Zvakavapano insists that God favours Zimbabwe. According to her, this is because Zimbabweans know and love God. Furthermore, Zimbabweans follow the divine commandments, leading to God blessing the country. All this reverses the notion that the devastating problems that the country has grappled with emerge from being cursed by God.

Where international media networks have beamed images of a traumatised people, she contends that Zimbabweans are, in fact, a happy people. Actually, Zimbabwe is Paradise on earth. Life is characterised by peace, joy and happiness. According to her, “*kwedu kuZimbabwe tinofara, kwedu kuZimbabwe tinotamba*” (in our Zimbabwe, we are happy, in our Zimbabwe, we enjoy). Zimbabwe is the heartbeat of Africa “*kuZimbabwe, moyo weAfrica*”).

Zimbabwe embodies the African spirit of celebrating life. According to her, far from Zimbabwe epitomising all that is wrong with Africa, Zimbabwe embodies African identity. Significantly, she combines English and Shona, showing that she is keen to address both the local and international communities. She opens with the words, “welcome home to Africa, welcome to Zimbabwe.” Here, she is likely to be evoking the notion of Africa as the “original home of humanity.”

Where some might wonder why anyone wants to remain in Zimbabwe, she declares, in English, “my heart belongs to Africa, my homeland is Zimbabwe.” She is willing to be identified as Zimbabwean because, “*vanhu vekwedu vanotywa Mwari, vanhu vokwedu vanosekerera, vanhu vekwedu vakangwarira*” (our people are God-fearing, our people are jovial, our people are intelligent). She refuses to accept the narrative of Zimbabweans as depressed and long-suffering. She paints an alternative picture, namely, that of a thriving and vibrant people. She is probably aware of the country’s high literacy rate and a strong work ethic. This is the source of her confidence: Zimbabwe is not anywhere close to being a failed state. If anything, Zimbabwe is a blessed, God-fearing and vibrant country. Alongside the government, she wages her own media struggle to paint an alternative story (Willems 2011).

Zvakavapano-Mashavave takes a “proudly Zimbabwean” stance and questions the narrative that missionaries brought the concept of God to Africa (Cox 2014). According to her, Zimbabweans have *always* known God and have continued to worship God. In the song, “*Ishu Jesu*” (Lord Jesus), she integrates traditional lyrics and incantations. Jesus becomes a Zimbabwean ancestor, alongside Chaminuka. Thus, “*She Jesu ndimambo, Shumba yerudzi rwavaJuda. Chaminuka ndimambo, shumba inogara yoga musango*”(Lord Jesus is king, lion of the tribe of Judah. Chaminuka is king, the lion that lives alone in the forest). Jesus is no longer a foreign religious personality, but a member of the Shumba clan. He is also, “*mutana wekarerekare wenguvo chena, waDavida*” (The ancient legend, son of David in white garments). By using the mbira, the traditional thumb piano which some conservative Christians associate with the ancestral cult (Matiure 2011), she is projecting herself as a cultural nationalist. Zvakavapano-Mashavave challenges the notion that indigenous cultures are pagan and backward, choosing to present them as God-fearing and progressive.

In the song, “*Vabereki*” (Parents), she portrays Zimbabweans as hard working people, declaring, “*KuHarare havarari,*”(a brilliant play on words meaning, “in Harare they do not sleep”). She also calls upon God to bless industrious individuals, “*Mwari ndiropafadze, ndoenda kuHarare*” (God bless me, I am going to Harare). Whereas critics project the city as a place characterised by moral decay, Zvakavapano-Mashavave presents Harare as space that is sacred due to the output of the individual residents.

The residents of Harare do not rest on their laurels. Instead, they have continued to devise means of survival and are thriving in a challenging economic context. In particular, the musician appeals to a notable Zimbabwean Pentecostal strategy of mobilising resources. She sings, “*tinonoshanda Matarendawo kwedu,*” (we will work Talents). The Zimbabwe Assemblies Of God Africa, where Zvakavapano-Mashavave is an elder, teaches members to work Talents. This concept has been exported to other congregations outside Zimbabwe (Biri 2012).

She likens Zimbabwe to Job who was scorned and dismissed as a spent force. She also challenges Thomas Mapfumo’s characterisation of Zimbabwe as a “disaster” when she sings, “*zvikanzi nevamwe Zimbabwe yavedisaster*” (some said Zimbabwe is/was now a disaster). According to her, with Jesus on the country’s side, the present and the future were bright. In all the criticism, citizens had to choose Jesus and embrace an optimistic outlook. Jesus is the future and it was definite that the country was being restored, she maintains.

Zimbabwe: God’s Chosen Country to Redeem Africa

Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s celebration of Zimbabwe and Africa is closely related to the political philosophy of President Robert Mugabe. Mugabe’s popularity across the continent of Africa must be located within the context of his proud Pan-African philosophy (Mugabe 2001). For Mugabe, black Africans have nothing to apologise for. They must take pride in who they are and must not feel inferior to any other race, especially the whites who have historically treated blacks as sub-humans. Mugabe articulates a form of black theology where black people have been created by God and must have full access to all the earth’s resources (Hopkins and Antonio 2012). Zvakavapano-Mashavave adopts the same position and presents Zimbabwe as strategic to Africa’s struggle for freedom, dignity and access to resources.

Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s music promotes African pride. Where global media networks have conditioned their viewers to associate Zimbabwe with political violence, corruption and decay, she presents an alternative narrative. The story of Zimbabwe (and Africa) is not one of hunger and collapse, she charges. Zvakavapano-Mashavave proudly declares that she is not ashamed to belong to Zimbabwe and to Africa, a nation and a continent associated with so many socio-economic and political challenges. This is because Africa is not a lost cause: there is so much going for the continent, she contends. For example, she maintains that Zimbabwe’s mineral resources are a blessing, “*zvicherwa zvedu makomborero*”, suggesting that these have been used to transform the lives of the majority.

Zimbabwe becomes an apt case study for Africa: “*KuZimbabwe ndokuAfrica*” (to be in Zimbabwe is to be in Africa). Zimbabwe embodies all that Africa has: the mountains, rivers and minerals. She also describes the beauty of the landscape, the impressive perennial streams and rivers, as well as mountains filled with evergreen vegetation. More critically, Zimbabwe (and by extension, Africa) is home to a gregarious and productive people.

Here, the sound of music reverberates, “listen to the beat!” There is euphoria, “*kunorira huku, kunotamba pwere*’ (the chickens cluck happily and children play). She focuses on the natural resources that Zimbabwe has and markets the tourist resort centres. She, therefore, markets Zimbabwe and invites visitors, charming them with the famed African spirit of hospitality. If the encounter images in the meetings between Africa and Europe have produced negative stereotypes of the former (Palmberg 2001), Zvakavapano-Mashavave endeavours to cultivate positive images through her music.

Zvakavapano-Mashavave celebrates Zimbabwe and Africa. This celebration negates Afro-pessimism, that is, the idea that nothing good can come from Africa. Her stance should be understood within the context of Pentecostal prophetic imagination (Biri forthcoming). Prophetic imagination operates amidst crisis (Brueggemann). She captures this prophetic defiance when she sings, “*panoonekwa rima ona chiedza*” (where there is darkness, see light), “*panoonekwa nhamo ona rugare*” (where there is lack, proclaim abundance), *panoonekwa rufu, ona upenyu* (where there is death, declare life) and “*usambochema*” (do not cry). Prophetic imagination does not deny reality but it defies it. Hardships and struggles are not the end. As other Pentecostal gospel musicians such as Shingisai Suluma, Pastor G, Donna Chibaya and others have insisted, “it shall be well.” This is built on the unyielding belief that, “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30: 5).

Zvakavapano-Mashavave anticipates a United States of Africa. This idea is quite pronounced in ZAOGA where the founder, Ezekiel Guti, “the African Apostle,” encourages ZAOGA and other Christians to pray for the United States of Africa (Guti 1997). The same theme has been taken up by another prominent Zimbabwe Pentecostal leader, the founder of the Family of God (FOG), Andrew Wutawunashe. Like Zvakavapano-Mashavave, Wutawunashe seeks to mobilise Africans to take pride in their history and identity. Echoing Mugabe’s ideology of indigenization and black economic empowerment, Wutawunashe (2011: 97) writes:

Learn the history of the Black people and their struggles and embrace passionately the real truth: you have the God given right to own the resources of the land and use them to create wealth for yourselves and for future generations. Learn the truth that you need to create your own dreams of wealth creation and aggressively compete for the world’s wealth and resources through your own innovative enterprises. Embrace the ethic of hard work and defeat the temptation to be lazy – for with freedom comes responsibility.

“Getting to Zero”: Facing HIV and AIDS

Whereas Zvakavapano-Mashavave paints an idyllic picture of the situation in Zimbabwe, in the song “Zero AIDS” she reminds her audience of the major struggle that has been launched for the country to attain the “three zeroes”, namely, “zero discrimination, zero deaths, and zero new infections.” Here, the artist demonstrates her realism and sensitivity. Alongside other Southern African countries such as Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, Zimbabwe is among those countries in the world having a disproportionate burden of the HIV and AIDS burden. Zvakavapano-Mashavave recognises the threat posed by the epidemic and she seeks to mobilise her compatriots to respond positively to the epidemic.

Whereas the church fuelled stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV during the early phases of the HIV epidemic (Chitando 2007), Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s engagement with the epidemic demonstrates the fundamental shifts that have occurred. She calls upon her compatriots to adopt a positive attitude towards the epidemic and to work hard towards a more effective response. If in the 1980s churches claimed that HIV was about “sinners outside the church,” now Zvakavapano-Mashavave is challenging Christians to become actively involved in addressing the epidemic. She takes a very progressive and non-stigmatising approach towards HIV and AIDS.

Zvakavapano-Mashavave challenges the marginalisation of the poor in accessing anti-retroviral drugs. She insists that everyone in need should access medication. She becomes an ambassador, not only of the nation of Zimbabwe, but of all those who are suffering: the poor, children, the marginalised and the disadvantaged in society. She advances the communalistic sentiment that has been characteristic of African societies. The communalistic orientation of African societies (of sharing and concern for the disadvantaged) has been eroded by several external challenges. Through music, the artist voices the injustices by not attacking directly, but by pointing to what should be done. She prophetically anticipates an HIV-free Zimbabwe and evokes the words of Jesus on the cross: “*Zvapera*” (It is finished). When the epidemic is finished, Zimbabwe will enjoy full health and well-being, with all its citizens enjoying life in abundance, as God intends.

Zvakavapano-Mashavave is painfully aware of the threat of HIV and AIDS to Zimbabwe’s health and well-being. During the 1990s, AIDS-related deaths caused untold suffering as families lost their loved ones and many children were orphaned. Zvakavapano-Mashavave approaches the HIV epidemic as an opportunity for the nation to demonstrate its resilience and to meet its set goals (Mangena and Chitando 2011). By overcoming the epidemic, Zimbabwe would confirm its heroic identity. Whereas earlier songs relating to HIV had been characterised by pain (Chitando and Chitando 2008), Zvakavapano-Mashavave approaches the topic with a renewed sense of optimism. For her, Zimbabwe has the opportunity to confirm its leadership and efficiency by providing an effective response to the epidemic.

The Dangers of the Diaspora

As we noted at the beginning of this article, some Zimbabweans responded to the crisis by taking the exit option. They left the country and engaged in “hunting in foreign lands”(Nyota, Manyarara and Moyana 2010). As the socio-economic and political situation became more challenging, some citizens sought to find greener pastures beyond Zimbabwe. Others were fleeing political violence. Many families were torn asunder and the Diaspora experience was traumatic for many, particularly those who had deserted their professional jobs in Zimbabwe for menial occupations outside the country. Cynics referred to such Zimbabweans as, “BBC” (British bottom cleaners) or “RR” (*rese rese*, meaning “any kind of job”). The loss of dignity and identity instigated deep soul searching among Diasporans.

As a proud nationalist, Zvakavapano-Mashavave portrays the Diaspora option as a doomed one. She contends that one can only thrive in one’s motherland. Shona proverbial wisdom cautions that, “*kusina mai hakuendwe*” (one should not go to a place where one’s mother does not live). For the artist, life outside the country is characterised by struggles (“*kushupika*”). She deploys the biblical story found in Ruth 1 to highlight the need for people to remain in their countries of birth, no matter how challenging the economic situation would be. She sings, “*KuJerusalem kwaita zhara, Naume nemhuri ndokuenda kure kure, kunyika Moab, nyika ine rufu (x 2). Asvika ikoko, akafunga kumba! KuJerusalem: nyika ine rudo, kuJerusalem, nyika yababa*” (There was hunger in Jerusalem. Naomi and her family went far away, to the land of Moab, the land of death (x 2). When she reached there, she yearned for home. Jerusalem: the land of love, Jerusalem, the fatherland).

Zvakavapano-Mashavave sustains the contention that life in the Diaspora is not rosy. Like Oliver Mtukudzi in the song, “*Nhava*” (Pouch), she charges that those who have left “Jerusalem”(Zimbabwe) have ventured into threatening spaces. “Jerusalem” represents stability, peace and security. On the other hand, the Diaspora is regarded as dangerous space (“*mumasango*”). Forests are associated with disorientation and death. Zvakavapano-Mashavave contrasts the peace and love found in “Jerusalem” with the death and suffering found in “Moab.” It is only upon returning to one’s motherland, the sacred and great Zimbabwe, that one will thrive once again. Thus, “*adzoka ikoko, iye wakagarika*” (when she returned, she enjoyed prosperity).

For Zvakavapano-Mashavave, while there may be hunger in Jerusalem (Zimbabwe), it remains God’s beloved nation. Consequently, the hunger may not last for long as God is sure to restore the nation to its former glory. Like the biblical Naomi and family who went to a foreign land, Zimbabweans in Diaspora must remember (to return to) their motherland. The idealisation of the homeland and nostalgia is typical of diaspora communities (Primorac 2010:532). They are reminded to come back home and to approach the Diaspora as a bridge to cherished life and, therefore, essentially temporary. Once the hunger that stalked Jerusalem is gone, they must trek back to the blessed homeland.

Like Mugabe and other Pentecostal leaders, through music, Zvakavapano-Mashavave fosters a “patriotic” nationalist narrative of Zimbabwe/Africa’s progress. (see Primorac 2010:202). Whereas many people might regard the Diaspora as a place of refuge from economic hardships, she challenges this image and claims there is humiliation, hardship and death. This confirms the response of most interviewees who come back to Zimbabwe from the Diaspora. They maintained that there are a lot of challenges and some of them long to come back home permanently (Biri forthcoming).

Zvakavapano-Mashavave: Upholding a Nationalist Stance

From the foregoing, it is clear that Zvakavapano-Mashavave understands herself as having the responsibility to project a positive image of Zimbabwe. We contend that her own social location (Dube 2003) has positioned her to undertake such a task. Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s music has been popular in a country dominated by Christians. It has been admired by the First Lady, Amai Grace Mugabe, who indicated that she plays Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s music in her car (28-5-2004). In a sense, therefore, the artist belongs to Zimbabwe’s elite. Her understanding of international politics, particularly the demonization of Zimbabwe by the West and the imposition of sanctions, leads her to take up a defensive posture. She defends the country and serves as its ambassador.

It is also instructive to note that Zvakavapano-Mashavave has also served as a member of the National AIDS Council (NAC) board. This is a strategic body which has contributed to Zimbabwe’s success story in responding to the HIV epidemic. Having the latest, up to date information on the state of the epidemic in Zimbabwe equips the artist to address the issue of HIV in a sensitive and progressive way. Unlike the earlier approaches that deepened stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, Zvakavapano-Mashavave proclaims a new theology of compassion and solidarity with people living with HIV.

She is steadfast in her call for access to treatment for all, as well as in denouncing stigma and discrimination. If previously the church had denounced people living with HIV as “sinners out there,” Zvakavapano-Mashavave is proposing a theology of liberation where people living with HIV have full access to life saving medication. She appeals to the Christian sense of social justice and equality by insisting that women and children must enjoy abundant life in the wake of the HIV epidemic.

Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s album was released in 2012, when the GNU was doing well and a sense of national optimism flowed through the veins of the citizens. The leading politicians demonstrated unity of purpose and challenged the followers to be patriotic. It is, therefore, understandable that her album celebrates Zimbabwe.

Here was a country that had been written off that was on the rebound. Hyperinflation had been tamed, the political environment had been sanitised and there was a sense that the worst was now over. The artist must be applauded for reading, capturing and promoting the national mood of optimism. The language of crisis had the effect of paralysing the country and the artist sought to galvanise her compatriots to look to the future in hope. As we have indicated, this is prophetic action. She seeks to mobilise Zimbabweans to shake off their pessimism and invest in “winning the future.”

Using post-colonial analysis, we also appreciate Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s pride in indigenous Zimbabwean culture. The use of the mbira and insistence that local cultures are not paragons of heathenism confirm the artist’s sophistication. She develops a theology of inculturation and fuses positive aspects of African culture in her music. She refuses to buy into the missionary discourse which painted indigenous religions as backward and devoid of spiritual insights. Instead, she celebrates African identity and reminds her audience of Zimbabwe’s many blessings. This forces Zimbabwe’s critics to pause and acknowledge the country’s many accomplishments. These include the advances made in education, the work ethos in the nation’s labour force and the abundant mineral resources.

Challenges in Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s Images of Zimbabwe

Despite the positive dimensions that we have applauded, we detect some debatable aspects in Zvakavapano-Mashavave’s portrayal of Zimbabwe in the album, “*Wenyasha ndeWenyasha*.” First, she glosses over the fragmentation and loss of identity that Zimbabwe experienced during the crisis years. While we understand the need to present a progressive and positive images of Zimbabwe in the face of demonization by external forces, she should have granted some space to an acknowledgement and discussion of the factors that led Zimbabwe to lose its glamour and glitz in the first instance. If the truth sets us free (John 8: 32), then there is an urgent need for Zimbabweans to engage in honest introspection in order to identify factors that contributed towards the crisis. Consequently, we contend that celebrating Zimbabwe must be tempered with an interrogation of “when the rain began to hit us” (Achebe 1964: 158) so that the nation can be better prepared to face the future.

Secondly, the critique of the Diaspora overlooks the desperate situation that forced millions of Zimbabweans to venture beyond the country’s borders. As a member of the elite, Zvakavapano-Mashavave had better options than most citizens who had nothing to lose by going into the Diaspora. In other words, those who could afford to remain in Zimbabwe must hesitate to criticise those who felt compelled to leave the country. At any rate, some Diasporans have actually done quite well, although their sense of alienation must be acknowledged. There is need to adopt a more open and tolerant attitude towards the Diaspora, rather than the current trend of regarding Diasporans as being in some sense “less patriotic” than those who have remained in the country.

A more creative approach would see the country deriving maximum benefits from its citizens who are outside the country. In a pastoral letter addressed to Zimbabweans in the Diaspora, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC 2012) acknowledged the opportunities that they bring to their families and the nation and admits that the nation has let them down.

Third, the artist's defensive posture comes too close to pronouncements by some political protagonists in Zimbabwe. Whilst this would not ordinarily be a challenge in and of itself, the heavily polarised situation in Zimbabwe exacerbates the situation. Some critics may, therefore, not engage the artist since (in their own interpretation), they would have already placed her in one camp. Consequently, artists may need to be more circumspect when articulating their views in a politically pluralist context such as Zimbabwe's. Although we conceded that the GNU brought about a semblance of tolerance, it can be argued that there were many patterns of continuity in terms of the parties' posturing and ideological inclinations.

Fourth, the theology of Zimbabwe as having undergone a divine test similar to Job's runs the risk of letting politicians "off the hook" too easily. Many citizens lost their savings due to poor decision-making by some individuals in government. The opposition too made some decisions that were not productive, such as "stay-aways" where the country lost many productive hours due to politicking. Collectively, therefore, Zimbabweans were responsible for bringing the misery upon them(our)selves. Perhaps the theology articulated by the prophet Jeremiah is more applicable to the Zimbabwean crisis: "Your ways and your doings have brought this upon you" (Jeremiah 4: 18). Zvakavapano-Mashavave leans towards a theology that minimises human culpability and this can be liability when efforts are made to locate the roots of the crisis (Chitando 2012). To bring God into the mess too quickly might prevent flesh and blood human beings from taking responsibility for their (mis)actions.

Conclusion

Zvakavapano-Mashavave challenges the global media networks' narrative of decay and death in Zimbabwe. Instead, she mounts a passionate defence of her motherland. Zimbabwe, she avers, is a divinely-favoured country that is at the heart of Africa's renaissance. God will not forsake Zimbabwe, as the country has a special place in the divine plan of salvation. As Yahweh struggled with Israel, plumbing the depths of Yahweh's heart and lamenting, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim?" (Hosea 11: 8), so does Yahweh struggle with Zimbabwe, lamenting, "How can I give you up, O Great Zimbabwe?" For Zvakavapano-Mashavave, all the caricatures of Zimbabwe as a "fallen giant" will/have come to naught as Zimbabwe has/will fulfil(led) her destiny as God's chosen country. This she knows because, "*vanhu vekwedu vanotya Mwari*" (our people are God-fearing).

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Sermon

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