
DARKEST BEFORE DAWN: The Work of Emmaculeta Chiseya of Zimbabwe

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2005 Women PeaceMakers Program

Made possible by the Fred J. Hansen Foundation

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ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights – as generally there is no time or, perhaps, they do not have formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women – those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation – must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.¹

BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER –
Emmaculeta Chiseya

Emmaculeta Chiseya, a mother of two from Harare, Zimbabwe has worked to gender-sensitize community development and promote human rights for over 15 years. From 1996 to 2000, Chiseya was responsible for the promotion, protection and defense of human rights under the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association. During an increasingly dangerous period of Zimbabwean history, she has helped pioneer human rights education and civic education curricula in schools throughout the country. As a project officer for the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Chiseya advocates for democracy and electoral education and serves as an election monitor.

Chiseya has experience educating police and other security forces to desist from torture practices, and has used theater to encourage greater understanding of human rights. In the current dangerous climate in Zimbabwe, with exorbitant inflation and unemployment rates and a nonexistent health care system, the rights which the constitution grants are challenged; politically motivated violence confronts the citizens who are seeking a return to peace. Human rights activists and peacemakers must maneuver carefully simply to assemble. Torture practices by police are on the rise. Chiseya is working to help people negotiate these pitfalls in order to move democratic change and human rights forward. She believes in the right of the people to elect a government of their choice without fear.

NARRATIVE STORIES

When Life was Bright

Good rains brought good harvests that year, 1971, along with lush yellow, green and pink flowers decorating the front of the house. The Chiseya family no longer had to shop for produce; their vegetable garden was overflowing in the backyard. The house in Mufakose, a township 9 kilometers outside Salisbury,² was just down the street from the local Catholic Church, where the priest had just christened the new infant Emmaculeta.

Emma was born into a family of four³ and a community of like-minded neighbors with similar daily routines. She could count on the scent of specific meals on specific days coming from nearby homes. Fridays were long days of eager anticipation – for her father’s return from his weekly work trips to South Africa and the candy and goodies he would bring, and for the joy of the weekend when the community was in a celebratory mood and music carried through the streets day and night.

Despite the guerilla war flaring in other parts of what was then Rhodesia, life in Mufakose in the ‘70s was bright, the streetlamps mirroring the jubilation of the neighborhood.



As 9-year-old Emma approached the moving stairs, she held tightly to her mother’s leg, fearing her own would be swallowed up. It was her first shopping trip in that area. Her mother’s too. It was the first shopping trip for all the black Zimbabweans present that day. The liberation struggle had recently ended, and areas formerly restricted to the white minority were now open to all – including this low-density suburb where Emma encountered her first escalator.

Fun-loving and artistic, the young Emma had dreams of teaching, singing, modeling and acting as she grew up in independent Zimbabwe. She and her younger sister could always be found with five other girls from the neighborhood, choreographing dances and copying routines from the American variety show “Kids Incorporated.” But the girls could only practice together on the weekends, as they were split up throughout the week to different schools – the girls from wealthier families went to Group A schools in low-density areas, while Emma and her sister stayed in the high-density areas. She started performing in school plays and took up competitive swimming.

Throughout her early years Emma took note of the disadvantage women and girls faced in her neighborhood and school. Women were always the ones toiling day and night to maintain their houses and families, and very few worked outside the home. Some of those that did spent entire days in the market or traveled to neighboring countries to sell their wares and earn some extra income for their struggling families. In school, the girls had to work twice as hard as the boys to do well in school – each day they had to study and do their homework, and then help their mothers prepare meals and clean the home. Sometimes the teachers reinforced these gender roles in the classroom, requiring the girls to stay after class to help clean but letting the boys leave. Emma was so incensed she once retorted, “Both boys and girls go to school, so both boys and girls should clean. Anyway, at home my brothers cook for me!” She and some of her classmates created a play

on the issue, forcing one teacher to change his mind – and showing Emma at an early age the power of theater as social commentary.

But it was another incident that shaped Emma's perception of the world: A close neighborhood friend, only 12 or 13 at the time, was raped by a cousin. The friend was either too afraid to tell anyone, or the community elders did nothing about it, but she soon died of an infection she acquired because of the rape. Emma resolved to protect the other girls in her neighborhood and at school, and was determined to level the playing field between girls and boys.

Batsiranayi: Help Each Other

There were ten of them: five men and five women, including Emma. They all felt a responsibility to educate their community on a growing problem with a huge stigma: HIV/AIDS. The topic was taboo – people rarely talked about sex openly, much less sexually transmitted diseases. The group knew they had to tread lightly as they gauged community feeling, researched their topic thoroughly, and found alternative ways to address it.

The group of artists formed Batsiranayi Theatre Company, choosing the Shona word meaning “help each other.” They created scripts and performed plays on how to prevent HIV/AIDS. It took some time to gain the community's trust and acceptance. People viewed artists as entertainers, not educators. But the group took their time, constantly eliciting feedback from the audience on approaches that worked and those that didn't.

Soon, companies began hiring them to perform for their employees, many of whom traveled to other countries for work. The companies were seeing a pattern emerge: While away from their families, the employees were tempted to hire prostitutes – multiplying the risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease and then infecting their wives upon their return. The theatre company finally realized their work was having a tremendous impact on their community and its awareness of HIV/AIDS.

In their plays on the issue, Batsiranayi discussed basic sex education and responsibility – something not often talked about in public. But the group – and Emma in particular – knew the importance of having a safe space to discuss safe sex: She had just become a mother at the age of 18.

Emma had recently finished her O-level exams; he had just begun his college career and was being financially supported by his older brother. Questions swirled in her mind: How would she manage to take care of a child on her own? Would she be able to continue her education? How would she tell her parents? It took her seven months to – she wore baggy clothes to hide the pregnancy.

But thankfully her family supported her and helped Emma raise her son. And the father, after finishing college and finding a decent job, also helped Emma in raising their child together. They had named him Tonderai, a Shona word meaning “remember.”

While still working with Batsiranayi and raising Tonderai, Emma enrolled in a three-year training program in community theatre at the College of Arts in Harare, which had a sister program at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. The program's focus was in training its students how to creatively educate – while still entertaining – audiences and communities about social issues. Emma completed two years in Harare and the final year at Utrecht, graduating with the desire to bring theatre to the people and highlight themes so communities could acknowledge their problems, discuss them and find ways of dealing with them – thereby complementing her work with Batsiranayi.

The theatre company had become part of the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre (ZACT), where the Batsiranayi members became trainers and recruiters. They continued their work on HIV/AIDS, but also created new works that mirrored other societal issues. The company also expanded geographically, performing in rural areas where access to information is minimal. Emma became a full-time training and recruiting officer for ZACT, and now as a mother and activist, she cultivated her passion for defending and protecting women's and children's rights.

ZimRights

In 1996, civil society was little threat to the regime of Robert Mugabe, who had been in power since independence in 1980. That year Emma joined one of the first human rights organizations in the country, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, known as ZimRights. Her role was as a civic education officer and then human rights officer for Mashonaland Central, and in a similar way to her work at Batsiranayi, she used the arts to educate people about human rights – not just civil and political rights, but also economic and social rights.

While educating communities about their rights, Emma was undergoing her own education. The Gukurahundi Report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace was released in 1997 and documented in brutal detail what had happened in Matabeleland in the early 1980s, not long after Mugabe came to power. He had accused his former political ally, Joshua Nkomo, of attempting to overthrow him, and sent a military brigade to the Matabeleland province to crush pro-Nkomo dissidents. In the process, government forces tortured, disappeared and killed thousands of civilians.

For Emma, this was a revelation. The media reported very differently on the situation as it was occurring, and continued to spread misinformation even after the report was released. Emma learned to pay attention to what was, and was not, stated in the news, and to scrutinize media more. She brought this revelation into her human rights trainings, encouraging ordinary citizens to not be passive consumers of information.

Emma's work focused, again like at Batsiranayi, on rural areas. But suspicions ran high in rural communities whenever urban dwellers came to visit. She went through traditional leaders in order to gain their trust before starting any programs or trainings. But even with that, Emma had trouble discussing anything perceived as political in nature, as the rural areas were traditionally the stronghold of Mugabe's regime.

But their work became even more essential after the economy crashed in late 1997 and food prices skyrocketed. Emma had been hearing rumblings in the community – “You are here with your democracy education, but we are here starving” – and knew the situation was almost unbearable, with food scarce even before prices went up. She and her colleagues at ZimRights had been encouraging people that if they knew their rights were being violated, they needed to make noise in order to change their situation. After the devastating economic crash, they made noise.

Zimbabwe erupted in three days of protests, but they quickly became violent as citizens started looting businesses and police cracked down harshly. They were spontaneous protests, not formally organized, but still nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – including the vocal ZimRights – were targeted for motivating and supporting what turned into riots. Some human rights activists were arrested but eventually released.

Though this new negative attention from the government was discouraging – even scary at times as NGOs were under constant threats – Emma had a resurgence of spirit after the food riots. She and ZimRights were finding it difficult to measure the impact of their work, so the protests showed that the people understood their rights and were vocally advocating for their government to recognize them. Emma saw that communities were willing to step outside the fog of fear – which only gave her more energy to keep working despite the threats and a near complete political and socioeconomic breakdown in Zimbabwe.

Politics of the Stomach

After the food riots, the economy continued its freefall, with food shortages and drought multiplying the effects of poor economic policies. In 2000, Mugabe began executing a controversial land reform program, what became known as the Third Chimurenga.⁴ During the liberation struggle, Mugabe and his allies had promised that land that had been taken from native Zimbabweans by colonizers would be reclaimed. He made good on his promise at the turn of the century, displacing or arresting white farmers and re-distributing the land to black Zimbabweans – but only to elites or supporters of his political party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Many of those who took over farmland didn’t have the knowledge or resources to be commercial farmers and produce in vast quantities. The lack of production on the farms added another blow to a withering economy.

Just as Mugabe began his re-distribution of land – in what was seen as a campaign tool in the 2000 parliamentary elections and 2002 presidential elections – Emma began working as a democracy and electoral education officer for the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). She was now seeing first-hand the politics of the stomach. Citizens, particularly those in the rural areas, were told that if they voted for the opposition there would be no food or development for their region. The question for them became “Do I starve today or do I vote?” Traditional leaders were instructed about the number of votes for ZANU-PF that were expected from their community, and there were consequences for not producing those results: no food aid.

It was within this context that Emma started her work with ZESN, encouraging active, educated and peaceful citizen participation in elections and democratic activity. The challenges were

immense. In addition to the politics of the stomach, the regime cultivated fear in the rural populations. Youth were recruited or coerced into campaigning for the ruling party; campaigning included threatening and intimidating – sometimes assaulting or killing – opposition supporters and leaders. Ballots were counted at police stations rather than at legitimate polling stations. When practices like the use of translucent boxes were employed to increase the likelihood of free and fair elections, people thought their votes could be seen, so they were more likely to vote for the ruling party.

To counter the climate of intimidation, fear and misinformation, Emma used community-based workshops to educate voters and facilitate dialogue about election-related issues. She and ZESN produced and distributed training manuals, flyers, pamphlets, videos and radio and TV programs on democratic practice and voter rights. They were strictly non-partisan, never instructing people who to vote for, but simply helping them make informed decisions without coercion and encouraging dialogue on political issues within communities and nationwide.

ZESN staff also served as election observers, and Emma trained and coordinated election observation programs nationwide. The reports produced by ZESN – which revealed unfair campaigning and major violations that restricted free speech and movement – became essential impartial sources of information, in a country where media is government-controlled.

But Emma's and ZESN's work went beyond election years to the practice of democracy once leaders were elected. They attempted to link leaders and the people they are supposed to represent. They lobbied politicians on issues relating to elections, and advocated for increased transparency in the democratic process.

But as much as ZESN wanted to be seen as partners of the government – filling the gaps in information so Zimbabweans will be educated voters and active participants in a democracy – the ruling party viewed them, and all independent NGOs, as enemies of the state. The government tightened its grip on their freedom and livelihood. Mugabe said that the Zimbabwe Election Commission had the sole responsibility of educating the citizenry – yet the commissioners were appointed by the current regime. The Electoral Act of 2002 officially bans civil society from monitoring elections or conducting independent civic education. The ZANU-PF claimed that ZESN and independent NGOs are aligned with the opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, so they restricted their activities and intimidated staff members. The Public Order and Security Act bans any assembly without police clearance, and gives the police unlimited power in cracking down on public gatherings. The police also use the act to arbitrarily arrest and detain human rights defenders and democracy activists.

These moves by the government effectively stifled even the notion of free and fair elections, and Mugabe and his regime retained power in 2002 and again in parliamentary elections three years later. And as civil society was muzzled for years, life in Zimbabwe was reduced in another way in 2005.

Reduced to Rubble

“700,000 Families Displaced.” “Destruction of Homes.” “Drive Out Rubbish.” “Take Out Trash.” “Nowhere to Go.” “City Stores and Vendor Stalls Destroyed.” “Citizens Demolished Their Homes.” These headlines hovered over Zimbabwe in May of 2005 as the mayor of the capital city of Harare, once known as the Sunshine City, initiated Operation *Murambatsvina*, or Operation Drive Out Rubbish. The government claimed it was trying to beautify the city and reduce crime by razing illegal housing and other structures.

Because the country had become so impoverished, many people from rural areas had moved to the capital to earn a better living. Shantytowns and street stalls popped up as the demand for housing and business increased. Some who lived in the city also added extensions to their homes for extended family. They weren’t told they were illegal.

Bulldozers were used. Police enforced the operation. Sometimes they would warn homeowners that their residence was going to be destroyed and told them they would be beaten if they didn’t destroy the buildings themselves. If people resisted, violent battles would break out. Emma’s own family was affected when their housing extension was destroyed. Many resigned themselves to moving back to the rural areas and starting over. Others stayed and tried to live with family, putting further strain on struggling Zimbabweans.

With ZESN, Emma continued her democracy work, conducting research on the effects of the displacement on the electorate and tracking the mood of people on the ground. She also liaised with other NGOs and community organizations who were trying to provide aid to the displaced. While many believed the operation targeted opposition voters, who mainly resided in Harare, for Emma it was less important who was behind the destruction than it was ensuring that basic needs were met. The question that continues to drive her work:

How will they ever listen to me talking about democracy if they don’t have food to eat or a roof over their head?

CONVERSATION WITH EMMACULETA CHISEYA

The following is an edited compilation of interviews conducted by Lucia Gbaya-Kanga between September 20 and November 5, 2005.

Q: Can you briefly describe the current situation in Zimbabwe, including the situation of women?

A: The inflation rate is at 360 percent. Unemployment is at 80 percent. Low agricultural production has led to food shortages. Many companies are closing down and as they leave, so do the “intellectuals,” resulting in a massive brain drain. Four million people are living in neighboring countries and beyond; we call them economic refugees. There are widespread violations of property rights and violent farm invasions. Operation Murambatsvina – the demolition of illegal structures – has left 700,000 people homeless. Harare has gone to the dogs. There are violations of civil and political rights, specifically freedom of association, choice, movement and speech. Corruption is our number one enemy.

Women are always toiling day and night for the family; it has always been the women who run the home. Women tend to bear the brunt of the burden worrying about themselves and the child’s daily necessities, and are always toiling day and night for their families. Women and children shouldn’t live in isolation. They must be supported – they must be supported.

Q: How would you characterize the work you did with Batsiranayi?

A: We call it “edutainment.” Not very many people are interested in reading pamphlets or flyers, but if they see something that is engaging – like our theater plays – this becomes more effective in educating and provoking dialogue amongst people.

Q: Discuss some of the challenges you face in your work now, including the repressive legislation that has passed or been considered recently in Zimbabwe.

A: The government came up with the NGO bill to stifle us and restrict our activities. It bans NGOs from receiving foreign funding. [Donors] are viewed as external forces coming into the community and creating havoc. The NGO Bill was how the government could clip our wings. It is a way to divide and conquer NGOs by creating confusion: You lose focus in the competition for funds and worry about survival. The government’s stubbornness and stance in maintaining repressive policies keeps the conflict going.

Some rural areas have become virtually inaccessible to human rights activists. Non-legislated militias, war vets and the youth brigade are deployed to curtail freedom of movement, assembly and expression. But we are not telling people who to vote for; we want our community to make informed decisions without coercion or intimidation. After all, we can have differing views and still get along.

My work as an individual is not to challenge the government but to empower the citizens. But it becomes difficult to educate people about their rights when they are wondering where their next

meal is going to come from. Again, people tend to do a cost-benefit analysis and decide to support the ruling party, if only to eat.

Q: What are your hopes for Zimbabwe?

A: It is always darkest before the dawn. One cannot predict the future. We are still in it – people are not happy with what has been going on in the country. They have hopes, but some are despairing. It becomes our job to make sure they are engaged and empowered.

My greatest wish for Zimbabwe is for the ordinary person to be able to vote and have access to the basic necessities in life. I want our children to know from a tender age our history, who we are, where we come from and what makes us who we are.

Q: Would you ever consider leaving Zimbabwe?

A: Sometimes I think, *how long? Will this improve in my lifetime?* Now, I am a mother and I see what is taking place around me. My children⁵ are my fuel, my greatest motivators in life. And then I say, “What if one day I’m gone or something happens to me, and my children are left alone in this environment?” It’s frightening.

But it is always darkest before dawn. This is my calling. Despite the threat, I must continue on.

BIOGRAPHY OF A PEACE WRITER –
Lucia Gbaya-Kanga

Lucia Gbaya-Kanga, originally from Sierra Leone, fled the country with her family during turbulent times when she was young. She was raised in Philadelphia, Pa., and lives in San Diego where she teaches composition and literature at City and MiraCosta Colleges. As an author of dramatic poetry, she has performed at various venues in Philadelphia and San Diego. Gbaya-Kanga's work focuses on issues such as fragmentation, displacement, exile, war and relationships between mother and child. She is published in *Sunshine Noir*, an anthology published by City Works Press, and *Chain*, a literary magazine. She also co-hosts a specialty show "illfonix" on KSDS Jazz 88 and is involved in various projects with community artists, activists and educators.

JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to not only talk about peace, but also make peace. In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. In Nepal, for example, for nearly a decade the IPJ has been working with Nepali groups to support inclusiveness and dialogue in the transition from armed conflict and monarchy to peace and multiparty democracy. In its West African Human Rights Training Initiative, the institute partners with local human rights groups to strengthen their ability to pressure government for reform and accountability.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

IPJ	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
USD	University of San Diego
ZACT	Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network

ENDNOTES

¹ A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article “‘Women Cannot Cry Anymore’: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

² The capital city Salisbury became Harare after independence in 1980.

³ Emma also has a younger sister.

⁴ *Chimurenga* is a Shona word meaning “struggle.” The First Chimurenga refers to African insurrections against British colonial rule in the late 19th century, and the Second Chimurenga was the guerilla war against Rhodesia’s white minority rule from 1966 to 1980.

⁵ In addition to Tonderai, Emma has a daughter named Chenai.