

Re-reading John 3:26–27: A comparative analysis of the politics of intolerance in Zimbabwe

**Author:**Dzikamai Mundenda^{1,2} **Affiliations:**¹Anglican Diocese of Harare, Harare, Zimbabwe²Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa**Research Project Registration:****Project Leader:** Ernest van Eck **Project Number:** 2400030**Description:**

The author/s are participating in the research project 'Africa Platform for NT Scholars', directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

Corresponding author:

Dzikamai Mundenda, dmundenda@gmail.com

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The Gospel of John seems to show different thematic emphases that reveal socio-historical cultural tensions and a stressed community. The tensions between Jesus, the Pharisees and Jewish authorities, John and religious authorities, and John's and Jesus' disciples stressed the unsettled community. A disagreement existed on the divinity, identity and legitimacy of Jesus. The tensions bore character assassinations, name calling, denigration, crucifixion and tensions among followers. John 3:26–27 is an archetype of the friction. In the same vein, the independent and post-independent Zimbabwe exhibited political tensions, hate speech, denigration and violence since 1980. The tensions eroded confidence, unity and decision-making of the electorate. The violence and human rights abuses left visible trails of suffering and humiliations. The societal and political tension triggered unbecoming behaviours causing economic and ethical meltdown. This research seeks to unravel the mindset that aggravates violence to provide a reprieve theologically. The socio-historical reading juxtaposed with comparative analysis points to averting hate speech and songs that fuelled intolerance. According to this research, parochialism originates from citizens uniting behind promised futures and peace, a product of leaders participating in promoting peace. This unity helps propel tolerance, accountability and responsibility.

Contribution: The study observes that citizens rally behind the promised future where leaders and ordinary citizens exhibit tolerance, accountability and responsibility. The leaders and the ordinary citizens can participate in amplifying intolerance, hate speech or character assassination. Vice versa, they can participate in controlling tensions and fights.

Keywords: intolerance; violence; Zimbabwe; politics; ethnical politics; Gospel of John; comparative analysis; socio-historical reading.

Introduction

The Gospel of John is a distinct stratum of socio-historical cultural tensions. There are episodes of disagreements between Jesus, the religious and civic authorities, John and religious authorities and John's disciples and Jesus' disciples and others. The tensions assassinate or desire to assassinate characters. They birth intolerance that physically killed and promoted emotional or character assassination. A reading of John 3:23–26 is an archetype of the reactions when contenders appear on the stage. Zimbabwe is no exception. The nation experienced political tensions, hate speech and violations, the pre- and post-independence periods that eroded citizens' confidence, unity and decision-making (Weigel 2009). The political and human rights violations left visible trails of suffering, disenfranchised families, orphans and homelessness. The societal changes triggered unbecoming behaviours and economic meltdown. The changes influenced the social behavioural pattern and the electorate's electoral thought processes. Researchers such as Lloyd Sachikonye (2011), CCJP¹ (March 1997), RAU² (2019) and Gunda (2019) suggested both Christian and political solutions to the atrocities. The reports acknowledged the effects and proffered elucidations to promote a conducive environment that enhances socio-economic development. One cannot repudiate the retrogression.

This research seeks to unravel the mindset that aggravates violence aiming to provide a reprieve theologically. The socio-historical reading when juxtaposed with comparative analysis points to averting hate speech and songs that fuelled intolerance. The methodology unveils the source of

1.CCJP is a Roman Catholic Church ministry arm that stands for Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace.

2.Research Advocacy Unit.

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parochialism. The research contends that citizens rally behind the promised future. This helps propel tolerance, accountability and responsibility.

Theoretical framework and research methodology

The study used socio-historical method as a theoretical framework. The study used comparative analysis and textual analysis with specific reference to John 3:26–27. These methodologies, one after another, shall explore the text beginning with the theoretical framework.

Socio-historical study

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896–1936) through his work founded the socio-historical theory in the 1920s. Vygotsky argued that one can understand human beings from their socio-historical environment. Karl Marx (1818–1883) influenced Vygotsky who identified the persuasive process as a sequence of conflicts and resolutions. This happens when a new force of production or administration comes into conflict with the existing social system and the new social system seeking installation. The social environment, thus, influences the mental capacity of any person. This contemporary method influenced the birth of historical interpretative methods such as feminist, woman and liberation theology seeking familiarity with the history of mankind.

Thus, according to Meeks (2003:2–7), socio-historical method is an inter-disciplinary study of the New Testament that seriously explores the biblical world, human experiences and its text to construct interpretation or criticise construction. The method explores the biblical historical (political, religious, social or economic) events and their relations effected on people or those that affect other people, seen in the presentation of the materials. Segal (2001:339) argued that since inception, researchers accepted the socio-historical method as central to the quest for knowledge because it encompasses human social, economic, cultural and political life. The methodology evaluates biblical social life, asking why certain historical events impacted communities and individuals, lives, decisions and decision-making processes of people living within the *Sitz im Leben* 'that concern intergroup conflicts, organizational structure, and community norms' (Slade 2020:5). What insights on social life, legal, cultural and religious life does the text offer to ascertain the course of certain behaviours 'providing a more meaningful account of the factors that influenced the course of history' (McDowell 2002:20). The assertion suggests that one understands a behavioural pattern or the text based on the historical social life, daily interactions, events or values of the society. Thus, Karl Marx in *Theses in Feuerbach* quoted by Schwartz (1955:134) stated: The essence of man is no abstraction dwelling with the isolated individual. It is the totality of his social relations, also argued as the history from below (Himmelfarb 1987:14–15). Karl Marx's approach submits that there are dynamics in all human behaviour, with the social structure acting as the determining factor (Schwartz 1955:134).

Gorman (2009:220) discussing on *elements of biblical exegesis* called this methodology the historical approach. It explores the social and cultural milieu of the text and the communities by which and in which it was produced. Social historians emphasise researching the lives of ordinary people, the actions of individuals and social movements investigating what these elements say about society (Jurgens 2021). There is incompact interrelationship between the 'letters, reports, and diaries that were composed at the time when the specific events took place are primary sources with the author' (Jurgens 2021:4).

Biblical scholars Koester (2001:19), Meyer (1981:49), Schneider (1991:152) and Dunn (2003:124) argued that the primary work of socio-historical reading is asking questions. The example is: What are the meaning and implications of Jesus' baptism to the religious leaders of the time in John 3:26–27? Would following Jesus create serious negative repercussions on their reputation or image to the Johannine party?

Such questions probe and search for reasons. Rabinowitz (1977:121–141) and Talbert (2003:14–18) identified four audiences foundational in understanding the text. These are: (1) the actual audience, the readers, or audiences physically present or reading the text; (2) the authorial audience, the implied readers or audiences of the text; and (3) the audience. These are the audience targeted in the creation of the story, and lastly, the (4) ideal audience. The ideal audience accepts the author's presumed perspective regardless of the perspective of the actual and authorial audience.

The socio-historical reading validates an analysis and inquiry of a constructed behavioural pattern of political intolerance in Zimbabwe and criticises the same. In relationship to John 3:26–27, the reaction of John and his disciples to the popularity of Jesus helps us juxtapose the same pattern prevalent in Zimbabwe.

Comparative analysis

This social scientific method emanated in the last century. The methodology, according to Azarian (2011:114), 'gained popularity and attention, due to globalisation, and technological advancements on cross-national platforms'. As a global village, one could compare behaviour patterns and ethical considerations between states and cultures. At stake are values, effects, ideologies, and variables or relationships that inform choices and decisions. Adiyia and Ashton (2017:1) noted that comparative analysis explains the causal processes involved in the creation of an event, feature or relationship, gathering variations in the explanatory variables or valuables, and thus compares differences and similarities seeking to evaluate the findings.

The methods compare relationships, conflicts and values of the Zimbabwe situation and John 3:26–27. What are the drivers of the prevailing trends in both Zimbabwean and the text context? Why is it that in John 3:26–27, Jesus' party

agitated against other players who were baptised but never spoke against them?

Zimbabwe's political, intolerant and violent chronicle

Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 after a long-protracted struggle against the British colonisers. The government, according to Alwang, Mills and Tauvinga (2002:3), inherited a relatively modern diversified economy, especially by sub-Saharan African standards. Julius Nyerere, the late Tanzanian president, described Zimbabwe as 'the Jewel of Africa'³ and advised Prime Minister Robert Mugabe to safeguard it.

The fortunes, however, turned around upside down. Besado and Moyo (2008) observed that:

Within the first decade of independence, however, President Mugabe had reneged on his promises to provide Zimbabweans with basic government services, adequate living standards, and a democratic and representative government that embraced the rule of law and fundamental human freedom, and the country began to spiral out of control. (p. 1)

Gunda (2018:13) lamented the economic woes arguing Zimbabwe moved 'From being the breadbasket of Africa, we have gradually and rapidly fallen to become the basket case of Africa'. Nyarota (2018:22) said it took two decades for Mugabe's political ideology (*Mugabeism*) to put Zimbabwe on its knees. Raftopoulos (2004:2 quoted in Gunda 2018:13) concluded 'As a nation, we are at the most critical point of our history, struggling to chart a peaceful path beyond our present devastating political and economic conditions'.

The drastic economic turnaround of the socio-political life requires an investigation of the history and socio-political situation in Zimbabwe.

Gukurahundi

As early as 1983–1984, Zimbabwe suffered the first spate of social unrest as the government instigated a genocide and Human Rights Violation. The ruling party unleashed tribal or regional violence in two of the 10 provinces, Matabeleland and Midlands. The North Korean-trained army was predominantly Shona or who could speak Shona. The army wilfully set to quell the opposing voice. The atrocities spared the Shona speakers from death, which worsened an already unhealthy relationship between the two ethnic groups (Dumisani 2018:2). Gukurahundi confirmed and cemented the tribal differences and political differences that existed since the 1960s. Enos Nkala⁴ (1932–2013) argued that 'the solution to the problems (*disunity and differences in ideologies*)⁵

3.The former president of Tanzania, Julius Mwalimu Nyerere (1922–1999) said this statement just after independence to Robert Gabriel Mugabe soon after independence when the country had a booming economy.

4.Enos Nkala is one of the four founding members of the ZANU (PF). He was the treasurer, Léopold Takawira was the vice president, Robert Mugabe was the secretary general and Ndabaningi Sithole was the president.

5.This emphasis is mine.

lies in the establishment of a one-party state' (Doran 2017). The Prime minister longed for a one-party state thus creating an executive presidency akin to the traditional chieftainship. This happened in 1987.

The mass killing, torture, disappearance and maiming was codenamed *Gukurahundi*. The atrocities adversely affected the Ndebele perception of ZANU (PF).⁶ The ZANU (PF) party became synonymous with hatred, abuser or killers. The atrocities according to CCJP left more than 20 000 dead and thousands, the living stripped of their *Ubuntu* and human rights (Mthwakazi Independent 2023). The citizens disliked the ruling party desiring an alternative voice. The human rights violations targeted Ndebele-speaking people who supported ZAPU and had voted for Joshua Nkomo (1917–1999) party that opposed ZANU (PF) (Nyarota 2018:22). Supporting ZAPU was synonymous with supporting dissidents,⁷ stooges, sell-outs or agents of imperialism. The government blocked open commemorations and dialogues of the atrocities.

The ruling party discouraged social integration or interaction with the opposition party but in liquidating or introducing a one-party state such as the Rhodesians (Doran 2017). The atrocities left Matabeleland and Midlands resenting the Shona people, with extreme hating of Robert Mugabe. The resultant feeling gave birth to one and more dissenting voices.

The referendum

In 2000–2002, Zimbabweans rejected the draft constitution that sought to strengthen Mugabe's presidential powers simultaneously addressing colonial imbalances. About 56% of the Zimbabwean electorate rejected the proposed reforms. The rejection indicated the emergency of the alternate voice.⁸ Zimbabwe was a one-party state since the 1987 Unity Accord. The ruling party ZANU (PF) accepted the outcome unreservedly. Social unrest resulted (Sims 2015):

ZANU (PF) supported a process which included torture, rape, kidnapping, intimidation, and murder, as well as a range of other forms of social, economic, emotional, cultural, and sexual violence, to consolidate its hegemony on power. (p. 1)

In a report by Australia (2008:5), persecution targeted teachers as opposition supporters. In the Gutu district, teachers were forced to pay 300 Zimbabwean local currency each for rallies. The reporter said, 'Although some teachers have vowed to defy the order, others said they would solely pay the money as a protection fee against victimisation'.

6.Gukurahundi is a 'Shona' term refers to the first rain of summer that washes away the chaff left from the previous season (Sachikonye 2011). The people of Matabeleland and Midlands were construed as the chaff needing burning or eradication.

7.A dissident is a person who disagrees and carries a different opinion. In our context, it meant the Ndebele people who the government felt disagreed with the party ideology and intended to overthrow the government. So, the atrocities committed sought to annihilate the person with an opposing view.

8.The dissatisfaction with ZANU (PF) forced people to accept MDC from the workers union. The citizens felt marginalised and uncared for by the ruling party.

Operation Murambatsvina

The government in 2005 launched *Operation Murambatsvina* (drive out the filth).⁹ What needed cleansing, from whom and what was the filth? The clean-up was aimed at evicting the poor urban population from their squalid shelter. The evictions started on the 25 June 2005, sweeping through towns and rural business areas. The clean-up targeted properties belonging mostly to urban and rural opposition supporters. Ncube and Phillip (2006:74) say '*Operation Murambatsvina*' impacted an estimated 90 000 vendors, adversely affecting about 2.4 million Zimbabweans with over 2000 killed. The opposition party became dirty to wash out or annihilate. The opposition party members did not deserve space as they were the chaff. The behaviour left people homeless without sustainability raising international concerns.

Politically motivated violences

In 2008, Zimbabwe experienced a series of political violence beatings, torture and killings of the opponents of the regime. The Human Rights Watch (2008) stated the torture happened in informal detention centres. The detention centres were set up in the opposition constituencies of Mutoko North, Mutoko South, Mudzi and Bikita West to round up and instil fear in suspected political opponents.

The surging violence targeted people suspected of having voted for MDC in the previous month's elections (Human Rights Watch 2008). The ruling party launched the campaign, '*operation makavhoterepi*':

ZANU-PF officials are calling the crackdown *Operation Makavhoterapapi*, or 'Where did you put your cross?' There seem to be two aims to this organized violence: to punish people for having voted for the MDC and to intimidate them to vote for ZANU-PF if there is a presidential run-off. One victim told Human Rights Watch: 'They told me that next time you will vote wisely, now you know what we can do'. (p. 1)

Besides the impunity, the ruling party controlled all structures. Food distribution went to card-carrying members or prospective supporters. The suspected opposition members did not deserve social recognition and were denied social benefits. The ruling party became synonymous with the umbilical cord or the conveyor belt that supplied food to the people attached and supported the party. ZANU PF employed violence through state institutions to bolster the dominance over opposition members across the country.

The ruling party coined the term '*Third Chimurenga*', as a sequel to the First and Second Liberation struggles. The quest was the liberation of the nation against Western countries. The ruling party considered MDC as the vehicle for recolonisation. The atrocities, tortures and disappearances caused sections of the society to bunk ZANU (PF) for the opposition party. The current tumbling down of the economy under the Second Republic continues to influence people and

9.Operation restores order or Operation Clean-up.

their perception of the ruling party. At least new emerging parties such as Citizens for Coalition Change (CCC) and Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC (A) appear innocent and promise to change the living standards of the citizens.

Juxtaposing the Gospel of John's socio-historical context with the ruling ZANU (PF) helps fathom the causes and possible responses to similar future occurrences. What does the Gospel of John say? Does it reveal similar tendencies found in contemporary Zimbabwe?

Textual analysis

This method gathers information about how human beings understand the world and understand how society determines identity and how to fit into the world. Textual analysis investigates texts, movies, rules of games and buildings in their architectural designs (Allan McKee 2003:6). Thus, textual analysis reads a text or a book to understand thought pattern, experiences and ideologies. The quest is to interpret the world, trends, thoughts and feelings. In this research, the Gospel of John is the platform.

The debate on the authorship remains a perennial problem among New Testament scholars. Irenaeus¹⁰ (Ca 18–200), Clement of Alexandria (Ca 150–215) and the Muratorian canon claimed John as the author of the Gospel. He went to Ephesus and visited the church appointing bishops to consolidate the church (Von Wahlde 2010:623). The Anti-Marcionite prologue of the Gospel of Luke opines that John wrote the apocalypse on Patmos and later wrote the Gospel.

The second school of thought acclaims that 'the disciples whom Jesus loved' (John 21:20, 24) are the authors (Riddderbos 1997:1): At the Last Supper (13:21–26), the crucifixion (19:26–27, 34–35), the empty tomb (20:1–10) and the last chapter of the book in (21:1–8, 18–24). Westcott wrote five considerations justifying John as the author of the Gospel. He said: (1) the author was Jew, (2) the author was Palestinian, (3) the eyewitness, (4) the apostle and (5) John the disciple. He becomes the author and a witness to Jesus' ministry known to Peter. However, the gospel does not provide further details for identification leaving the scholarly debate rife and open.

Brown (1979), a conservative scholar concluded that the two: the Son of Zebedee and the beloved disciples are but one person. He is the elder proffered in the letters (Von Wahlde 2010:35). The Muratorian fragment regards John as the Disciple whom Jesus loved. Brown (1979) states that John testified to Jesus' ministry and the founding of the Johannine community.

Scholars date the gospel around 130 AD when the gnostic acknowledged the Book. The Gospel circulated after the destruction of the temple. Jesus replaced the temple with his body. The Jerusalem temple played an insignificant role

10.He is the first to mention that John was the author of the gospel.

during the time of the composition. Justin Martyr 155 knew Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (Brant 2011:4). Thus, scholars place the authorship of the fourth gospel in the early second century. The book could be from Antioch, Alexandria or Ephesus. Scholars who favour Alexandria (Ac 18:24) honoured John the Baptist overshadowed with Hellenistic thought (Buttrick 1952:441). Alexandria is known for several theological debates including gnostic tendencies. Irenaeus, the Early Church father contends that 'John ... published the Gospel while he resided at Ephesus in Asia' (Kosternberger 2013:7). The most acclaimed traditions accord Ephesus as the destination.

Martyr (2003:146) opines that the gospel of John reflects community interests, concerns and experiences. The material appears in literary strata each distinct from the other reflecting socio-historical strata of a continuous nature of the community over a period. His reflection agrees with Raymond Brown's discoveries that help imagine the social, historical, religious and cultural life experiences that influenced the Johannine community's thought and bring the material for comparative analysis. Raymond Brown (1979:146) imagined phases in the establishment of the communities the letters addressed reflecting the socio-historical life.

What does the text in question say? The text shows divided, different ideologies and assumptions. The same thoughts make sense when interpreting the text in question.

Exegesis of John 3:26–27

The text for exegesis and comparative analysis reads:

They came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—look, he is baptising, and everyone is going to him.' To this John replied, 'A person can receive only what is given them from heaven'. (Jn 3:26–27)

Jesus had taught spiritual regeneration to Nicodemus. The disciples of John liked and enjoyed the popularity. The narrator then 'characterised the health of John's ministry' (Brant 2011:80), as dwindling or affected by Jesus' ministry. Jesus spent time teaching and baptising people in the countryside. His regeneration message gained the limelight with new people following him and others defecting from the Johannine party. Jesus' ministry was parallel to John the Baptist in another region. Jesus' popularity and the baptism ministry did not auger well with John's disciples. There could have been a dispute between Jesus' disciples and John's disciples, affecting the growth of the Jesus movement (George 1952:514).

John's disciples addressed John as *Rabbi*, (ῥαββί) the master, teacher and standard. The disciples identified Jesus as *that man ...*, without identity and distracting them. John responded saying, 'We must be content with what God gives'. John understood his mission and its duration. In Mark 2:19, 'John calls himself', the friend of the bridegroom. He knew the new age had arrived.

According to Carson (1991:165), the statement '*everyone is going to him*', is an exaggerated response to their resentment. Would the disciples of John need to silence, maim and intimidate Jesus' followers because they were turning tables upside down? Was John's ministry to stop at the onset of Jesus' ministry? If John had halted his ministry abruptly with the coming of Jesus, people would construe his action as resentment or anger.

The success of Jesus dispirited John's disciples because Jesus was more popular and commanded a following than John. John should surely do something. Their quest implied, 'What are you doing about it' (Michaels 2010:316). They wanted John to react. They could not stand watching the developments that dwindled their popularity. The response from John was, A person can receive only what the heavens gave him.

The continuation meant the two, John and Jesus, were not diametrical but saved the same purpose. The people followed simply because they saw Jesus' ministry as superior. Besides, the Romans oppressed the Jews, and they desired freedom of worship.

Application

When Jews broke rank to follow Jesus, they compared the manifestos of the Johannine and the Jesus party and their compelling visions. The followers listened to the voice of opposition parties such as Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC (A) that promised a 'brighter future'. Zimbabwe has had series of political, economic and moral woes. When Zimbabweans rejected the referendum, they rejected constitution, the weaknesses of major player, ZANU (PF). ZANU proposed changes that promoted their selfish agenda. The proposed change did not reflect hope and care for the citizens and so compelled people to voluntarily support the NO to the referendum. The MDC (A) spoke the desired future. Jesus' ministry seemed to provide an alternate way of better living. Since 2000, the growing electorates followed the emerging parties that appealed to citizens' needs: the new voice, 'Movement for Democratic Change' (MDC) as their voice. The party emerged from the Workers Union, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) and civic organisations. They attracted citizens dissatisfied with growing poverty and unemployment, in what Hammar and Raftopoulos (2002) called a 'national crisis'.

The Jesus party brought a fresh breath and desired an end to the tyrannical rule. The nationalist agenda of the ruling party aimed to dislodge the colonial mentality, however, failed to provide security and social peace for the Zimbabweans. ZANU (PF) power declined in the first decade. Alternate voices appealed to the public. The alternative Jesus voices garnered support. Within the year of formation, the MDC garnered 57 while ZANU (PF) had 62 seats out of the 120 contested. ZANU (PF) lost seats in their stronghold provinces of Matabeleland and Manicaland (Maroleng 2002:1). Power struggles ensued during campaigns the questions: What should best be done to the rival voice. People defected to the

new MDC formations because of discontentment. The close contest and defections to MDC signified the dissatisfaction with the ruling party. The future promised by MDC formation was attractive. However, the quest to quell the opposition voice emanated from hatred, annoyance and challenges to ZANU (PF) that had dominated the political arena since independence.

'What do you say or what would you do about it?' This presumed question from John's followers reflects that Jesus, ministry and popularity threatened John. The question was: Will you remain silent when your name is under threat? Surely you must do something. Since independence, the ruling ZANU (PF) party promoted one party-state. The rejection of the Referendum in 2000 probed the question to the President and the ruling cronies of their popularity. Such a question invited hostility, character assassination, torture, hate speech and violent response from threatened ZANU (PF). The ruling party jeopardised, killed and tortured MDC members. The ruling party never imagined a fierce opposition. The referendum made the ruling ZANU(PF) reminisce alternatives to remain relevant. They would not stand watching a prevailing rival group.

Currently, Job Sikhala, a leader with Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) is in prison, unconvicted for demanding justice for the murdered CCC opposition activist Moreblessing Ali. They found her mutilated body in a well. Sikhala has been in prison since June 2022 and unsuccessfully applied for bail more than 15 times. Critics perceive the treatment as politically motivated limiting contest in the coming 2023 elections. The government jailed Jacob Ngarivhume, the leader of Transform Zimbabwe for 3 years for inciting the public¹¹ to join Twitter posts. Critics argued that the ruling party ZANU (PF) incarcerated the one baptising, but not belonging to their group. This is what ZANU (PF) said about the opposition or alternative voice.

People rally for the promised future. Coercion yields temporary results. The statement by John's disciples invited John to react. He however understood the social aspect of leadership, 'A man can receive nothing, except it is given him from heaven'.¹²

Jesus came to give a unique life (Jn 10:10), no wonder people 'came from all over following him'. People accused ZANU (PF) for not heeding to the cries of the people, without deliberate listening to the people. If the current tide persists, these circumstances shall compel citizens to vote for the CCC in the next harmonised elections. The use of force bussing citizens forcibly to rallies yields nothing.

John's disciples did not approve Jesus' ministry. They assassinated Jesus 'character, as *that man*', to damage his

11. Jacob Ngarivhume called for a peaceful anti-corruption demonstration in July 2020 that is constitutionally guaranteed in Zimbabwe and his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The arrest testifies to the ruling party's crackdown on dissenting voices. He was convicted on the 28 April 2023 for 3 years without an option for fine.

12. John 3:27.

reputation and credibility. The assassination is rife in Zimbabwe. The ruling ZANU (PF) party uses songs, spoken insults, verbal and non-verbal insults, and media to discredit or assassinate characters of opposition voice. John's disciples said, '*Rabbi ... that man ...*'. They gave John the status, which they stripped Jesus.

The story of questioning Jesus' identity resonates well with the African leadership cultural beliefs: the Shona proverb, '*Hakuna musha unorira machongwe maviri*'. There is no homestead that crows two cocks simultaneously. You must kill or silence the other cock. Killing manifests differently. It could be physical killing or name calling such as calling someone a dissident or Gammatox. There is also the sexually denigrating of women politicians as witches or prostitution. Does that mean leadership comes in succession? However, autocracy develops from refusing to acknowledge other potential.

John's disciples wanted to be the only cock crowing, and ZANU (PF) believed the same; hence, their hostile reaction. The ZANU (PF) is the Rabbi while CCC is *that man ...* When John's disciples called him Rabbi (ῥαββί), they tagged John as the standard, teacher or master, hence, undisputed. They become experts in every aspect of Jewish life, in marriage, death, religious services, teaching and counselling.

The *Oasis* magazine recalls the hate speech by the then Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe. He called the (PF) ZAPU as snakes and Joshua Nkomo, the party, as the 'head of the snake that needed to be crushed' (Malunga 2020). After the 2017 coup, Mnangagwa used to hate speech against the MDC supporters and civil society activists as '*dark forces, bad apples and terrorists*' that had to be dealt with (Malunga 2020). Such statement does fuel violence.

The political leaders can significantly prevent violence. John participated when answered his disciples saying:

A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him'. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. (Jn 3:27-30)

Conclusions

The research employed the methodologies to compare two variables, though distant. The current Zimbabwe political quagmire and Johannine scenarios provided informed comparable truth on human philosophies, world view, interpretation of events or when there is competition or contest. John's response provides an understanding worthy meditating on in times of multiple voices in the community. Through these methodologies, Zimbabweans can learn the root and development of the challenges understanding that God has the final say. The Johannine gospel and its socio-historical context forewarn the contemporary understanding

and perceptions when you challenge the status quo. However, not all people follow the new and alternative voice. Some people see the future within an organisation most people would denigrate.

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