

Tragic Optimism: A Psychobiography of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai



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Abstract For many Zimbabweans, Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (1952–2018) became the face of courage and hope during his political career. Tsvangirai was subjected to and witnessed political violence, physical abuse, brutality, emotional humiliation, unlawful detentions, and persecution. He challenged the ruling party in Zimbabwe, and his leadership gave many people hope for the future. In the context of living in a colonial era, poverty, and having to endure the brutality of the Mugabe era, he lived a meaningful life that saw him becoming a Prime Minister of Zimbabwe (2009–2013). This single-case study explores and describes Tsvangirai’s life and interprets it in terms of Frankl’s existential theory. More specifically, Tsvangirai’s life is interpreted from the perspective of Frankl’s three triads, the fundamental, meaning, and tragic triads, as well as the noetic dimension. Tsvangirai was selected through purposive sampling based on his important role in Zimbabwean politics. The primary source of data was biographical and autobiographical publications. The findings indicate that Tsvangirai shifted emphasis within the meaning triad in living a meaningful life and that he was able to use the human capacity of self-distancing/detachment and self-transcendence to find meaning in his life. This chapter sheds light on how individuals make sense of their circumstances and search for meaning and purpose in adverse conditions. It also contributes towards the development of psychobiographical research among non-WEIRD samples.

Keywords Psychobiography · Morgan Tsvangirai · Existential psychology · Viktor Frankl · Non-WEIRD

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1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore, describe, and interpret the meaning-making process across the lifespan of Morgan Richard Tsvangirai (1957–2018), a past leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) who provided the Zimbabwean ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), with strong opposition. Essentially, this chapter focuses on how Tsvangirai achieved meaning in his life while living in a turbulent socio-political context.

2 Context of Zimbabwean Political Environment

For the past 42 years, the Zimbabwean social, economic, and political landscape has been characterised by human suffering. Since attaining independence, the country's economy has been shrinking, yielding the second-highest estimated inflation rate of 79.6 billion percent in November 2008 (compared to a rate of 5.4% at independence in 1980), an unprecedented high unemployment rate, and political chaos (Hanke, 2008, 2018; Jones, 2010). The following examples illustrate Zimbabwe's unusual inflation rate. In 2008, the highest currency unit was a Z\$10-trillion note, which was equivalent to US\$8, and one could not buy two cans of Coca-Cola with the note (Biti, 2015). The highest note issued by the Zimbabwean government was a Z\$100-trillion note. At independence, the highest note was a Z\$20 note. At the height of hyperinflation in December 2008, Z\$4-million was equivalent to US\$1 per the official exchange rate (Globalisation and Monetary Policy Institute, 2011). The *Economic Times* (2008) stated that the value of a loaf of bread was equivalent to the value of 12 new cars a decade ago (i.e., Z\$10-million).

Despite the challenges the governing ZANU PF faced, opposition parties such as PF-ZAPU (led by the late vice-president Joshua Nkomo) and the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (led by Edgar Tekere, a former member of ZANU PF) failed to pose any threat to the ruling party (Phiri, 2022; Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). The opposition parties faced challenges that included vote-rigging, political violence, and pre-and post-election intimidation of voters and opposition leaders that resulted in their demise (Phiri, 2022). Amidst this chaos, Zimbabweans became hopeful for a better future when the MDC, led by Tsvangirai, was launched in 1999 (Phiri, 2022).

3 Overview of Tsvangirai's Life¹

3.1 *Early Life*

Tsvangirai was the eldest of nine children and grew up in a rural area of Zimbabwe. His mother was a housewife, and his father was a carpenter, bricklayer, and mine worker. The family experienced poverty, but Tsvangirai's parents valued education and ensured the children attended school. Tsvangirai described his father as stubborn and undaunted due to his persistence in schooling. He started his education in 1959. He remembers being taught to recite Psalm 23 by his first schoolteacher and continued being able to recite it with ease into his adulthood. During that period, failing a grade resulted in dropping out of school or looking for another place. Tsvangirai failed a few school grades, but due to his parents' dedication, he completed primary school at another school.

Tsvangirai often witnessed the arrests of political activists, including his teachers. Although he failed to understand the reasons for these arrests, the courage of the political activists impressed him. At a very young age, Tsvangirai listened to his father narrating how he detested his own life because of poverty and suffering. Tsvangirai also had to contend with racist remarks when he wanted to apply for high school places. Tsvangirai left school as a teenager in 1971, with a high school qualification (Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level—4 years of high school), to assist his parents financially. Ironically, he was later called an “ignoramus” by Mugabe due to his lack of tertiary education (Nyambabvu, 2013). Tsvangirai noted that he learnt “manly” responsibility, fearlessness, and moral worthiness from his father. He learned independence, passion, empathy, kindness, survival skills, and communal solidarity from his mother.

3.2 *Marriage*

Tsvangirai met his first wife, Susan Tsvangirai (born 1958), in 1977 and married her in 1978. They welcomed their first son in 1979. The birth of his first son is described with greater joy than the birth of the other five children. No further information about his first marriage was provided until he was involved in politics. Tsvangirai shared his ambitions of founding a comprehensive opposition movement with Susan in 1997, who “laughed her heart out” (p. 218), as, during that time, it was inconceivable. Upon Tsvangirai assuming a political role, Susan had to take up a dual role (i.e. mother and father) due to Tsvangirai's work commitments. He did not have time to spend with his children due to his political involvement, which required his full attention. Tsvangirai was aware that his role in politics may have negatively affected

¹Unless otherwise specified, this section relies mainly on Tsvangirai's autobiography: Morgan Tsvangirai: At the deep end (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

his children. His family had to cope with *loneliness* even when he was physically present as he tended to be an absent father and husband.

Tsvangirai felt powerless after the accident that killed Susan in March 2009. Tsvangirai sounded grateful for the support and the opportunity that Susan gave him to pursue a political career. The death of Susan resulted in Tsvangirai experiencing dark anxieties as he had lost someone he had shared his life with for an extended period. The couple had been married for 31 years at the time of the death of Susan and had six children together. Tsvangirai describes Susan as a personal adviser, a confidante, a devout Christian, an honest spouse, and a consummate listener. He further describes Susan as a life partner who supported him through the trials and persecution he faced during his political career. Tsvangirai also highlights that his marriage had minimal conflict despite their hardships. After the death of his first wife, no further information is provided about his other marriages, which are in the media. It is reported that Tsvangirai “married” Locardia Karimatsenga (born 1972) for 11 days in November 2011 and Elizabeth Tsvangirai (born 1977, a daughter of a ZANU PF official) from September 2012 to his death (Mujakachi, 2017). He had no children with Elizabeth.

3.3 *Early Career*

Tsvangirai started his career in 1972 when he worked as a sweeper in a textile factory. He was arrested early in his career for using two names (Morgan and Richard). This attracted the attention of the police, who suspected that he used a pseudonym to cover up terrorist activities. Generally, Tsvangirai preferred to use the name Morgan rather than Richard, his Christian name. The first arrest marked the beginning of many unwarranted arrests to follow in his life. He joined a trade union in 1973 and quickly rose through the ranks. This culminated in his election as the Secretary-General of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) in 1988. ZCTU adopted an increasingly political role, mainly due to the deteriorating economy and the plummeting of workers’ living standards. At the time, Tsvangirai’s involvement in the unions resulted in ongoing clashes between the ZCTU and the ruling party. In the early 1980s, Tsvangirai idolised Mugabe, who was among the most educated leaders in the world at that time. In 1997, as the Secretary-General of ZCTU, he was beaten and almost thrown out of the window of his tenth-floor office by a group of war veterans loyal to ZANU PF. This incident was due to his involvement in a protest against tax increases by the government (Hudleston, 2008). After the national protests, Mugabe regarded ZCTU as an opposition political party due to the unresolved differences.

3.4 Political Career

Owing to the growing tension between the government and trade unions, an opposition political party that the ZCTU fully supported was formed in 1999. Tsvangirai resigned from his position as a trade union leader to lead the new party. There was consensus among the founding members that Tsvangirai should lead the party. Tsvangirai understood that he ran the risk of being arrested or assassinated for challenging Mugabe's ZANU-PF (Fontein, 2018). But he duly accepted the responsibility to lead the party. He was brutally assaulted, charged with treason, and labelled a traitor. His dignity was denigrated on numerous occasions by Mugabe. In the process, Tsvangirai became a symbol of resistance and hope for many Zimbabweans. The new opposition political party defeated the government during a national referendum and won almost as many seats as ZANU PF during the parliamentary elections. At this point, Mugabe and ZANU PF realised that MDC was a formidable force.

In 2002, Tsvangirai challenged Mugabe for the presidency. Tsvangirai lost the election, but many reports suggested that irregularities made the election unfair. Tsvangirai challenged Mugabe and ZANU PF again in 2008. Despite the violence and intimidation, Tsvangirai gained the most votes. However, as per the official results, he had not secured enough votes to win outright. As a result, a presidential run-off was set for June 2008. The security forces victimised many voters for supporting the MDC. Tsvangirai withdrew from the elections as a result of the brutalisation of supporters. Mugabe was subsequently declared a winner with 90% of the votes. However, international outrage over voting irregularities and violence resulted in a power-sharing agreement. After months of tortuous negotiations, Tsvangirai became the Prime Minister from February 2009 to September 2013. Tsvangirai was able to transcend his past suffering for the country's benefit by having a civil relationship with Mugabe. He stated that:

I signed the Global Political Agreement because my belief in Zimbabwe and its people ran deeper than the scars I bore from the ten-year struggle against Mugabe dictatorship. I went into an openly loveless marriage out of my hope for the future. The hope was and still is far stronger than the grief I felt for the needless suffering in my personal past. (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, pp. 537).

In 2009, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize (eventually awarded to Barack Obama) (Chitiyo, 2018). He was also the recipient of three awards. He was the first non-lawyer recipient of the *Human Rights Award* and received a *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the International Bar Association and the *Spanish Foundation Cristobal Gabarron* for his fight for peace and the advancement of human rights.

From the perspective of ordinary Zimbabweans whose lives improved, Tsvangirai's term as a prime minister and his party in the government was successful (Nyarota et al., 2015). However, the terms for the coalition, for example, electoral reform, were not enforced. Consequently, he lost the presidential elections conducted in 2013 to Mugabe. There are suggestions that he may have lost the elections as he allowed Mugabe to control the coalition's narrative (Booyesen, 2014).

Tsvangirai was diagnosed with colon cancer in May 2016 and died in February 2018.

4 Frankl's Existential Theory

Frankl suggested that there is a realm beyond the psychological and physical called the human (spiritual/noetic) dimension (Frankl, 2014). The spiritual dimension is the sphere of human freedom and is not subject to deterministic laws (Frankl, 2014; Lukas, 2014). He argued that a person "is not fully conditioned or determined but rather determines himself" (Frankl, 2004, p. 133). Frankl (2014) argued that humans do not merely exist as machines, as described by the deterministic approach, but are free to determine their character and take a stand against whatever circumstances they may face. The freedom of the human personality is fundamental in existential psychology. The noetic dimension offers resources (metaphorically referred to as a *medicine chest*) that individuals can use depending on the circumstances they face, such as the will to meaning, conscience, self-transcendence, self-distancing, responsibility and response-ability, choices, decision-making, commitment to someone or something, and forgiveness (Fabry, 2013; Frankl, 2006, 2011, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2020; Shantall, 2020; Wong, 2014). Frankl's theory rests on three basic assumptions, namely: (a) life does not lose its meaning regardless of the circumstances or conditions (meaning of life/to life); (b) a will to meaning is the primary motivation for humans, and the meaning can be actualised through self-transcendence (will to meaning); and (c) humans have the freedom (free will) to search and find meaning in their lives however within limits (freedom of will) (Frankl, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2002, 2020;).

Frankl contends that two fundamental phenomena within the noetic dimension can enhance human life: self-distancing and self-transcendence (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). Self-distancing refers to the ability of an individual to take a step away and discover meaning by looking at oneself from the outside rather than focusing on oneself. By distancing or detaching themselves, individuals can take a stand towards their somatic conditions, physical illness, determinants, and emotional states (e.g. anger and fear) (Fabry, 1988).

On the other hand, self-transcendence is the ability of an individual to look beyond their personal needs and reach out to someone or causes to serve (Frankl, 1984, 1997, 2006, 2014). Self-transcendence occurs when an individual makes a commitment that surpasses personal interests by acting for the sake of something or someone other than the self (Wong, 2014). Frankl suggested that self-transcendence allows individuals to go beyond their egocentricity and selfishness to reach out to something or someone to fulfil a task.

Frankl (2014) further averred that personality is dynamic and human beings can initiate change volitionally. Human beings, therefore, can change themselves depending on the circumstances or environment and the meaning of the moment attached to those occurrences (Fabry, 2013; Frankl, 1967, 2012; Wong, 2014).

Frankl thus asserts that humans have the ability to choose how to respond to any given circumstances. The freedom of will is aligned with Frankl's dimensional ontology, according to which humans cannot confine themselves to psychological or biological products such as genetic makeup and environment (Frankl, 2014). Humans have a spiritual (noological) dimension that can transcend their drives, instincts, and environment or unavoidable conditions. Human personality can thus transcend suffering, pain, guilt, and life transitoriness using the spiritual dimension. In general, it implies that it is not only about transcending the psychophysical suffering but taking a stance towards unavoidable situations such as chaotic political environments.

5 Aim of the Psychobiography

The purpose of this psychobiography is to explore and describe how Tsvangirai made sense of his life while experiencing life-threatening situations in the midst of a chaotic political context. The specific aims are: (a) to explore and describe the events and experiences that challenged Tsvangirai; (b) to interpret the events and experiences from the perspective of specific aspects of Frankl's theoretical framework (i.e. the fundamental triad, the meaning triad, the tragic triad, and the noetic dimension) (c) to supplement the paucity of psychobiographies of African leaders (see Fouché, 2015; Fouché et al., 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2009, 2010; Van Niekerk et al., 2019); (d) to respond to the call for more psychobiographies that focus specifically on meaning creation (Mayer, 2021; Mayer & Kelley, 2021); and lastly (e) to contribute towards psychobiographical research focused on subjects from non-WEIRD contexts.

6 Methodology

Fouché and van Niekerk (2010) described psychobiography as “the study of historically significant and extraordinary individuals over their entire life spans with the aim to uncover and reconstruct their lives psychologically” (p. 2). Through asking challenging questions, a psychobiographical study allows psychobiographers to adopt a holistic view of an individual and create a comprehensive narrative (Schultz, 2005). Furthermore, psychobiography can be used to facilitate or prove an existing psychological theory (Schultz, 2005). In simple terms, psychobiographical research uses a psychological theory to understand the lived experiences of a significant individual (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019; Van Niekerk et al., 2019). A longitudinal single-case study design approach was adopted to explore and describe the life of Tsvangirai (Ferrer & Ponterotto, 2020; Van Niekerk et al., 2019).

6.1 Psychobiographical Subject

Tsvangirai was chosen as the subject for this study using non-probability, purposive sampling. Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) argued that “psychobiographical study entails a systematic and descriptively-rich study of renowned, enigmatic, exceptional, or even contentious individuals in socio-historical contexts within a psychological frame of reference” (p. 495). With that in mind, Tsvangirai was selected for this study as he is a significant individual who lived a courageous life and paved the way for other opposition political parties to stand against the liberation movement rule in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

6.2 Data Collection, Extraction, and Analysis

Psychobiographers use two primary data sources to extract evidence, that is, primary and secondary sources (Du Plessis, 2017). The sources used for this study included biographies by and about Tsvangirai and transcribed interviews. The data were only extracted from sources available in the public domain to minimise ethical risks. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the respect and dignity of the psychobiographical subject (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). The study utilised Miles et al. (2014) guidelines to extract and organise the data. A deductive thematic analysis approach was utilised to analyse the data for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The themes in the data were identified using the various triads from Frankl’s theory (noetic dimension, the fundamental triad, the meaning triad, and the tragic triad). The researchers were thus able to identify the themes directly related to Frankl’s theory. As Runyan (1981) and Ponterotto (2014) suggested, the researchers looked at both confirming and disconfirming evidence to avoid artificially imposing themes on the data.

7 Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study will be discussed within the framework of Frankl’s triads which were identified in Tsvangirai’s existential journey.

7.1 Freedom of Will

Freedom of will is possible because of the human capacity for self-distancing or self-detachment (Fabry, 1988; Wong, 2012). This capacity allows an individual to detach from themselves and a situation. An individual retains the ability to choose his

attitude towards himself (Frankl, 2004; Shantall, 2020). Despite the adverse conditions that Tsvangirai faced, his life remained meaningful. During his career, he was confronted by many instances that could have resulted in losing hope (e.g. vote-rigging, brutalisation of supporters and officials, family members losing their livelihoods, and suffering) (Hudleston, 2008; Nyambabvu, 2013). Tsvangirai proved that an individual retains the freedom to fulfil the meaning of life despite the limitations an individual can face. He believed he was free to take a stand against the oppression that the opposition political officials and citizens had endured for years under the leadership of Mugabe.

It is also evident that Tsvangirai was responsible for his career and believed that he had the freedom to choose the type of career he would pursue and the responsibility to meet the demands of each situation. His freedom of will is evident through his choices in his life. The demands informed his decision-making in the different situations he faced, for example, choosing to look after his family soon after school as well as becoming a trade union activist and an opposition political leader. The human quality of self-distancing allows an individual to choose a stance towards the world and the physical and psychological self through the freedom of the will (Shantall, 2020). Tsvangirai was able to practice the concept of self-distancing/self-detachment as he was able to choose how he responded to the suffering he endured. Tsvangirai was able to choose his response to the torturing he suffered at the hands of the ruling party. In his book, Tsvangirai mentioned that “although I was now free, I could feel Mugabe’s shadow looming over me. . .but I refused to be intimidated” (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, p. 131). It is evident that he was able to choose an attitude towards himself and the situations he faced.

7.2 *Will to Meaning*

Frankl argued that the desire to find or realise meaning is the primary motivational force for human beings (Frankl, 2014; Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). A person needs someone or something to live a meaningful or purposeful life (Frankl, 2006; Shantall, 2003, 2020). As meaning differs from person to person, day to day, or even hour to hour, an individual thus must realise the unique meaning of their life situation (Fabry, 1988; Frankl, 2012; Shantall, 2020). For example, Tsvangirai could have become a political activist in high school, but he had other responsibilities towards his family (Hudleston, 2008). Being there for his family was more meaningful at that stage than being an activist. Humans want a purpose to live for and feel needed to fulfil responsibility for someone or something (Shantall, 2003, 2020). Tsvangirai pointed out that he had a responsibility towards his family and his supporters to continue with the cause. It is evident that Tsvangirai sought responsibility from a young age when he took over the responsibility of providing for his family (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). It is also apparent that Tsvangirai believed that his life responsibility was to play a role in freeing the Zimbabwean masses (Booyesen, 2014; Hudleston, 2008). It seems his involvement in trade union activities

and being the leader of an opposition political party gave him a life purpose. He had set himself to form a comprehensive opposition movement which became his purpose (Hudleston, 2008). What is striking is that despite adverse circumstances in which he had to function, he remained dedicated to the cause through his orientation towards other people. Frankl (2014) posited that meaning can be discovered by reaching beyond oneself (self-transcendence). It is apparent that Tsvangirai found the meaning of his life by reaching out to others, committing to a cause, and serving others.

7.3 *Meaning Triad*

The meaning of life constantly changes, but life never ceases to have meaning (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020). It has been argued that the more complex life becomes, the more meaningful it becomes (Shantall, 2020). Each passing moment should thus be used to actualise the values to live a meaningful life. Frankl (2006) indicated that the defiant power of the human spirit can be activated to resist pain, fear, and suffering. Humans can stand against their adversities, fears, and emotions when they are searching for meaning through the defiant power of the human spirit. Meaning of life can be discovered through (a) self-chosen creative activities, e.g. work, commitment to a cause, and hobbies (creative values); (b) experiencing something or encountering another person in their uniqueness (experiential values); and (c) taking a stance towards unavoidable suffering or tragic situations (attitudinal values) (Fabry, 1988, 2013; Frankl, 2006, 2012, 2014; Shantall, 2003, 2020).

7.3.1 *Creative Values*

Frankl (2014) pointed out that life remains meaningful under all circumstances. Humans are free to fulfil the unique meaning of their lives. It seems like Tsvangirai was able to actualise his creative values (through the work he performed), which gave meaning to his life. He continued being involved in the political landscape, trying to make a difference for other people by fulfilling a task (Wong, 2014). His creative values were actualised throughout his career, from being involved in trade union activities to being the opposition leader. Despite facing challenges that prevented him from actualising his creative values or fulfilling his task, he developed an attitude that allowed him to endure the suffering that precluded him from actualising his values. Tsvangirai also searched for work and took responsibility for work beyond his personal needs (Shantall, 2003; Wong, 2014). For example, he took up a trade union position, although he knew that his salary was going to be negatively affected (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). Despite the adverse conditions he faced, he was able to self-transcend in concern for other people through his deeds.

7.3.2 Experiential Values

Experiential values entail what we take or receive from the world, for example experiencing beauty and love towards and from another human being (Shantall, 2003). Humans can discover the meaning of a moment through engaging, appreciating, encountering, and experiencing relationships of all kinds. Experiencing meaning is also about being grateful and appreciative (Wong, 2014). Such experiential values were cultivated over the course of Tsvangirai's life. He gave and received love from his family. He also enjoyed walks in the garden with his grandson, which brought him peace (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

Moreover, he encountered people from various backgrounds when he was a trade union activist and an opposition political leader, arousing feelings of responsibility (Chitiyo, 2018; Hudleston, 2008). He might have felt the need to contribute to the well-being of other human beings from these encounters. Although his presence at home was limited, he found the little moments that he was able to spend with his family fulfilling. Tsvangirai was also grateful for the support and encouragement he received from his first wife (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). It is interesting to note in spite of the suffering, he was still able to notice and appreciate the encounters he had with his grandchild and other people.

7.3.3 Attitudinal Values

The most important part of the meaning triad is the attitudinal values which refer to taking a stance towards a situation (Frankl, 2011). Frankl (1984) claimed that everything can be taken away from a man but not the freedom to choose one's attitude towards any given circumstance. Attitudinal values take precedence above all the values, as attitudes determine how humans experience creative and experiential values (Lukas & Hirsch, 2020; Wong, 2014). The actualisation of attitudinal values is evident throughout Tsvangirai's life. For example, he remained determined to attend school, although he had to walk long distances during wartime (Hudleston, 2008). He refused to allow difficult circumstances and challenges to determine his ability to attain education. It shows that he remained resolute (was able to persevere) in his quest despite facing adverse circumstances. Attitudinal values are also evident when he was discouraged from applying for high school admittance (Hudleston, 2008). Tsvangirai actualised the attitudinal values by accepting that the political landscape could not be changed by being passive but actively involved. However, he knew the consequences of being an opposition political party in Zimbabwe. Although he had different views from the ruling party, in 2009, Tsvangirai accepted and worked with them for the sake of the people of Zimbabwe. He was able to turn human suffering into human triumph through the stance he took against the suffering (Wong, 2014).

Tsvangirai's transcendence over his psychobiological suffering reinforces Frankl's assertion that we can choose how to respond to challenging situations.

Although he was able to detach himself from his suffering, he remained concerned about other people's suffering (self-transcendence). The adverse political climate did not deter him from remaining committed to a greater cause (alleviating human suffering) than himself. Thus, Tsvangirai's horrific experiences give credence to logotherapy's basic tenets and ideas, especially courageously facing unavoidable situations.

7.4 *Tragic Triad*

Frankl (1967) noted that human existence is confronted by three inevitable facts, the so-called the tragic triad (suffering, guilt, and death). These facts are evident in Tsvangirai's life.

7.4.1 Pain/Suffering

The experience of *suffering/pain* as a human experience was experienced when he herded cattle barefooted, had to walk 16 kilometres to and from school, was subjected to racist remarks, was beaten by the state security forces, unlawful imprisonment, torture, and emotional humiliation (Chitiyo, 2018; Fontein, 2018; Hudleston, 2008). He grew up in an environment that was negative towards Black people. He grew up during a period when he did not have freedom from the circumstances. However, despite the oppression, he continued believing in the ultimate meaning of life:

It may seem from all this that we were helpless victims of change and oppression. That was not the case at all: beneath the surface, our culture was robust and continued to thrive and survive, along with a strong feeling that an unfolding destiny awaited us. (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011, p. 15)

7.4.2 Guilt

The second of the tragic triad, *guilt*, was experienced by Tsvangirai when he realised that he was not there for his family; he had put his family in danger because of his involvement in political affairs (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011). As fallible beings, we can make mistakes that cause inerasable guilt (Frankl, 1997). Frankl (2012, 2014) indicated that when faced with inerasable guilt, one can decide never to repeat the action that may have caused the guilt by taking a stand against their emotions, which is self-distancing. Tsvangirai took responsibility for not being there for his wife and children due to the kind of work that he performed. He redeemed himself by spending time with them whenever he could. He also took personal responsibility for the remarks that led to his arrest for treason (Tsvangirai & Bango, 2011).

7.4.3 Death

Tsvangirai also experienced *loss/death*, the third tragic triad. He lost an opportunity to further his studies due to the low socioeconomic status of his family and wanting his siblings to attend school. He also suffered another loss when his parents separated and his father died (Hudleston, 2008). Furthermore, he experienced indirect loss as his family members lost their employment opportunities and marriages fell apart. After being sworn in as a prime minister, he lost his wife in March 2009, resulting in him losing his emotional support. He was able to actualise the possibilities of the moment by not blaming his adversary for the death of his wife, although he had every reason to believe so. Throughout his career, it appears that he was aware that he might be assassinated at any given time (death awareness) (Fontein, 2018). Frankl noted that the highest meaning of life can be found through the transcendence of the tragic triad. It is striking that within the presence of the tragic triad, he did not lose a sense of life meaning as he remained determined and dedicated to the cause.

8 Conclusion

It is evident that Tsvangirai's life themes align with the fundamental triad as he was able to have commitments that transcended his personal struggles. Though he experienced personal suffering, he continued saying *yes* to life (Frankl, 2006, 2012). He was able to choose and take responsibility for his choices in his life. He was also able to strive for and discover meaning through his responsibility to his family when he discontinued schooling so that his siblings could also go to school, being the provider of his family when he started working, and his overall dedication to the Zimbabwean cause. Tsvangirai experienced many challenges in his life. He had many instances of pain and suffering from childhood to late adulthood. However, he was able to transcend the tragic triad to live a meaningful life that was dedicated to a cause and oriented towards other people. Tsvangirai was able to shift emphasis within the three values: from creative values to contemplation of experiential values and having a greater emphasis on attitudinal values. He clearly refused to accept the adverse circumstances as an obstacle through his stance towards those circumstances. Tsvangirai's life proves that life does not lose its meaning potential in spite of the tragic triad.

It is evident that Tsvangirai remained faithful to his beliefs and values. He was able to change his orientation according to his situation. Tsvangirai's life highlights that humans are not helpless victims of their environment, circumstances, instincts, genes, or physical limitations. It is widely believed that people can take a stand against their fate and maintain their dignity because of the defiant power of the human spirit (noetic dimension). The collated information highlights several strategies Tsvangirai used to actualise the meaning of his life. The strategies included a

commitment to serving others, commitment to a cause, encounters with other people and nature, practising his freedom through choices, responsibility, response-ability, and taking a stance against adverse conditions. It is evident that Tsvangirai did not allow external circumstances to control his search for meaning. He was able to choose his attitude towards himself and the situation and go beyond himself to discover the meaning of his life. It is apparent that Tsvangirai endured the torture as these experiences aligned with his beliefs. He also felt significant because he believed he was connected to something larger than himself. His work made a positive and lasting difference in the political landscape of Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai had a goal that gave him a reason to endure adverse experiences and helped him create his identity. He was able to transform his suffering into something more significant. Tsvangirai died as an influential person and significant individual in the political course of Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. His life is a true example of an exemplary sufferer and the defiant power of the human spirit considering the challenges and struggles he faced throughout his life. Tsvangirai was able to transcend the tragic triad and personal interests to benefit the country. He practised his freedom of choice/freedom of will by not allowing the external circumstances to deter him from fulfilling the meaning of his life. Tsvangirai found meaning in his life through self-transcendence, commitment to a cause, formulation and actualisation of goals, and actualisation of the meaning triad (i.e. creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values), taking a stance towards unbearable conditions or circumstances. The study overall concludes that the spiritual (noological) dimension plays an essential role in the personality of individuals. Evidence from this study suggests that self-distancing and self-transcendence are important phenomena in the noetic dimension and can enhance human life. However, a more in-depth analysis of Tsvangirai's life could provide more information about his development and life decisions. Also, this study is limited to pre-defined and selected aspects of Tsvangirai's life and does not account for his entire life experience.

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