

ROBERT MUGABE: Liberator or Destroyer?

By James Wyse



### Introduction

Good evening, everyone. Tonight, I am going to be approaching you with the man, or monster, that was Robert Gabriel Mugabe. I'm sure some of the adults in attendance already possess a rigid view of Robert Mugabe, and I am also sure that some of you have absolutely no idea who he was. I hope to change this. A geopolitical topic such as this is wildly complex so I will not be able to breach all of the information, situations, and consequences, however, I will make my best attempt. I'd like to clarify that I do have in-depth experience with dictatorships, if anyone here has met my mother you would understand my plight.

## Context

**MUGABE:** For me to progress in my Academy, I will need to provide you all with some context behind Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe, and colonialism in Africa itself. Robert Mugabe was a Zimbabwean revolutionary and politician, who only died recently, (2019) at the ripe age of 95. Mugabe was the leader of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) from 1975 to 1980, and he also led ZANU's successor political party ZANU PF (Patriotic Front) from 1987 to 2017.

**ZIMBABWE:** Zimbabwe is located in Southern Africa. It is a landlocked country, bordered by Zambia to the north, Mozambique to the east, South Africa to the south and Botswana to the south-west. Zimbabwe's capital city is Harare, formerly known as Salisbury. It is home to landscapes of extraordinary beauty. I'm sure all of you have heard of Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe also boasts one of the largest game reserves in the world, Hwange National Park. Home to all kinds of wildlife, including the big 5. (Possibly the largest elephant population in a national park in Africa) Zimbabwe has a population of about 15 million people, nearly 40% live below the poverty line. HIV runs rampant through Zimbabwe, affecting 12.8% of the population. Zimbabwe is not the shining beacon of progress in Africa that it once was, why? How can a country that was once referred to as the jewel of Africa, fall so far? From my research, I believe a deep-seated colonial influence to be the source of blame. The failings of African democracy are not indicative of their eligibility, instead of their hamartia, their fatal flaw. Zimbabwe could never thrive indefinitely because it was destined to fail from the beginning. The scars left by colonial influence have still not healed, and this is outlined in Zimbabwe's failure. The secrecy and violence required for revolution do not correlate to the transparency and pragmatism of governance. This is why many freedom fighters become the tyrants they sought to overthrow, merely filling the shoes of their oppressors. This is especially true in Mugabe's case.

## Colonialism in Africa:

Now I must broach European Colonialism in Africa. An extraordinarily complex topic, but I believe it to be vital in understanding Mugabe and Zimbabwe's context. In 1415, Portuguese explorers, led by King John I of Portugal, conquered Ceuta, a coastal town in North Africa. Historians regard this as the beginning of the Portuguese Empire, and the colonisation of Africa. Modern colonialism can trace its origins to the Age of Exploration, a time when new trade routes were established, new technologies were discovered, and most importantly, the birth of Empires. The Portuguese and Spanish battled for control of the Americas, leading to the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494, dividing the New World between the emergent superpowers. At the end of the 19th century, Europe turned its interests to the colonisation of Africa. It is widely reasoned that Europe desired a foothold in Africa due to its abundance of natural resources, in addition to other motives. The means to control production were essential to the economic growth and industrialisation of European powers. The beginning of the Colonial Era coincides with the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution in Europe. Therefore, one could argue that Europe colonised Africa to acquire the natural resources required to fuel this revolution. Another rationale for the colonisation of Africa could be attributed to the sense of nationalism in Europe and the view that European cultures, languages, and religion should be spread to the less 'civilised' areas of the world. Furthermore, a rivalry between European countries to become a colonial power is another possible factor. Similar to the Arms Race between the US and the USSR, colonial powers saw the colonisation of Africa as a means to demonstrate that they were superior not only to Africans but to other Europeans as well. It is most likely that all three motives were in play. These events during the Age of Exploration, and the motives of Europe during the mid to late

19th century not only resulted in the colonisation of Africa, but also the creation of something much greater, and much darker, the colonial mindset.

My understanding of the colonial mindset is that it is an ethnic and cultural sense of superiority or inferiority felt by people as a consequence of colonisation. The colonial mindset is not only that of the colonisers but also of the colonised. This mindset is still prevalent in today's society, especially in the societies of previously colonised countries such as the Philippines and Zimbabwe. During the Colonial Era, Europeans felt that their cultures, languages, and way of life were superior to anyone else's. This attitude did not disappear as it is still common throughout the world. The American nationalist mentality epitomises this: the majority of the American population doesn't have passports. Some would argue this is because they feel that everything they need is within America. When the colonists came to Africa, they had an intrinsic sense of superiority over the natives. They saw them as people in need of their European values.

A superb example of **'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'** would be the Belgian Congo. From 1885 to 1908, King Leopold II of Belgium obtained a substantial part of central Africa, declaring that he would propel the Congo Free State towards civility and progress. However, Leopold instead exploited the Congo, an exploitation seen as one of the worst human rights abuses in human history. More than 12 million native Congolese died in the Belgian Congo so that Belgium could fuel the rubber demands of the European automobile and bicycle industry. Throughout the Congo Free State, European colonists had an abominable sense of superiority over the native Congolese. They determined that the Congolese were savage and inhuman. The injustices and prejudice that occurred in the Belgian Congo were a ramification of this sense of supremacy amongst the whites. This false perception is illustrated eloquently by Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness*.

*Heart of Darkness* is a novel set in the Congo Free State during the 1890s. It follows the narrative of Marlow, a character in the novel who has taken a job with the Company, a Belgian organisation concerned with trade in the Congo, particularly ivory. We follow Marlow in his journey up the Congo to meet Kurtz, the legendary manager of the inner station. Throughout his journey, Marlow encounters the extensive inefficiencies and violence of the Europeans in the Congo. The actions of the whites are more barbarous than the so-called 'savages,' and Marlow begins to wonder if the native Congolese are as savage as the whites portray them to be. His suspicion of their humanity, along with his unease caused by the white's actions, only grows as he spends more time in the Congo. **"The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there---there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were---No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it---this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would slowly come to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity---like yours---the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar."** Marlow's Eurocentric mentality was being altered by his journey into the Congo, into the heart of darkness.

The colonists in the Congo believe that they are 'bringing civilization to the savages.' From my reading of *Heart of Darkness*, the whites in Europe and the Congo believed that the natives were inferior in every conceivable way, yet the incompetent acts of the company employees suggested otherwise. An apt example of this incompetency was when a storage house went ablaze, and an employee attempted to douse the flames, using a pail with a hole in the bottom. In the opening pages of *Heart of Darkness*, a further example of this superiority complex is demonstrated when the first narrator refers to London as the

**“biggest, and greatest, town on Earth.”** I find the text to be assertive that the employees’ efforts are solely fuelled by greed, rather than a desire to ‘help’ the natives of the Congo. Instead of regarding them as colonists, I would find it more fitting to see them as thieves, and as swindlers. **“To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe.”** The sheer rapacity of the employees is unnerving, their greed, sickening. **“The word ‘ivory’ rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse.”** This excerpt from *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates the avarice and solitary purpose in the Congo. Ivory for the employees is no longer a commodity, but an idol. I would argue that in the pursuit of this idol, the employees had lost their humanity, and turned to complete and utter savagery. This savagery is further exhibited by the ‘accomplishments’ of Kurtz in the inner station. The inner station is littered with the mounted heads of ‘rebels.’ **“These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic.”** I believe the heads symbolise Kurtz’s tyranny over the natives of the Congo. Kurtz’s actions cement Marlow’s disdain for the exploitation of the Congo and its people.

As mentioned previously, the colonial mindset is still prevalent in the modern world, and the consequences of colonialism have not been realised, nor do I believe they ever will be. I propose this mindset, and colonialism itself is responsible for the future tragedies that would occur in Zimbabwe. The effects of both colonialism and the colonial mentality are blatant throughout the formative years of what is now acknowledged as Zimbabwe. Heidi Holland’s psychobiography *Dinner with Mugabe* not only provides profound insights into the man, or monster, Mugabe, but also the political and social landscape and pressures Mugabe faced during his rule. Robert Gabriel Mugabe’s upbringing was influenced deeply by British colonialism, and this will become more than apparent to you all in but a moment.

## UPBRINGING/PRE-POLITICAL CAREER

He grew up in Kutama, 100km from Zimbabwe’s capital of Harare “A village of brick as well as grass-roofed traditional houses.” Speaking both English and Shona, Mugabe was raised in truly the crossroads of two exceedingly different cultures and societies. During Mugabe’s childhood, Kutama was a mission village run by the Jesuits, so like all of us, Mugabe was a product of a Jesuit education. Yet I doubt the Jesuits would be keen to claim him as such... After completing his elementary education, Mugabe obtained a place on Kutama College’s teacher training course, and in 1945 he obtained his teaching diploma. At this point in Mugabe’s life, Zimbabwe did not exist, instead, it was the self-governed British Colony of Southern Rhodesia. Throughout Mugabe’s years in education and as an educator, he learned about the Irish War for Independence from his Irish Jesuit Mentor Jerome O’Hea as well as Mahatma Gandhi’s role in Indian Independence. After teaching for a few years, Mugabe attended the University of Fort Hare in South Africa. It was during Mugabe’s time in South Africa that he slowly became more politically inclined. He attended African nationalist meetings and was introduced to Marxism by Jewish South Africans. Having obtained his BA in history and English literature, Mugabe was now far more aware of the British colonial influence in his homeland, and possibly even on himself. Obtaining a Bachelor of Education from the University of South Africa in 1954, he continued teaching, living in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), and in 1958 he moved to Ghana. It was in Ghana where he met his first wife Sally Francesca Hayfron. All the while, Mugabe’s passion for politics grew, and during his time in Ghana, the African Nationalist movement was picking up steam in Southern Rhodesia. Mugabe planned a visit to his home country with his wife; however, he was urged to stay by close friend Leopold Takawira.

During a political demonstration in 1960, Mugabe was propelled to a public position before the crowd and invited to speak to them. The members of the NDP (National Democratic Party) deemed him the perfect man for the job. He was eloquent, educated, and a black man. He was an educator who possessed three degrees. One could see how a man of Mugabe's background, educated, and civilised to perceived European standards, was identified for a leadership role. He was, in many ways, a shining light of leadership in post-colonial Africa. Yet he was not infallible, he was human, susceptible to fragility, coercion, and corruption. After this event, Mugabe's political curiosity had been satiated, and he decided to quit his teaching role in Ghana and devote himself to political activism.

## **Pre-Imprisonment**

Now, whilst Mugabe stoked the fires of his political ambition, one must ask why there was political unrest in Southern Rhodesia. The answer to that question is minority rule. Since 1923, the colony of Southern Rhodesia had been ruled by the minority white population. In 1960, this was still the case. As African Nationalism grew in popularity, so too did opposition against white minority rule. The NDP, led by Joshua Nkomo, was advocating for a black majority ruled government. In 1961, at a conference held in Salisbury (now Harare - the capital of Zimbabwe) the British government agreed to allow black representation in 15 of the 65 seats in the Southern Rhodesian parliament. This was undeniably a victory for the NDP, as it chipped away at the absolutism the white minority government possessed. However, Mugabe did not see it this way. This internal conflict led the African national movement into arrears, and in 1961 the NDP was banned by the white minority government. Now, this party eventually regrouped to form ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) with Mugabe as General Secretary. Yet unsurprisingly, 9 months later ZAPU was also banned. Political demonstrations were outlawed, so Mugabe argued for armed resistance. These prohibitions were a symptom of the white minority rule's vice grip on power and would lead to an armed struggle in Zimbabwe.

## **Imprisonment**

In August of 1963, Sally Mugabe gave birth to Mugabe's first child, Nhamodzenyika, a Shona term meaning "suffering country". Sally and Nhamo returned to Ghana at Mugabe's behest, whilst he returned to Southern Rhodesia. All the while, the political landscape in Southern Rhodesia continued to heat up. The Rhodesia Front (the white-minority rule party) had won a landslide victory in December of 1962, and African Nationalists opposed to Nkomo's leadership of ZAPU (operating underground) formed another political party, ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union). Ndabaningi Sithole was elected the group's president with Mugabe as its secretary-general. These groups opposed each other vehemently and demonstrated this in the Zimbabwean Bush War, which I will come too soon. Upon Mugabe's return to Southern Rhodesia, he was immediately arrested and sentenced to 21 months in prison. A sentence which would be extended to last nearly 11 years. Mugabe's time in prison was brutal; overcrowding and guard brutality were everyday problems. However, Mugabe did not waste his time in imprisonment. He obtained a further four degrees and was a member of the ZANU executive committee, smuggling messages in and out of prison. Yet, during his sentence, disaster struck. Mugabe discovered that his son Nhamo had died from encephalitis, a disease similar to meningitis. The prison authorities denied Mugabe's request for a leave of absence to attend his son's funeral. During Mugabe's imprisonment, Ian Smith rose to power as the leader of the white minority government in Southern Rhodesia and in August of 1964, the white minority government banned ZANU and ZAPU and arrested all remaining leaders of the country's African nationalist movement. To Mugabe, it seemed as though African Nationalism had failed. In 1965, Ian Smith, the then Prime

Minister of Rhodesia and his cabinet declared Rhodesia's unilateral independence from the British Empire. Rhodesia was now under minority-white rule, and the Rhodesian Bush War was to ensue. As Sithole's leadership began to be called into question, guerrilla warfare against the Rhodesian Front broke out.

### *Pre-Independence & Bush War*

The Second Chimurenga is the name given to the Rhodesian Bush War by the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Chimurenga roughly translates to 'revolutionary struggle.' From July 1964 until December 1979, the Bush War was fought between the Rhodesian Security Forces and the Guerrillas of ZANU and ZAPU. The Zimbabwe African National Union, led then by Robert Mugabe, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union, then led by Joshua Nkomo. In the years leading up to the Rhodesian Bush War, amnesty towards the government and civil disobedience were rapidly increasing. The banning of black supported political parties, like the NDP, ZANU, and ZAPU added to the vortex of racial and political tensions within Rhodesia. In response to the growing dissent, ZANU, now operating in secrecy, established ZANLA. (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army) Members of ZANLA were sent to the People's republic of China to receive military training. Additionally, ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) was founded by ZAPU, and also led by Joshua Nkomo. I'd like to make it clear that the Rhodesian Bush War was as much a racial and ethnic war as it was a war of revolution. ZANLA was composed mainly of members of the Shona ethnicity and ZIPRA of the Ndebele ethnicity. Two groups with a long history of hostility. The conflict was not black against white, but a racial free for all, each group trying to fight for their own version of Zimbabwe. Biological and chemical weaponry was employed by the Rhodesian security forces against the guerrillas. Minefields were laid, numbering around 2.6 million, which I am sure still lie on Zimbabwean soil to this day. Here is an image of dead guerrilla soldiers, put on display to the media by Rhodesian Front soldiers. The bush war was fought with bitter hatred, and this is a miserable example of such.

A major turning point in the Second Chimurenga was that of Mozambique's independence from Portugal in 1975. Their independence meant that ZANLA could now also use Mozambique as a staging ground for their liberation efforts. By 1978, ZANLA had liberated so many regions within Rhodesia that the collapse of Smith's regime seemed imminent, victory was in the air for the African Nationalists of Zimbabwe. 1979 marked a massive escalation in the War. The Year of the people's storm, or *Gore Regukurahundi* in Shona, was the year in which several Rhodesian Military bases and security facilities were ransacked by guerrilla soldiers of both ZANLA and ZIPRA. On the 1st of August 1979, Margaret Thatcher stated that her party was "***wholly committed to genuine majority rule in Rhodesia***" The Rhodesian Bush War seemed to be coming to a close.

### **Lancaster House Agreement**

After this brutal conflict, with an estimated 20,000 dead, Zimbabwe was granted Independence by Britain after the Lancaster House Agreement in 1979. Following pressure from the South African Government, Ian Smith concluded that white-minority rule in Southern Rhodesia was not sustainable. In response, he reconstituted Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe Rhodesia and oversaw the election of Black (and politically malleable) prime minister Abel Muzorewa. This election was not internationally recognised and was spurned

by ZANU and ZAPU. So eventually Smith agreed to negotiations with ZAPU and ZANU, for a democratic rule, to obtain recognised independence from Britain.

Negotiations for a majority, democratic rule in Zimbabwe Rhodesia were held in Lancaster House in London, led by Lord Peter Carrington. Now Mugabe and Lord Carrington had an amicable relationship, both respecting each other's political agendas. The conference was attended by ZANU (led by Mugabe), ZAPU (led by Nkomo) and the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia delegation, with Bishop Muzorewa, Silas Mundawarara, Ian Smith, and Ndabaningi Sithole. Lord Peter Carrington chaired the conference. The Lancaster House conference addressed several political issues that faced ZANU, ZAPU and the Zimbabwe Rhodesia government. These issues were:

- The composition of the House of Assembly and Senate. A disproportionate amount of seats were reserved for white members of parliament. 10/40 in the Senate and 20/100 in the House of Assembly.
  - Blacks outnumbered whites in Zimbabwe at the time by 22:1, so this ratio in their government was of great concern.
- The redistribution of white-owned land to native black, Zimbabweans. The majority of land in Zimbabwe was owned by whites, especially rurally. ZANU and ZAPU stipulated the dispensation of this land to peasants.
  - Britain was against this as they had to accumulate large funds to purchase all of the lands from the white farmers.
- A constitutional amendment mandating full agreement between the total membership of the House of Assembly on certain issues.
  - This amendment would inhibit the new, black majority government from achieving anything, leaving the country's development at a standstill.
- A cease-fire agreement between the guerrilla forces of ZANU, ZAPU and the Rhodesian Security Forces.

Another term of the Lancaster House agreement was that a British Governor, Lord Christopher Soames was to oversee a fair, democratic election in Zimbabwe. Rhodesia was to be renamed Zimbabwe. Mugabe had agreed to the protection of white, privately owned land, under the condition the UK and US would fund the land purchase for redistribution amongst the Zimbabwean people. The Lancaster House agreement marked the end of the Guerrilla War and the beginning of the internationally recognised, independent State of Zimbabwe.

## **Election of Mugabe**

During Zimbabwe's political transitional period, Lord Soames acted as governor of Zimbabwe. General elections took place in March of 1980, where 80 common seats were to be divided amongst ZANU, ZAPU and the UANC (United African National Council). ZANU won 57, ZAPU, 20, and the UANC, 3. The 20 white seats of the parliament were won

by the Rhodesia Front (now the Republic Front). The Senate was dominated by members of ZAPU. Robert Mugabe, the leader of ZANU, was elected the first Prime Minister of Zimbabwe. Originally seen as favourable and a pro-Western leader by Britain, Mugabe later went on to commit heinous human rights abuses, becoming remembered globally as a tyrant and a monster. Yet, in his address to the nation after the 1980 general election, Mugabe insisted upon national unity. Here is an excerpt from this address:

*"I urge you, whether you are black or white, to join me in a new pledge to forget our grim past, forgive and forget, join hands in a new amity, and together as Zimbabweans, trample upon racialism, tribalism, and regionalism, and work to reconstruct and rehabilitate our society as we reinvigorate our economic machinery."  
"The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten,"*

Mugabe ensured that his cabinet of ministers was both ethnically and politically diverse, containing members of ZAPU and whites. Lord Soames remained governor of Zimbabwe until April 18th, 1980, when Zimbabwean independence was established. A new government ruled Zimbabwe, and the world was confident in the African nation's future. Before I move on, I'd like to briefly mention Zimbabwe's first president. Canaan Banana. That's right Banana. He was more of a figurehead of the nation than its leader, and in 1987 he was stripped of his role of president as Mugabe no longer saw any use in him. He was removed from his premiership under the accusations of his homosexuality, charged with 11 counts of sodomy. Mugabe was notoriously anti-LGBTQ, as were most Zimbabweans at the time.

Mugabe is attributed to saying:

*Even Satan wasn't gay, he approached naked Eve instead of naked Adam*

## The era of Peace and Prosperity

Initially, under Mugabe's rule, Zimbabwe was known as the 'jewel of Africa'. For reasons that I have already outlined, Mugabe was at first regarded as an ideal leader. The new Zimbabwean government needed to reorganise their unstable economy after the Bush war, and Mugabe was the man for the job. Initially, he had had a profoundly positive effect on Zimbabwe's economy. From 1980 to 1982, Zimbabwe's GDP grew by 2 billion USD. Manufacturing, commercial and mining sectors in Zimbabwe grew by 14% during the first year of independence. Zimbabwe is rich in gold, iron, coal, and other natural resources. The impressive local infrastructure of Zimbabwe contributed greatly to this growth, having been built to a high standard by the previous government of Rhodesia.

Agriculture in Zimbabwe also leapt forward, with Mugabe's Minister for Agriculture, Denis Norman, making substantial improvements to Agricultural policy. Such as the introduction of modern fertilisers and farming techniques. At the time, 70% of Zimbabwe's workforce was employed in the Agricultural sector. Zimbabwe began to export beef and increased its volume of tobacco production and exportation at the time, Tobacco accounted for about 50% of Zimbabwe's exports. It was Denis Norman who orchestrated a 30% increase in the price of cattle in Zimbabwe, dramatically improving farmer welfare. More on Norman later. This graph represents the percentage contribution of Agriculture to Zimbabwe's GDP. Note



the initial rise under Mugabe. The fluctuation is mainly due to rainfall patterns, namely a minor drought in 1982.

Not only did the Economy of Zimbabwe thrive under Mugabe's early rule, but so too did the well-being of Zimbabwe's people. Under Mugabe, literacy rates were raised to 98% by the late 1990s, primary school education was made free, and secondary school education was also made available to every child that had completed their primary education. Third level education increased, and Zimbabwe was beginning to develop an educated workforce. At the start of Mugabe's premiership, there was one public university in Zimbabwe, today there are 9. Health care was made free for those earning less than Z\$150 dollars a month. Zimbabwe was truly proving to be Africa's Jewel, but Mugabe has since tarnished it.

It was during this era of peace and prosperity that my mother briefly worked in Zimbabwe. When I say prosperity, I am comparing it to Zimbabwe's current situation. At the time she was there, in 1994, Zimbabwe was at the height of its HIV epidemic. Around 40% of the population were suffering from the disease, most of which were unaware they even had it. My mother was working at the Murambinda Mission Hospital, which is about a 4-hour drive south of Harare. She was treating patients with HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

### **Gukurahundi Massacres**

Zimbabwe seemed to be prospering under ZANU's early rule, however, under the sheen of success lay an atrocity. Mugabe committed several abominable acts during his administration, but I believe the foremost of these acts to be the Matabeleland Massacres.

In the early 1980s, a North Korean trained special operations force, the Fifth Brigade, was ordered by Mugabe to begin a crackdown on ZANU's opposition supporters in Matabeleland. ZANU was supported by the majority Shona people in Zimbabwe, and ZAPU by the minority Ndebele. Matabeleland, a homeland of the Ndebele people, was subjected to outrageous acts and obscenities. Mugabe waged a campaign of terror in the western part of Zimbabwe, where an estimated minimum of 20,000, and a maximum of 80,000 civilians were killed, all so that Mugabe could root out the '**dissidents.**' The killings lasted for four years, and only stopped when the ZANU and ZAPU leaders, Mugabe, and Joshua Nkomo, agreed to merge their parties, creating ZANU-PF. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front. Mugabe had managed to eliminate the political opposition, by murdering all of their supporters in ethnic cleansing. Gukurahundi, in Shona, means the '*early rain that washes away the chaff.*' Chaff is the protective coating of seeds and is generally regarded as worthless. This is often the consensus of such pogroms. The targeted ethnic group are dehumanised and systemically exterminated. And in hastening their deaths, the exterminators feel as though they are doing them and the world a service.

I believe the government of Zimbabwe, along with the majority of people in Zimbabwe, permitted these killings because of Britain's colonial influence on the nation. The natives were so used to ethnically and racially targeted bloodshed, that they had become numb to it. On Mugabe's part, he could argue that Britain committed atrocities in his country, so why couldn't he? The international condemnation of the Matabeleland Massacres is a prime example of the hypocrisy of the colonists' mindset. Europe had overlooked its historical transgressions in Africa, instead choosing to denounce an African leader for acts they had committed themselves in the past. The Gukurahundi, what the massacres are known as by the Zimbabwean people, was, by all means, a tragedy and an outrage, but the death toll of the Congolese during the Belgian Congo is 300 times greater. The colonists are quick to criticise

the post-colonial African nations, but they often fail to reflect on their offences, and how those crimes are the source of blame for future disasters.

## FALL OF ZIMBABWE WHITE SUPREMACISM + FARM INVASIONS

White Supremacism was an enormous social and political issue in Zimbabwe. The 19th British Colony of Southern Rhodesia imposed racist social and economic laws within the region. White colonists owned full citizenship rights, amongst numerous other advantages over the majority black population of the colony. These racist policies continued still into Ian Smith's Rhodesia, going as far as to spark the racial war mentioned in the above paragraph. The whites in Rhodesia saw themselves to be superior to the native population, before, during and even after the Zimbabwe War of Independence. This racist ideology was displayed during the 1985 elections in Zimbabwe. As a condition of the Independence Constitution that was agreed upon, 20% of the seats in Zimbabwe's parliament were to be reserved for whites. Under this agreement made at Lancaster House, Ian Smith, the racist former Premier of Rhodesia, won most of the seats. According to Denis Norman, Zimbabwe's Minister for Agriculture from 1980 to 1985, the moment the whites voted racially, was the beginning of the Zimbabwean Tragedy. Mugabe sacked Norman, a white minister, to spite the white population of his country. Mugabe felt betrayed and rightly so. His policies were in the white's interests, having negotiated Zimbabwean beef into the European market, yet the whites of Zimbabwe voted against him because he was black. The colonial mindset of the Zimbabwean white farmers was their downfall. Their outright bigotry against Mugabe, caused by their superiority complex, led to a bitter new political atmosphere in Zimbabwe. Mugabe reacted caustically: **'You will be white, and we will be black.'** The racial maelstrom had been invoked, and Mugabe was not mature enough to not see their decision as a betrayal. Mugabe's disillusionment led to his ambivalence towards the farm invasions of 2000. I would argue that this is one of the key moments in Zimbabwe's downfall. Mugabe, fuelled by his own emotions, would slowly kill the country he fought so hard to liberate. When the Land Reform disputes came to the forefront of Zimbabwe's political scene, Mugabe chose chaos. Here is a quote, directed at Tony Blair, about the Land Reform disputes:

*"We have fought for our land, we have fought for our sovereignty, small as we are, we have won our independence and we are prepared to shed our blood.... So, Blair keep your England, and let me keep my Zimbabwe."*

Since before Zimbabwean Independence in 1980, the redistribution of land amongst the black majority population was a topic of harsh debate. As I have already mentioned, one of the key conditions of the Lancaster House Agreement was that of land redistribution. The purpose of this redistribution was to balance the dispensation of wealth and land ownership in Zimbabwe between different ethnicities. Several factors led to the failure of land reform in Zimbabwe, and they are to blame for the violence that ensued. Such factors were the failure to compensate ousted landowners and the failure to resolve boundary disagreements.

The bureaucratic nightmare of land reform frustrated natives of Zimbabwe greatly, leading to vicious and lethal takeovers of farms. The veterans of ZANLA and ZIPRA felt that their country owed them for their efforts in the liberation of Zimbabwe and believed that this

land was their compensation. These veterans took several farms by force in the early 2000s, killing white farmers and their farmhands in the process. Most of these murdered farm hands were black. The farm invasions were not only a further example of racial violence but also of greed, greed similar to that of Zimbabwe's original colonisers. These acquisitions of land were referred to as the 'Fast Track Land-Reform Program' and were widely condemned by the international community. Up to 3,500 white farmers were evicted from their lands by Mugabe's political policies, or rather his apathy to the farm invasions. A widely disputed report of Land reform showed that Mugabe had given himself 15 farms, and members of his inner political circle, such as Simon Muzenda received much land too. Simon Muzenda was Mugabe's vice president from 1987 to 2003. Now it is important to note that all of the lands did not go to politicians and veterans. A study conducted by the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex showed that about 50% of land acquired during the Land Reform went to Zimbabwean peasants, with only about 10% of the land going to 'well-connected' Zimbabweans.

Land Reform in Zimbabwe was a massive contributor to the country's economic collapse in 2008. Farm production decreased dramatically, and as a result, a huge chunk of Zimbabwe's exports and overall GDP vanished. From 2001 to 2005, Zimbabwe's tobacco production dropped by more than two thirds. Staple crop production such as maize was reduced by 30% from 2001 to 2012, and now 45% of Zimbabweans are considered malnourished. Mugabe put the final nail in Zimbabwe's coffin through his Land Reform Policies, laying waste to the agrarian system once dubbed *'the basket of Africa.'*

## **CONC + Future of Zimbabwe**

From examining the man, and the monster that was Robert Mugabe, by studying Zimbabwe's rise and fall, and my research into British Colonialism, my opinion is that the colonial mindset is both destructive and detestable, and Zimbabwe is a prime example of its corruptive capacity.

However, it is also a completely understandable one. Both the colonists and colonised are entitled to feel the way they do, each able to argue their case, yet this entitlement in itself is the issue. The white's Eurocentric viewpoint is not a justification for their racist, barbarous, and deplorable acts, nor for their belief in supremacy over anyone with "a different complexion or slightly flatter noses." On the opposite side of the coin, the hatred towards whites in previously colonised countries is unfounded and also racist. People should not be punished or discriminated against because of their ancestor's crimes and the fact that atrocities were committed in the past does not give one the right to commit them again. I make these points knowing it to be futile. I find there is no conceivable way to reconcile the colonised and the colonists. The horrors of history still echo in today's halls, the screams may have been quieted, but they are still heard by those affected by the savagery of colonialism and the colonial mindset.

From the beginning of his childhood, Mugabe's dual identity tore him apart. His British identity conflicted directly with his African one. He was an anglophile and hated himself for it. Mugabe loved the queen, he loved his colonisers, he just didn't know it, so when Tony Blair's government pulled out of funding Zimbabwe's Land reform, he felt betrayed. Although Mugabe publicly expressed his hatred of the British, he was a quintessential British gentleman. He was always dressed impeccably and expected his African political colleagues to also dress in such a manner.

Under Mugabe's later rule, Zimbabwe was driven into the ground. Its economy collapsed during the great recession, culminating in November of 2008 when the inflation rate of the Zimbabwean Dollar rose to 79,600,000,000% per month. The end year to year rate of inflation was 89.7 sextillion per cent. Some of you might have seen this banknote before, the one hundred trillion-dollar bill. In April of 2009, the Zimbabwean government stopped printing its currency, and other types of currencies such as the Mozambican metical, the Zambian Kwacha, and the South African Rand. It was only in 2015 that Zimbabwe adopted the US dollar as its official currency. Then in 2019, they changed their currency, again, to the RTGS dollar, now simply known as the Zimbabwe dollar. The inflation rate of this currency was estimated to be at 737% yearly in July of 2020. The economy of Zimbabwe was left in pieces by Mugabe's regime, and the COVID-19 Pandemic has shredded the leftovers. Poverty and hunger are rampant in Zimbabwe, and it is expected that illiteracy rates will continue to drop, from 98% in the late '90s to 88.7% today. To put that into perspective, instead of 1 in 50 not being able to read, it is now greater than 1 in 10.

## COUP

It was only in 2017 when Robert Mugabe was ousted from power in a military coup, that the future of Zimbabwe became less bleak. On the 15th of November 2017, the ZNA (Zimbabwe National Army) placed Mugabe under house arrest under worries that he would name his second wife Grace as his successor. 3 weeks earlier, he had fired his vice-president Emmerson Mnangagwa in a cabinet reshuffle. The reason being he was 'undermining the president's authority.' This raised deep concerns about the future of leadership in Zimbabwe, as Mnangagwa was seen by many as Mugabe's obvious successor. On the 19th of November, Mugabe was sacked as leader of ZANU-PF, and Mnangagwa was appointed as the leader of ZANU-PF, and later elected president. Mugabe was impeached from his position as president of Zimbabwe, but not before negotiating a deal granting him and his family diplomatic immunity, and a 10 million USD payoff. This image is that of a ZNA APC (Armoured personnel carrier), in the streets of Harare during the 2017 coup. I'd like to mention that it was a Jesuit priest Fidelis Mukonori, S.J. who was a key negotiator between the Zimbabwean military and Mugabe.

On the 6th of September 2019, Robert Mugabe died in Singapore. The liberator/tyrant was dead, but his ghost still haunts Zimbabwe to this day. What is the future of this nation, left desolate by a freedom fighter turned tyrant? The Zimbabwean economy somewhat stabilised after Mugabe and COVID-19, growing by 6% in 2021. Yet hyperinflation still plagues the people's purchasing power, thus making the necessities of life unaffordable to most Zimbabweans. People are dying from malnutrition and all manner of diseases, all caused by a root infection, Robert Mugabe. Mugabe himself was slowly corrupted by his conflicting identities, political pressures and the lure of wealth and power. It was this corruption that seeped into Zimbabwe itself and rotted the country to its core. Mugabe was once a man, a freedom fighter, who became one of Earth's greatest tyrants.