

Speaking Without Fear: How Did Zimbabwe Come to This?
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No country has complete freedom, especially the freedom of expression, but there are countries forging the way towards attaining it. Whether my desire for such freedom is a flirtation with an illusion or a genuine goal worth fighting for, I have decided to concentrate my energy on the quest to understand why my country Zimbabwe has thwarted my right to speak out and say exactly that which is on my mind, why my government is at odds with Western ideas of democracy, how the ordinary man in the street has suffered as a consequence, and why we should all care. There is an old expression in Zimbabwe that well articulates how people feel in the current situation: “Madziro ane nzeve (Shona for 'Walls have ears').” I am tired of these walls that people claim can hear. I need to speak my mind, without fear, without looking over my shoulder.

One fact is that I came to the US in search of a better life for myself, in search of a better future for my family, and that very fact leaves me concerned about the state of the country that I left behind. My decision to leave Zimbabwe was very rational, considering that every human being wishes for the promise of prosperity, a reward after the toil, peace of mind. I left Zimbabwe in August of 2002 feeling that my stay in that country would not guarantee all these human desires because, in my opinion, Zimbabwe was going backwards, towards dictatorship. Unfortunately, things are worse now. I am convinced that most governmental practices fall short of international humanitarian law and universal human rights standards.

Indeed, personal reflection on the situation in Zimbabwe reveals a deficiency in real respect for, and effective protection of, the freedoms of the masses, particularly the freedom of expression. My four years in the US have shown me that Americans believe

freedom of expression to be the cornerstone for public freedoms and the democratic system as a whole, and I am beginning to see why the US and the Zimbabwe governments are at odds. The Zimbabwean government claims that my country is democratic, despite the obvious lack of freedom of expression. However, I also realize that I cannot judge my country, nor let others judge it, without first understanding how Zimbabwe was allowed to deteriorate into her current state. The following deliberations provide the foundation for debate on the question: How did Zimbabwe get into the mess she is in today?

The state of present-day Zimbabwe is best understood in terms of her struggle for independence, because through independence Zimbabweans earned the right to vote for their own leaders, the right to a Zimbabwean constitution, along with many other rights. I have no doubt that when Zimbabweans fought the war of liberation against the colonial regime of Ian Smith, they were fighting with a will to be responsible for their present day lives, their future and the future of their children, all in accord with Friedrich Nietzsche's idea that freedom is the will to be responsible to ourselves.¹

Now fast-forward to 2002, twenty-two years after their independence, when Zimbabweans went to the polls to choose a leader. More often than not, the story of the polls that is told on the news in the Western world goes something like this: *When Zimbabweans went to the polls to choose a president, the very same government that everyone thought was going to be booted out ended up winning. Since then, the Zimbabwean economy has spiraled into the abyss under the tyranny of an aging totalitarian leader, Cde. R.G. Mugabe.* While this story definitely sells on its own (and

¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Group, 1988.

probably earns some pity for Zimbabweans), one particularly interesting question that was hot after the elections in 2002 but maybe not so much now is whether or not Mugabe rigged the elections. If he did, is it too late to say anything now? Who should speak out? Zimbabweans? The international community? Which international community?

I do not forget that there were international observers from the EU and UN during the 2002 presidential elections. I do not forget that several African states brought their own observers, too. Upon the conclusion of the elections, the US- and European-led observers denounced it as “not free nor fair” while at the same time African observers proclaimed the opposite. Need I mention that the winner of the elections, R.G. Mugabe, smacked the US in the face when he rebuked their allegations of fraud on ZBC TV by saying that the Zimbabwean elections had been more transparent than what the world had seen between Bush and Gore in 2000?

How then can the US teach Zimbabwe how to hold free and fair elections? Does “free and fair” to the US translate into 'only the one we want should win'? This question provokes the underlying power struggle that exists in the world of politics. Why did African states vouch their support for Mugabe? How did no one else see the mishandling of voters that happened before the Westerners' eyes during the elections? I am afraid that on this occasion Africans and Westerners had diverging viewpoints probably stemming from the lack of a real standard for “free and fair” elections. In other words, the standards differed between African states and the Western states, but why?

A potential explanation, at least in the case of Zimbabwe, can be found by trying to understand the defiance against the grip of Britain in the war against colonialism. I believe that following the torture and racial discrimination by Smith's regime, no one

wanted anything to do with whites and everyone generally considered the white man as a heartless beast and hated him for it. With this hatred was born the idea of *total* independence, in other words, no white man in the country would ever dare to raise a finger against a black man once independence was achieved. In the open interview that I had with Mugabe in 2001 at his rural home in Kutama (organized by the Principal for my senior class at Kutama College), he lamented that his colleagues convinced him to join them in negotiating for a ceasefire. Mugabe wanted to achieve total independence on the battlefield by fighting until *mabhunu* (the politically-incorrect term for whites used in colonial Zimbabwe) were driven back to England. I speculate, therefore, that other African states rallied behind Mugabe because they wanted him to finish his land redistribution program – a program that has the potential to take away any white power that still exists in Zimbabwe. In addition, Mugabe probably commanded a lot of respect from African leaders because he played a role in bringing many of them to power. Mugabe also has a history of participating in several important African Union efforts such as peace keeping forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Unfortunately, when African states decided that Mugabe's past actions and his future vision were more important than transparency in the elections, they went against the Western philosophy of a free and fair elections.

Whether Mugabe's relationships with African states won their hearts or not, I must admit that if he won the elections fairly he did so through his oratory charisma. When I met Mugabe at his home in 2001, he entranced my colleagues and me to the point where we were convinced he is the man to vote for. Similarly, in the run-up to the presidential elections, Mugabe managed to win the vote of many Zimbabweans. In this campaign, he

consciously or otherwise subscribed to Benjamin Franklin's statement, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety" [Historical Review of Pennsylvania, 1759]². In other words, Mugabe convinced his followers that the West was offering temporary safety through the puppet opposition party, whereas he guaranteed the preservation of permanent liberty and was thus willing to thwart, by any means necessary, any movement that aligned with the West.

Statements like these turned the elections into a loyalty game. Should the electorate leave Zimbabwe at the mercy of soothsayers by voting for the opposition, or should it preserve the freedom that was earned on that April day in 1980 when the country Zimbabwe was born by voting for Mugabe? The former promised Western influence or 'development,' and the latter totalitarian rule (or total independence).

In case you are not aware, Mugabe won the elections resoundingly through votes from rural Zimbabwe and very few from urban centers. Why? To put it succinctly, Mugabe, through his oratory charisma, convinced the rural folk that victory for the opposition was a return to colonization and there would be need for another war of liberation; nobody in the rural areas wanted to relive another struggle for independence. On the other hand, the 2002 elections were the first in which the 'born-frees' (people born after independence) could cast their vote. Many of the born-frees are not interested in an aging leader, and most of them live in the urban areas. At the same time, the urban population, born-free or otherwise, is the first group affected by economic hardships. In 2002, the urbanites had had enough of Mugabe's regime and wanted change.

I find it difficult to picture how things might have turned out had the opposition

² Bartlett, John. Familiar Quotations. Boston, Little, Brown and company, 1937. 11th ed.

won, or whether Mugabe would really have gone to arms against -- whom? The US? The UK? The opposition? Well, the latter sounds like a civil war. Rather, I am going to paint a picture for the urban dwellers and the 'born-free-generation' who believed that there would *not* be a return to colonization and who were convinced that Western influence was the way forward. I am one of these born-free Zimbabweans who admired the wonders of the Western world, and who also wished that Zimbabwe enjoyed them too. Yes, I wanted to see Mugabe out of office in those presidential elections, and yes I wanted to believe the opposition in its campaign as it promised to make friends with the West and prepare for an economic turnaround once in office. However, I must admit that the idea of 'development' is but an elusive concept in my mind, as it was then. No single economist can guarantee development, and the truth of the matter is that economics is the most inexact and unpredictable 'science'; hence, no-one can give an indisputable definition of development nor prescribe a guaranteed path towards attaining it. If development means you have a job, sweatshop or otherwise, and if development means you get food in your stomach, shelter above your head, a semblance of a health system, and some measure of freedom, then maybe, just maybe, my desire to see Mugabe out in 2002 was right.

Unfortunately, I did not see any guarantee of development for Zimbabweans even with a victory by the opposition. All I saw was the will of the West to get rid of a leader they did not like, and afterwards it was going to be up to us to see ourselves through. My fears were confirmed by the recent three-year anniversary of the war in Iraq, which reminded me that the US has no clue how to deal with domestic problems of other countries. Attempts to bring democracy have not solved problems in Iraq at all, and no

'development' will happen for a while in that country. Similarly, by the time the elections were held in Zimbabwe, there had been farm invasions, the land redistribution program was in motion, the economy was dying. How was democracy and Western promise supposed to solve any of these problems? It is no wonder that African states rallied behind Mugabe. Apparently, experience with the West had taught African states never to bestow trust on it. Their idea was that an African problem needed an African solution, but did they have it right?

One way to look at the “African problem-African solution” issue is to realize that everything has a price. As Zimbabwe went on a spree to destroy her agro-based economy through the land invasions, the West acted to protect the victims by sanctioning Zimbabwean leaders (freezing their Swiss accounts, putting travel bans on them, etc.).^{3,4} Unfortunately, there are other economic sanctions,^{5,6} travel embargoes and tourism restrictions⁷ (that is why Grinnell College canceled the off-campus study program in Zimbabwe), which have had dire consequences for the common man. The sanctions against Zimbabwe have made it difficult, if not impossible, to run the country, and it is now harder for people to maintain, let alone *improve*, their standard of living. In addition, the droughts, corruption, HIV/AIDS pandemic, and downright governmental incompetence have exacerbated the Zimbabwean government's failure to take care of its own people. I am therefore not surprised that in March 2006 the government made a

3 Richard Boucher. “Zimbabwe: Sanctions Enhancement” Spokesman, US Department of State. 2 March 2004. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/30091.htm>>.

4 “Zimbabwe officials' assets frozen”. BBC News. 24 November 2005. 29 March 2006. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4465136.stm>>.

5 “IMF maintains Zimbabwe sanctions.” BBC News. 9 March 2006. 29 March 2006. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4790332.stm>>.

6 Alexander Downer. “Tighter sanctions against Zimbabwe.” Minister of Foreign Affairs, Australia. 14 June 2005. 29 March 2006. <http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2005/fa076_05.html>.

7 “Travel warning on Zimbabwe” United States Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. 14 November 2005. 29 March 2006. <http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_937.html>.

remarkable about-turn from its previous "We can do it alone" stance when President Robert Mugabe joined hands with the UN to launch a US\$277m appeal for humanitarian assistance.⁸ Food supplies worth US\$111m were top of the bill, followed by requests for assistance with shelter, drugs and agricultural support. The appeal estimated that at least 3m people, or a quarter of the population, will need food aid this year.

There is no doubt that so much discontent and suffering abounds in Zimbabwe, and I can feel the tension every time I call my family. One thing that is clear is that the government cannot afford an uprising; therefore it tramples upon the freedoms of the masses through constitutional amendments. The amendments legalize the human rights abuses perpetrated by the government; thus, the West has been left fuming at the Zimbabwean government but without any specific idea how to deal with it. (Well, maybe not fuming, since other countries like Sudan have worse problems). At this point, I am reminded that we should have voted Mugabe out. At this point, I find it difficult to defend Mugabe's vision of "African solutions to African problems" and "land to the people." At this point, it seems the promise of development is a better beast than the beast we already have.

However, the events that I saw unfolding in Zimbabwe also proved something that I hate to admit: that the West is a bully. The West has definitely made running Zimbabwe difficult ever since the farm invasions in the late 1990s. Honestly, the West knows that the decisions it makes affect every nation in the world, which means it has the power to influence small countries like Zimbabwe. However, when the response of the West to political misgivings forces my country to fight for bread-crumbs and to succumb

⁸ Mukaro, Augustine. "Government swallows pride, appeals for aid." The Zimbabwe Independent. 14 March 2006. 8 April 2006.

<http://www.theindependent.co.zw/viewinfo.cfm?linkid=11&id=401&siteid=1>.

to the pressure of selfishness, I do not hesitate to say that is worse than (if I may coin a word) 'bullyism' – it is torture, inhumane. Unfortunately, the fact is that the present status quo makes it difficult to deal with all the domestic problems ourselves; therefore Zimbabwe needs truly philanthropic outsiders – outsiders who are willing to see us over all hurdles. I do not believe that our friends from the West are *not* doing a good job (Zimbabwe owes a lot to Western NGOs), but the current wave of “looking to the East” by my government has brought new relations whose fruits are still premature.

Despite the potential good that will come out of looking to the East, I don't condone what Mugabe's regime has done, nor do I laugh off Western influence. There are many good lessons to be learnt from the West. Yes, Mugabe has tried an African solution to an African problem to keep Western influence at bay, but if an African solution warrants the demolition of freedoms for the Zimbabwean people then such a solution is by no means acceptable. I find it unacceptable that people are afraid to speak their minds, and I certainly do not wish to be silenced when I have something to say. I want to speak out, because the more I am afraid of walls that can hear, the more I allow my government to conspicuously kill off my voice and orchestrate clear violence against me, my family, and my fellow countrymen. Unfortunately, my grandfather, my sister and her children cannot enjoy freedom of expression when they have no power against the government. I very much want to believe V in the movie *V for Vendetta*⁹ when he says “people should not be afraid of their governments; governments should be afraid of their people.” But is it not better that neither should be afraid of the other and rather work together as a unit; a government for the people, and a people for the government? Of

⁹ *V for Vendetta*. Dir. James McTeigue. Perf. Natalie Portman, Hugo Weaving, Stephen Rea. Warner Bros., 2006.

course, in the unfortunate situation where one must be afraid of the other, I share V's sentiments. Sadly for Zimbabwe, my government does not show any signs of fear, and who can we turn to when the police is a weapon against us?

Zimbabweans think that if Bush can invade Iraq to rid the Iraqis of the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, why can't he do the same for them? There was an unbelievable turnout by Zimbabweans to see the US President in South Africa on 9 July 2003 and ask him to 'save Zimbabwe'¹⁰. They all wanted Bush to say that he had come to their rescue, but to Mugabe's relief and to the dismay of the opposition, Bush put his faith in Tabo Mbeki (South African President) to deal with the Zimbabwe situation. I understand that Bush probably had his hands tied with the war in Iraq. However, I also realize that Bush's actions, whether consciously or not, acknowledged that some African problems need African solutions. Thus, food for thought here is whether or not in this situation the search for the much elusive African solution to Zimbabwe's problems is the best way forward.

For many people in Zimbabwe, it is difficult to put together the intentions of the US because in the run up to Bush's visit, Colin Powell said, "Their time has come and gone,"¹¹ in reference to Mugabe and his regime. Zimbabweans interpreted Colin Powell's words to mean the US would do everything in its power to remove Mugabe's regime; hence, several of my countrymen thought the US was going to invade Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, Bush did not have such an intention but rather left Zimbabwe in South Africa's hands. For many Zimbabweans who believe that South Africa cannot solve

10 "MDC asks Bush to 'save Zimbabwe'." Mail&GuadianOnline. 9 July 2003. 26 March 2006. <http://www.mg.co.za/articledirect.aspx?articleid=24012&area=%2fbreaking_news%2fbreaking_news_africa%2f>.

11 Powell, Colin. "Freeing A Nation From A Tyrant's Grip", US Department of State. 24 June 2003. 28 March 2006. <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/21857.htm>>.

Zimbabwe's problems, they think their plight was ignored because Zimbabwe has nothing to offer. People realize that the US is a capitalist country looking to make profits, and they can clearly see Uncle Sam pointing his finger with a big smile saying, "I want you ... to understand the capitalist way." At least Iraq has oil worth fighting for; therefore, many Zimbabweans believe that the humanitarian consciousness of the US is bogus. However, to be honest, the US cannot invade Zimbabwe as it did in Iraq for one simple reason – who is their target? If the US could misfire in Iraq where it had a pretty good idea what it was aiming for, how much more misfiring can it do in Zimbabwe?

I do not wish to spend unnecessary energy on speculations. Therefore, I will focus on the lack of police protection in Zimbabwe that I alluded to earlier instead. According to Kathleen Sullivan, "freedom of speech depends on material preconditions, and first among them is the availability of strong police protection"¹² Americans always assume they are protected by the police and the law, and for the most part they are right. Hence, people like Michael Moore can make *Fahrenheit 9/11*, and citizens can demonstrate against the war in Iraq. Zimbabweans, on the other hand, cannot stage any form of demonstration without the risk of getting arrested. Even worse, they do not feel safe in their own homes, especially following the great shock of government-endorsed police brutality against the masses in a crackdown code-named Operation Murambatsvina.

Operation Murambatsvina (Shona for 'Operation Drive Out Trash'), also officially known as Operation Restore Order, is a large scale Zimbabwean government campaign to forcibly clear slum areas across the country. On 25 May 2005, Africa Day, the

12 Sullivan, Kathleen. "Freedom of expression in the United States". The boundaries of freedom of expression & order in American democracy. Kent State University Press, 2001.

Government of Zimbabwe began the operation to "get rid of the filth", and the cleanup continued throughout the month of June, affecting virtually every town and rural business center in the country. The latest United Nations figures estimate that it has led to the unemployment of 700,000 people and affected a further 2.4 million people countrywide.¹³ The nature of police brutality in Zimbabwe during Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 is exemplified by the following excerpt (the use of the term uniformed thugs is meant to show that the police worked together with government-trained youth known as the green bombers):

The ZANU PF [Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front] forces of lawlessness and anarchy, wearing full riot gear and armed with AK 47 rifles, arrived in Killarney on a Saturday morning (June 11, 2005). The villagers had been given orders to evict, and they sat there helplessly besides their pathetic bundles of pots, blankets and mattresses which they had assembled in compliance with the order. These uniformed thugs encountered a funeral wake, where a poor grandmother had lost her only son. She and the mourners gathered around her dwelling, awaiting the delivery of the body from the mortuary, and they pleaded for a stay to finish their all-night vigil and observe the rituals of death. But the politicized and brutalized thugs of a heartless regime showed no mercy, shouting "we have our orders," and they proceeded to clear the dwelling and reduce the structure to rubble.¹⁴

13 Tibaijuka, Anna K. "Report of the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN special envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe." 24 July 2005. 28 March 2006. <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/zimbabwe/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf>

14 "Operation Murambatsvina continues..." Sokwanele Special Report. Sokwanele NGO News. 14 June

Mugabe openly spoke on government controlled ZBC TV that the clearances are needed in order to carry out "a vigorous clean-up campaign to restore sanity,"¹⁵ and he described the program as an "urban renewal campaign."¹⁵ In addition, Ignatious Chombo, the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, purported that "it is these people who have been making the country ungovernable by their criminal activities actually."¹⁶ The Zimbabwean Police Commissioner, Augustine Chihuri, said that Operation Murambatsvina was meant to "clean the country of the crawling mass of maggots bent on destroying the economy."¹⁷ While police have carried out most of the demolitions, they have been supported by the army and the green bombers (ZANU-PF thugs). Many inhabitants have been forced to destroy their own homes, sometimes at gunpoint.¹⁸ An important question to ask after all this is why does the government put the blame on its people for the economic downfall?

I spent a great deal of time putting so much blame on the West and their sanctions for the troubles in the Zimbabwean economy. Therefore, I must defend my arguments in the wake of the finger-pointing at the 'crawling mass of maggots.' As jobs are now harder to find in the formal employment sector in Zimbabwe, the informal sector where people establish their own businesses is becoming more and more lucrative. Trade in the informal sector is very common in many African states, but unlike African nations like

2005. 28 March 2006.

<http://www.sokwanele.com/articles/sokwanele/operationmuranbatsvinacontinues_14june2005.html>.

15 "Operation Murambatsvina." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 29 Mar 2006. 29 Mar 2006.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Operation_Murambatsvina&oldid=45965131>.

16 "Police to use live ammo, army rolls into suburbs". ZimOnline News. 28 May 2005. 29 March 2006.

<<http://www.zimonline.co.za/printme.asp?ID=9809>>.

17 Lamp, Christina. "Priests told: don't aid 'filth'" Sunday Times News, UK. 19 June 2005. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1660059,00.html>>.

18 "Zimbabwe Parliament debate on Operation Murambatsvina - Page 1" Kubatana NGO News. 23 June 2005. 29 March 2006.

<http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/demgg/050623parlzim.asp?sector=LOCGOV&range_start=1>.

Ghana where the government has some form of tax revenue from the informal sector, the Zimbabwean government does not have income from, nor control over, the dealings. Zimbabwe is fighting to control the flow of foreign currency, which is in short supply on the formal market (realistically, the formal market is now called the parallel market). The shortages are associated with the existence of the black market – money transactions on the streets, in the flea markets, and in back-rooms of houses. Thus, Operation Murambatsvina can be viewed by the government as a means to reverse the currency problems and jump start the economy. [An important side note is that the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) runs a parallel market for foreign currency, which is equivalent to an auction for currency. When this market opened in 2003 its rates were similar to those on the black market, but attempts by the RBZ to control inflation have changed everything; currently, US\$1 goes for Z\$215,000 on black market and Z\$99,200 on parallel market].¹⁹

However, other hidden agendas can explain the operation. The opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) argues that the government's main reason for Murambatsvina was to punish the urban poor for voting for the opposition.²⁰ In this way, the government would weaken the opposition in preparation for the next presidential elections in 2008. The MDC's legal affairs spokesperson David Coltart has argued that, by dispersing MDC supporters to remote rural locations, the ZANU-PF government would find it easier to control an angry population in the event of possible riots or mass protests.²¹ Not surprisingly, people whose homes were demolished were essentially told

19 "Zimbabwe: Dollar depreciates 90%". The Zimbabwe Independent. 7 April 2006. 9 April 2006. <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200604070660.html>>.

20 "Mengistu hatched and directed Operation Murambatsvina" MDC News. 20 February 2006. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.mdczimbabwe.org/Archives/2006/Feb/muramba06.htm>>.

21 "Mugabe's regime lays waste to buildings in new terror tactic". Sunday Times News, UK. 5 June 2005. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1641558,00.html>>.

to return to the rural areas or face further action from the Zimbabwe Republic Police and the dreaded Central Intelligence Organization. Education Minister Aeneas Chigwedere claimed that there is "nobody in Zimbabwe who does not have a rural home."²² In other words, the urban renewal campaign is meant to drive Zimbabweans back to the rural areas. However, if the government hopes to improve the economy as well as people's lives, I do not understand how ruralization can be successful given that jobs are in the urban centers and the rural areas are "reserves" that can no longer support a livelihood. Need I remind Mugabe and his cronies that their 2002 presidential campaign promised to move people away from the "reserves" for this very same reason?

I remember very well my history courses in secondary school. We were taught about the history of Zimbabwe and how our great-grandfathers were driven to the reserves by the colonialists. We were taught that *vapambepfumi* (Shona for 'the wealth-grabbers') tricked Lobengula, the illiterate King of the Ndebele, into signing the Rudd Concession that gave the British rights to mine in Zimbabwe.²³ *Vapambepfumi* came looking for gold, but they did not find much. Rather than returning with empty hands, they decided to settle down in the beautiful savanna and farm on its fertile plains. Thus, the next best alternative quickly became an operation to drive Africans into "reserves" that had poor rainfall, bad soil, and tsetseflies; whites grabbed the rich and fertile land in regions where rainfall was plentiful. With additional legislation such as the Land Apportionment Act in 1930 and the Land Tenure Act in 1969,²⁴ the only source of

22 "Teachers decry Mugabe's 'clean-up' plan" Mail&GuardianOnline. Published 15 June 2005. 28 March 2006. <<http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=243162>>

23 "Cecil John Rhodes: from Childhood to the grave" Bulawayo1872!Profiles. 28 March 2006. <<http://www.bulawayo1872.com/history/rhodescj.htm>>

24 "Background to Land Reform in Zimbabwe." Embassy of Zimbabwe. 28 March 2005. <http://www.zimbassy.se/land_reform_document.htm>.

livelihood for the Africans was to work for the whites, but the working conditions were terrible. Not surprisingly, an uprising by the masses eventually ensued, strong and unstoppable, until Zimbabwe gained her independence. There was joy and jubilation when people thought they had regained their land and could now live and work on it. In addition, many who had been denied access to urban areas by the whites saw independence as the gateway to live and work in the city without harrassment. A lot of good things were in store for Zimbabwe, and she did enjoy a great deal of success as many people left the “reserves” and worked in the cities.

After independence no one was given a new piece of land, except those who had enough money to purchase land for themselves or government officials who had their own way. For the masses, the obstacle in their quest for better farming land was the constitution that Zimbabwe accepted from her colonial master Britain at the time of independence. Through the Lancaster House Agreement,²⁵ Zimbabwe's war of liberation ended on the tables rather than on the war front. As I mentioned before, in the open interview that I had with Mugabe in 2001 at his home in Kutama, he lamented the idea of negotiating for a ceasefire because he really wanted total independence. He was bitter about the way the delegation that negotiated for peace (which he was a part of) was convinced to include a “willing seller - willing buyer” clause in the constitution. Mugabe precisely blamed this clause for his failure to deliver land to the people after independence in 1980. Clearly, the number-one agenda in the war of liberation was “land to the people!” but even right now 70% or so of the country still lives in the “reserves” that were created by the colonialists.

25 "Lancaster House Agreement." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 10 Mar 2006. 29 Mar 2006. <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Lancaster_House_Agreement&oldid=43131411>.

The story of land redistribution in Zimbabwe is but evidence of a political crisis. Across the globe politicians are almost always the greatest liars and in order to keep ahead of the game they are always ready to pounce on opportunities that give them power. Mugabe told my colleagues and me that that he wanted to redistribute land soon after independence but that the clause in the constitution stopped him, but I believe he would have done it eons ago if he really wanted to. The Zimbabwe constitution requires a two-thirds majority in parliament to make amendments of any kind without opposition, and Mugabe's ruling party has enjoyed more than this fraction for a long time now. Why did he not change the clause earlier? I therefore think that Mugabe's land redistribution was opportunistic; it was born once he allowed the war veterans to stay on occupied farms. Despite Mugabe's efforts during the interview to convince my colleagues and me that he had planned on redistributing land prior to the land invasions by the war veterans in 1998, I could sense that his enjoyment of the benefits of power had nearly made him forget about the land issue, but he quickly seized the opportunity to make amends when the war veterans went on a rampage to seize land for themselves.

Mugabe is a smart man. He knew that once he promised the 70% or so of Zimbabweans the much needed better farming land, he would stay in office. Of course he was right – the resounding number of votes he garnered from the rural folk was '*unbelievable*' (with a lot of emphasis on the word to illustrate both the huge numbers and the potential for rigging) – but the West was not happy with the way the whole land redistribution program and the elections had been conducted. Thus, I return to the same question but with different wording: how can anything be judged as free and fair?

I certainly think that it is fair to give land to the masses who need it, but the

process is not free and fair if it involves threats and deaths. At the same time, I do not know how Zimbabwe could have redistributed the land on a willing seller-willing buyer basis when the whites had not bought the land from the blacks in the first place. Of course, I agree with Mugabe when he says that the Zimbabwean government should only pay the owners of enlisted land for improvements they made on the land. However, no comment was made about the land that has degraded through use over the years. Other concerns to keep in mind are that the whites living on that land are essentially Zimbabweans who have been loyal to the country, who pay their taxes, and who do not necessarily abuse people's rights. What should the government do since it promised reconciliation at independence? In the end I am left with but one thought – that the idea of 'free and fair,' whether in an election, in redistributing land, or in any situation, is a beautiful concept but one that we cannot all attain because each stakeholder may have a different opinion about what is free and fair. Why does the world behave like there are universal standards for freedom and fairness?

There is no absolute answer, even though I am certainly going to try to give one. I know I have probably disrespected economics by claiming that it is the most inexact science, but I will make up for my harsh judgment by drawing an important lesson from this field. We all understand the concept of trade and that it would be utterly impossible to find anyone who is completely self-sufficient. In fact, an introduction to an economics textbook walks you through the concept of total benefit to the whole society through trade, and the point is valid. In case you are wondering what that has to do with freedom and fairness, consider the following. Trade terms and trade partners depend on accountability, which in turn rests on the presence of intact human rights. By intact

human rights, I mean the law ensures respect for the rights of others and the protection of public order. This also covers areas such as the protection of national security and morals. Thus, in a world where globalization is consuming national boundaries, the presence or absence of intact human rights is a matter of international concern. In fact, because human rights are so important, their relationship to trade is made obvious by the sanctions that are imposed by other states on nations that do not conform to international standards of human rights agreed upon by members of the UN, the Commonwealth, the IMF, and many other such organizations. Any form of trade with countries that infringe upon these standards is seen as equivalent to promoting those governments; therefore, cutting off the trade is theoretically a way of forcing some change. The real misfortune that sanctions bring is increased suffering for the lower echelons of society, and the overall damage may be worse than intended.

International sanctions, among other things, have exacerbated suffering in Zimbabwe. While the money that goes to the corrupt leaders has shrunk, the income of the average Zimbabwean has dwindled even more. Unemployment in the formal sector is at a record 70%,²⁶ and yet the government went on a rampage to kill off the informal sector that provided a glimmer of hope to the unemployed. Inflation for the period March 2005- March 2006 was 913.6%, with figures for some commodities such as rent and postal services soaring above 3,000% during the same period.²⁷ According to Mr Nyoni, the Central Statistics Office acting director, the March 2006 Food Poverty Line (FPL) for an average household of five persons in Zimbabwe stands at Z\$10, 312, 900 (920.24%

26 Maisokwadzo, Forward. "Unemployment rate to reach 70%". The Zimbabwe Situation. 17 January 2002. 29 March 2006. <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/jan19a_2002.htm#link2>.

27 "Year-on-year inflation rises to 913.6 percent". The Zimbabwe Herald. 8 April 2006. 9 April 2006. <<http://www.herald.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=1847&cat=1>>.

increase from the March 2005 FPL).²⁷ He also said that the Total Consumption Poverty Line (TCPL) for an average household stands at \$31, 079, 500 in March 2006, a value that is 1, 003% higher than the March 2005 TCPL.²⁷ The Zimbabwe Tobacco Association estimates that production of tobacco, once Zimbabwe's chief export, will fall to 50m kilograms this year from a peak of more than 230m kilograms in 2000.²⁸ To prove the worsening situation in Zimbabwe, the WHO Report on 7 April 2006 showed that life in Zimbabwe is shorter than anywhere else in the world, with neither men nor women expected to live until 40 (life expectancy for men is 37, for women 34).²⁹ Logically, I attribute poverty and HIV/AIDS to the low life expectancy.

To add to all these woes, the 2001 Public Order and Security Bill³⁰ legally disallows demonstrations against government actions (economic or otherwise). The ruling party, ZANU-PF, enjoys more than two-thirds majority in parliament, which legally gives them rights to amend the constitution without opposition. (I am surprised Mugabe amended the constitution to suppress people's freedom and yet he did not amend it to change the willing seller-willing buyer clause that stopped him from achieving his goal). All freedoms to gather, or even speak of the president, have been abolished. The national television is controlled by the government, and all that is broadcast is censored (the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill ensures all this).³¹ There is no freedom for foreign journalists, and in particular foreign journalists must register with the

28 Hawkins, Tony. "Zimbabwe's economy spirals downwards". Financial Times World News. 7 April 2006. 8 April 2006. <<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/a322dde2-c5d2-11da-b675-0000779e2340.html>>.

29 "Working together for health". The World Health Report 2006. 7 April 2006. 8 April 2006. <http://www.who.int/whr/2006/whr06_en.pdf>.

30 "Public Order and Security Bill, 2001". Kubatana NGO publications. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posb011214.PDF>>.

31 "Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill, 2001". Kubatana NGO publications. 29 March 2006. <<http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/accesstoinfo011130.pdf>>.

government in order to report in Zimbabwe at all. At a time like this, Zimbabweans are simply praying and waiting for God's grace. They have become dormant and passive, and their day to day affairs are edging closer to “every man for himself and God for us all.” Who can I blame when a country lives like this?

I think it is high time I spoke my mind without any fear or regard for the consequences. I blame my own government, I blame my fellow Zimbabweans, I blame the West, I blame everyone. I blame my government for taking away my trust, for stripping me of my freedoms, for biting the very hands that feed them. I blame my government for sucking blood out of the toil of its people, for using Zimbabweans to fight for freedom and then designing laws that take away the very freedom they fought for. I blame the West for enticing my leaders into accepting a constitution that ignored the important land issue in exchange for independence. I blame the West for imposing economic sanctions that leave many Zimbabweans drenched in their own sweat and yet with nothing to take home. I blame us the Zimbabweans for losing the will to be responsible for ourselves and in the process giving away our power, for freedom is power. I blame us for losing the power to be heard, the power to speak our minds, the power to be respected, the power to say NO.

I blame African leaders who supported Mugabe's victory because they wanted to see an African solution to an African problem; I believe they wanted to see the end of Mugabe's land redistribution, with the idea that if it succeeded they too would join him, but now most of them probably silently laugh at my country and blame us for our own downfall. I blame everyone else for looking idly and wondering what is going to happen next, while at the same time feeling pity for the afflicted. I blame the rest of the world

because it constantly forgets that we are a global village, one big family. I blame the world for ignoring our very existence as a people with problems, because until we start acting on our inadequacies and bring freedom, shelter, hope, to every corner of the planet, we have but proven our hypocrisy. Action always speaks louder than words.