



Robert Mugabe, who came to power in Zimbabwe three decades ago and shows no sign of letting go. © *epa/Corbis*.

Day of the Crocodile

Zimbabwe's longtime ruler, Robert Mugabe, made a brutal sham of recent elections, after banning Western journalists. The author, a native, reports from the inside on Mugabe's campaign of terror—and the extraordinary courage of those who've confronted "The Fear."

by **PETER GODWIN** September 2008

For more than five hours on the afternoon of April 4 the man who sees himself as synonymous with the destiny of Zimbabwe, and who has made himself the country's dictator to ensure it, remained locked in a meeting in Harare, the capital, with his four-dozen-member politburo. The man was Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's president, and the session was taking place in the upper reaches of the ruling party's headquarters, Jongwe House. Everyone in Harare knew that Mugabe had to be up there; the soldiers of his presidential guard were still lolling around outside, in their distinctive gold berets.

Mugabe was chairing the meeting himself, in a dark suit and polka-dotted tie. On Mugabe's flanks were the men and women who fought victoriously with him 28 years ago to transform white-ruled Rhodesia into black-ruled Zimbabwe. Now, six days after elections for parliament and president, this group was facing certain defeat. Although the government had not yet officially announced the results, and despite strenuous efforts to rig the election, it was clear that Mugabe's ZANU-P.F. party had lost not only its parliamentary majority but the presidency as well. The purpose of the meeting was to decide whether to accept the loss gracefully and relinquish power to Mugabe's bitter rival, the Movement for Democratic Change (M.D.C.), led by Morgan Tsvangirai (pronounced Chahn-gur-eye), or to fight on, manipulating the results so as to force a second round of voting for the presidency.

Mugabe's party is divided now between hawks and doves, between hard-liners and conciliators, and it is riven as well by rival succession candidates. Mugabe's clan totem is Gushungo—meaning “crocodile” in Shona, the language of most Zimbabweans—and on the occasion of his 83rd birthday, last year, a giant stuffed crocodile was presented to him as a symbol of his “majestic authority.” But even the wildest crocodiles eventually tire and die, and the word on the street was that he had been stung by the extent of his defeat, and that his young wife, Grace, had urged him to step down and enjoy his last years with their three children in his 25-bedroom mansion. The mood in Harare was expectant, even giddy.

I grew up and was educated in Zimbabwe, served as a conscript, and maintain close ties to the country. Because of these roots I have been able to live and travel there even at times, such as the present, when other foreign journalists have been expelled. In Harare that afternoon I spent time with friends as the hours wore on. Finally an old school chum called to say that “the General”—his uncle, a politburo member and a former guerrilla commander—had at last emerged from Jongwe House, and that the meeting was over.

The General, Solomon Mujuru, is now considered a “moderate,” but he was not ever thus. Twenty-five years ago, not long after the end of the war of liberation, the General had once put a gun to my heart and threatened to kill me. The gun was a Russian-made Tokarev with a mother-of-pearl handle. Odd how you remember such details. The General had been working his way through a bottle of Johnnie Walker Red Label at the time, but his grip was steady.

This was in 1984, during the Matabeleland massacres, when Mugabe unleashed his fearsome North Korea-trained Fifth Brigade into that southern province to crush the opposition. I had written about the massacres for a British newspaper, which is what prompted the General to draw his gun when our paths crossed.

But now, on April 4, the General had bad news to report. In the end Mugabe had decided that he intended to do everything necessary to retain his powers. Behind the scenes the presidential ballot boxes would be effectively stuffed to indicate that Morgan Tsvangirai, though still winning more votes than Mugabe, had not achieved the 50 percent threshold necessary for election. (This was possible because there had been a third candidate in the race.) Further, in the weeks leading up to the runoff, Mugabe would wage a campaign of bloody intimidation to ensure that Zimbabwe's voters understood where their self-interest lay. Indeed, a secret battle plan was actually drawn up, in detail. A leaked copy dated April 9 was shown to me; the key section carried the heading “Covert Operations to Decompose the Opposition.”

For all the talk of doves and hawks within the politburo, it was clear that hawks remained ascendant. On the government television station, ZTV, I watched the official news reports of the politburo meeting. You could see Mugabe moving slowly around the horseshoe table, shaking hands with each member. They seemed to revere him, lowering their heads when he came near. A few of the women rose to curtsy, as though to a monarch.

The Crocodile

If you were casting the role of “homicidal African dictator who stays in power against all odds,” Robert Gabriel Mugabe wouldn't even rate a callback. To look at him and hear him talk, he's still the prissy schoolmaster he once was—a slight, rather effeminate figure, with small, manicured hands given to birdlike gestures. The huge banners that span Zimbabwe's streets do their best to make this 84-year-old into something more heroic—he is seen shaking an arm at the heavens, above the words “The Fist of Empowerment.” The image is marred somewhat by the little white handkerchief often held in Mugabe's fist, and by the outsize gold spectacles that dominate his face, and that seem to be wearing him.

Mugabe is no swaggering Idi Amin, the onetime heavyweight boxing champion of Uganda. He remains profoundly enigmatic. Godfrey Chanetsa, his former secretary, described to me how Mugabe has always stayed aloof even from his Cabinet, rarely seeing them outside the scheduled Tuesday-afternoon meetings. “He listens a lot. He just blinks and

listens. He lets you talk. He leans back with his head cocked to one side, resting on his hands.” Throughout his life Mugabe has been essentially friendless. Abandoned by his carpenter father, he was brought up largely by his mother and his maternal grandparents and by Catholic priests. A shy, bookish, unathletic boy, he reacted querulously to criticism, and worshipped the Anglo-Irish Jesuit principal of his mission school. He went on to earn a degree at the black University of Fort Hare, in apartheid South Africa—Nelson Mandela’s alma mater—and became a schoolteacher.

Mugabe was politicized during a stint in Ghana in the late 1950s, just as that colony became the first in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from Britain. There he also met and married Sally Hayfron, a fellow teacher. In late 1963 he returned to Rhodesia. The following year, Ian Smith, the incoming white prime minister, ordered Mugabe’s arrest and detention for subversion. In 1965 Smith unilaterally declared the colony’s independence from Britain and kept Mugabe in detention. He remained there for the next 10 years, during which time he acquired another six college degrees, taking correspondence courses mostly from the University of London. Ian Smith released him in 1975, and Mugabe slipped across the border into Mozambique to join the nationalist movement, the Zimbabwe African National Union, or ZANU. He quickly clawed his way to the top.

Mugabe’s most potent personal influences are mainly white ones. The repressive apparatus of his enemy Ian Smith became a model for his own. A more important influence is the former colonial power itself, Great Britain, with which he has long been besotted. Mugabe was in fact awarded an honorary knighthood in 1994 for his “important contribution to relations between Zimbabwe and Britain.” The evidence of his Anglophilia is everywhere: his Savile Row suits, his love of cricket and tea, his penchant for Graham Greene novels, and his continuing reverence for the Queen, even though she stripped him of his knighthood in June. Mugabe did not blame the Queen for this disgrace; no, it was those “demons” at No. 10 Downing Street.

The love of Britain is matched in Mugabe by a deep resentment. “You can never ever convince an Englishman that you are equal to him, never, *never*,” Mugabe has said. In Mugabe’s recent election campaign, he often appeared to be running against Britain as much as against Morgan Tsvangirai, employing slogans such as “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again!”

In reality, Britain (and the West more generally) indulged Mugabe for far too long, contributing greatly to the creation of the dictator we have today. Mugabe’s generally accepted story arc in the press tends to be “good leader turned bad”: liberation hero wins Zimbabwe’s first democratic election, rejects Communism, embraces capitalism and his white former oppressors, allows them to keep their farms, and fearlessly opposes apartheid in neighboring South Africa, and then, sometime in the late 1990s, he has a sudden rush of blood to the head and loses it. The precipitating cause of this change is often given as the death, in 1992, of his wife, Sally, regarded as a tempering influence on the inner tyrant. The mortician who embalmed Sally’s body told me that Mugabe visited the funeral parlor every day for nine days, until her state funeral, to sob over the open casket—a touching scene slightly curdled by the fact that Mugabe had already sired two children by one of his junior secretaries, Grace Marufu, 40 years his junior, whom he finally married in a lavish ceremony in 1996.

Grace, a woman of prodigious retail appetites—the Imelda Marcos of Africa—is known to her people as the First Shopper. By 1995, Godfrey Chanetsa was Zimbabwe’s ambassador in London, and he made the mistake of complaining, as he told me, that the embassy “was being turned into a warehouse for Grace’s shopping.” He was immediately recalled to Harare.

The true Mugabe plotline differs from the accepted one. It goes like this: From the very start his default reaction to any political threat has been a violent one. During Zimbabwe’s first democratic elections he kept his guerrillas in the field,

where they spread a chilling message: Vote for Mugabe or “the war goes on.” In the early 1980s, when he encountered opposition in Matabeleland from remnants of his former ally Joshua Nkomo’s forces, he sealed off the province and, as noted, laid waste to it. He called the action Operation Gukurahundi, using a Shona word that refers to “an early rain that clears away the chaff.” Estimates of the chaff vary from 10,000 to 25,000 dead. Through all this Mugabe got a free pass from the West. During the Cold War he was seen as pro-Western. Mugabe was also able, as a leader of the so-called Front Line States, which opposed white-ruled South Africa, to leverage the specter of apartheid. If you attacked Mugabe, he immediately painted you as a pro-apartheid apologist. That changed when Nelson Mandela was released from prison, in 1990; Mugabe had to play second fiddle. Mandela later made light of Mugabe’s predicament: “He was the star, and then the sun came up.”

By the late 1990s, Zimbabwe’s economy was in a shambles—corruption, misrule, and a disastrous military intervention in Congo had all taken their toll. To buy favor, Mugabe resorted to expropriating land and giving it to his supporters. The full story does not bear repeating here; land reform was certainly overdue and had been stalled for many reasons. But Mugabe did what he always does when there is something he needs: he employed brute force. And because the first victims were white—farmers who had their property *jambanja’d* (seized and occupied), and who in some cases were assaulted or murdered—the Zimbabwe story suddenly piqued the interest of the Western media. This is why the year 2000, when the farm seizures hit the headlines, is mistakenly seen as Mugabe’s watershed—the year he went bad. The truth is he had been bad long before that.

“The Fear”

The tragic irony of Zimbabwe is that what is today a hellish country should by all evidence be a paradise. Its high, malaria-free interior is a magical place: sweeping vistas of long tawny grasses slope up to the mountain ranges of the eastern highlands; in the north the land falls sharply down to the Zambezi River, which tumbles magnificently over the Victoria Falls. Zimbabwe is blessed with rich, loamy soil. Beneath it lie generous seams of gold, chromium, coal, iron, and diamonds. At independence in 1980, Mugabe inherited a sophisticated, well-maintained infrastructure. The black middle class grew fast, and Zimbabwe enjoyed the highest standard of living in black-ruled Africa.

But that was yesterday. The most recent World Values Survey shows that Zimbabweans are today the world’s unhappiest people. Their economy has almost halved in size in the past 10 years. The unemployment rate is more than 80 percent. About half of all Zimbabweans are reliant on food aid. Some 20 percent of the population is afflicted with H.I.V./AIDS. Zimbabwe today has the world’s shortest life span—the average Zimbabwean is dead by age 36 (down from age 62 in 1990). As a result the country now has the highest percentage of orphans on the planet.

Everywhere in Zimbabwe there are long lines: lines for bread, lines for cooking oil, lines for maize meal (the staple food). Buying gasoline requires an array of byzantine procedures. Zimbabwe can now boast, if that is the word, the highest rate of inflation in history. As I write, it’s running at about nine million percent a year. How can I convey what it’s like to live with this kind of hyperinflation? Imagine that you’re out grocery shopping, and in the time it takes you to reach the checkout line, the prices of the items in your cart have all gone up. Golfers now pay for drinks before they tee off, because by the time they’ve completed 18 holes the bar prices will have risen. No one uses wallets for cash; mostly you carry around bags full of blocks of money secured by elastic bands. During my latest trip to the country, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe issued new, higher-denomination notes no fewer than three times in a period of two months, the last one being the 500-million-Zimbabwean-dollar note. At its introduction it was worth two U.S. dollars. Four weeks later, its value had fallen to five cents.

To feed the ravenous monster of hyperinflation, Mugabe has been importing banknote paper from a Munich-based

company, Giesecke & Devrient; presses in Harare have been running 24 hours a day to pump cash onto the streets and into the hands of the soldiers and policemen and party militia who torture and imprison Mugabe's opponents. This is nothing less than blood money.

Why don't Zimbabweans rise up? In fact, Zimbabweans do rise up. They rise up and leave. As many as 70 percent of Zimbabweans between the ages of 18 and 60 now live and work outside the country. These aren't just a busboy underclass, wading across the crocodile-infested Limpopo River to take bottom-rung jobs wherever they can. Many are doctors and accountants and computer technicians—Africa's educated elite, the leadership echelon, and Mugabe is happy to see the backs of them. Many others are the truly dispossessed, eking out a living in South Africa's townships, where they have been subjected to terrifying xenophobic attacks.

You can feel the population loss in Harare, which is palpably less bustling and vibrant than it once was. There's a second reason for this. Three years ago the authorities launched Operation Murambatsvina—Operation "Clear Out the Shit"—to expel masses of people from Harare and other towns and cities, and demolish their houses, in what was touted as urban renewal. The victims understood it to be an act of "electoral cleansing," designed to rid the cities of the urban poor, who have increasingly opposed Mugabe. All told, some 2.4 million people have been affected by Operation Murambatsvina—many of them driven from the cities at gunpoint and dumped in the countryside.

This is a society dominated by terror. After Mugabe's politburo decision, in April, his security forces launched yet another operation. They called this one Operation MaVhoterapapi—Operation "Whom Did You Vote For?" Harare's hospitals rapidly filled up with its handiwork. People in Zimbabwe have a name for what has been happening. They call it simply "The Fear."

I found Denias Dombo lying broken on a hospital bed, his dark head propped up on pillows, trying to eat a slice of bread. His left leg was in plaster from hip to heel, a calloused sole peeping out against the bright-white sheet. Both arms were in plaster, too, right up to Dombo's powerfully veined farmer's biceps. He winced as he turned to pick up a teacup because several of his ribs were broken. On his bedside table was a copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*. "I've just finished it," he said, following my gaze. "I have form two." (Form two is the equivalent of 10th grade.) Until a week before, Dombo had lived in a tidy homestead with three houses and a granary up on stilts, and seven head of cattle. As a district organizing secretary for the opposition M.D.C., "it was my job to apply to the police for clearance to hold party meetings," as required by law. So everyone knew his political affiliation. After the elections, Dombo had just left his homestead when he heard a vehicle growling to a halt outside his home. He turned back to see "bright flames—my brick-and-thatch house already on fire" and the two men who had set it alight scampering back to their truck. He says he recognized both men, one of them a newly elected ZANU-P.F. member of parliament. The vehicle in which they sped off had ZANU-P.F. logos on its doors, and in the back sat a group of youths in party T-shirts. Dombo yelled after them, "I see you, I know who you are, and you are the ones who have burned down my house!"

He walked all night to cover the 15 miles to the police station to report the crime, and then walked the 15 miles home. Shortly after he returned, the youths in the T-shirts swarmed onto his property, armed with sticks and iron bars. Dombo and his family tried to barricade themselves in a building, but it was clear that defense was pointless.

Dombo made up his mind. "I decided, Better for me to come out, or they will kill my family." So he told his wife, Patricia, who was holding their infant son, Israel, and he told his 14-year-old daughter, Martha, and his 9-year-old daughter, Dorcas, "I'm going to go out, and when they come after me, you must all run away as fast as you can and hide." Dombo ran out toward his attackers. Just as he'd anticipated, they converged on him. He tried to protect his head with his arms while they beat him. "I heard the bones in my arms crack and I cried out: Oh, Jesus, I'm dying here—what have I done

wrong?” As they beat him, on and on, his assailants made him shout, “Pamberi ne [up with] Robert Mugabe!” and “Pasi ne [down with] Tsvangirai!” At last the ringleader said, “Let’s leave him here—we’ll come back and finish him off tonight.”

Dombo lay by the embers of his house. He tried to stand up but fell, tried to stand up once more but fell again. Dombo could see the jagged shard of his left shinbone “waving out.” One arm hung limp and shattered. “I was in such terrible pain, and I thought I was dying, and I decided, Better to kill myself than just wait for them to come.” So he picked up a thick length of wire, twisted one end into a tight noose around his neck, and summoned his remaining strength to reach up and attach the other end to a hook in the brick wall of his house. Then he allowed his body to sag. He felt the wire tighten around his throat, saw the light dim—but suddenly he dropped to the ground. The wire had snapped.

Then he heard a little voice calling to him. It was Dorcas, his daughter. She brought a neighbor who gingerly loaded Dombo into a wheelbarrow. Now he was here, in a private hospital.

Nearby lay a man named Tendai Pawandiwa. A group of armed Mugabe supporters had run him to ground near a river and, telling him that they were going to baptize him in the name of ZANU-P.F., held his head underwater in order to drown him. He managed to wriggle free, and fled. His body bore the stigmata of a free and fair election: deep lacerations on his back and legs. Pawandiwa listlessly flicked through the pages of a four-year-old copy of *People* magazine.

I went from bed to bed, listening to the stories. They were all, in essence, the same.

That evening, at a farewell party for a British diplomat, I was introduced to a black man in a clerical collar, but amid the hubbub I missed his name. In conversation I angrily described the torture victims I’d just been visiting—and noticed that he began to look distinctly uncomfortable. Then it dawned on me whom I was speaking with: Father Fidelis Mukonori, the head of the Jesuits in Zimbabwe, but, more important, Robert Mugabe’s personal chaplain.

“Well,” Fidelis said, “one hears these things generally, but one is not sure if they are true, of the details.” “Come with me tomorrow,” I said. “You’ll get all the details you need.” He gave me his card.

I called Fidelis the next day, but—predictably, I thought—he had switched off his mobile phone. I went back to the hospital with some books for Dombo. On the way in, I found Fidelis—he had come to the hospital after all. In front of the priest, Dombo repeated his story. Now Fidelis knew, and he knew that I knew he knew. There was no middle ground here—moral choices had to be made. He promised to “get the message up the line” to “the old man”—that is, Mugabe, as if he weren’t responsible for it all to begin with.

“How will this end?” I asked the priest finally. Fidelis sighed. “The old man is tired,” he said. “He wants to go.”

The Ambassador

But it is not at all clear that he wants to go; it seems more likely that he will have to be carried out in his Jermyn Street oxfords. The first round of elections in Zimbabwe took place only after long negotiations, brokered by South Africa. The opposition obtained a seemingly small, but vital, concession: the raw final vote count at each polling station would be taped up on a wall. Wherever they could get access—which was blocked in a number of the 9,000 polling stations—the M.D.C.’s party agents were able to copy or take cell-phone photos of these numbers, so they had a fair idea of how well they’d done. And although the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (essentially a lapdog of Mugabe’s) released parliamentary results in dribs and drabs in the days after the election—showing that the M.D.C. had effectively won a majority of seats—it ominously made no announcement for more than a month about the presidential results. According to the M.D.C., this provided time for Mugabe to alter the tabulation at polling stations where the M.D.C. hadn’t been able

to secure a backup record. The intervention was enough to throw the presidential contest into a runoff, set for the end of June.

In one sense the runoff was literal—the opposition had to run off. Morgan Tsvangirai and his deputy, Tendai Biti, got serious word of assassination plots against them and fled the country. Their departure, together with the absence of foreign correspondents—virtually all foreign journalists had been banned from working in Zimbabwe—gave Mugabe a free hand to unleash *The Fear*. During this period, the diplomatic corps in Harare played a key role in offering protection and sounding the alarm.

The most prominent among the diplomats was the American ambassador, James McGee, a career foreign-service officer with four previous African postings. I met McGee at six o'clock one morning in mid-May inside the courtyard of the heavily guarded American Embassy to join a trip he had organized to look into the widespread intimidation and violence. Because the fact of the trip had been leaked to the government, McGee arranged for a decoy convoy that would set off in the wrong direction. Playing the role of McGee in the decoy limo was a large black man from the embassy's local security staff. McGee, an African-American from Indiana, stands six feet four inches tall. The government's propaganda newspaper, *The Herald*, refers to him as an "Uncle Tom" and a "house Negro."

On the day of the trip, McGee wore a dark-blue golf shirt bearing the emblem of his old air-force unit. (He served for six years in Vietnam and was thrice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.) The convoy—the real convoy—was made up of 11 vehicles and included diplomats from the European Union, Britain, the Netherlands, Japan, and Tanzania, along with half a dozen of McGee's embassy staff, several Zimbabwean journalists, and a Zimbabwean pastor who served as a guide.

I rode with McGee in the second car. An hour north of Harare we came to Mvurwi—once a white commercial-farming district, now only sporadically cultivated. We stopped at a place called Rhimbick Farm. The white sawmill manager there peeped around the door, astonished to see this sudden convergence of diplomats. Interviews with torture victims had directed us to the Mvurwi area—it was one of the places where ZANU-P.F. had done its work. The sawmill manager pointed up the hill: "That's their base." It was an old farmhouse, and every night scores of ZANU-P.F. youths would congregate there.

On this day, in full sunlight, we found only four militia members. They naturally denied any wrongdoing. As the conversation with the diplomats continued, I went into the house. It was not hard to find the "black rooms," without windows, where political opponents had been thrown between beatings. I came across a backpack and from inside it took four school notepads, each labeled "Interrogation Book." The ZANU-P.F. militants had systematically recorded their beatings and interrogations, in Shona longhand. They also, helpfully, gave their own names.

We found and spoke with many torture victims in a nearby village. Initially the place had seemed deserted, but as word spread about what the convoy really was, the villagers started to come forward. They told us their stories and showed us their wounds. At the nearby Mvurwi hospital a nurse said that she had been overwhelmed with beating victims, but that most had discharged themselves prematurely, their wounds suppurating, afraid that they would be too easily found if they stayed in one place.

As we prepared to leave, a plainclothes police officer suddenly approached McGee. After examining McGee's credentials, he ordered him to report to the local police station. McGee brushed him off and told his convoy to proceed. More police officers then arrived, these armed with shotguns and rifles, and they shut the hospital gates. When they refused McGee's request to let us out, he walked over to open the gates himself. "Stop! Stop!" they demanded. "What are you gonna do?," McGee asked. "Shoot me? Go ahead." He pulled open the heavy metal gates and waved the convoy through.

McGee's final destination was the Howard Hospital, run by the Salvation Army. Here we found dozens of victims. They had been beaten on the soles of their feet and on their buttocks. Don't think of these as "normal" beatings. Think of deep, bone-deep, lacerations, of buttocks with no skin left on them, of being flayed alive. Think of swollen, broken feet, of people unable to stand, unable to sit, unable to lie on their backs because of the blinding pain.

Andrew Pocock, the British ambassador, was part of the fact-finding convoy. He lives in a 27-acre compound in the Harare suburb of Chisipite, not far from where my parents used to live. On my way there, I passed the Triton Gym, where diplomats and expats and fat cats pound on treadmills, hoping to become trim cats; today, right behind the gym is a ZANU-P.F. "re-education camp," where local residents who have been rounded up are forced to endure all-night political harangues. Zimbabwe can be a land of surreal juxtapositions. Ambassador Pocock walked me around the residence. Next to the swimming pool is a squash court that was recently converted into a crisis command center, with satellite phones and computers and its own generator. In the event of what the British foreign secretary, David Miliband, has called a "doomsday scenario," it would be from this squash court that Pocock would supervise an evacuation of British passport holders still in Zimbabwe. There are currently 10,000 such people. Thirty years ago, at independence, there were more than 200,000 whites, most of whom had the right to a British passport.

The Nemesis

Morgan Richard Dzingirai Tsvangirai, Zimbabwe's opposition leader, lives on a cul-de-sac in the Harare suburb of Strathaven, in an unremarkable house with pale-pink walls and a red tiled roof. Outside, two bodyguards in dark suits sat on a concrete culvert. More milled around inside. Tsvangirai is a man of 56. When I met him at his house he had only just returned—the previous day—after living outside the country for a month, since the first round of elections, keeping himself safe and trying to enlist African leaders in his cause. He looked exhausted, tilting back in his office chair in the converted garage at the back of the house. In many ways Mugabe's nemesis is also his antithesis. Physically Tsvangirai is a bear to Mugabe's bird, his face round, his smile quick. He appears to share none of Mugabe's aura of messianic entitlement.

I had gone to the airport the day before to witness Tsvangirai's return. A few hours later he held a press conference at a downtown hotel, then set out on a round of bedside visits to torture victims. Toward day's end he addressed the hundreds of displaced supporters who had crowded into his party headquarters, Harvest House, seeking sanctuary from the violence. It was a biblical scene: a vast, gloomy cavern of an office building, with tier upon tier of supporters carefully arranged by size, small children and nursing mothers seated in front. Many had been badly injured; some were in wheelchairs or on crutches. The white gleam of plaster casts and bandages was everywhere. The walls were lined with black plastic garbage bags holding whatever people had been able to flee with. The questions they asked were mostly practical ones. How do I find blankets, clothes, food, safety? One woman, shaking with grief, told Tsvangirai that when she had fled she became separated from her two-year-old child. "Please, please, help me find my baby," she sobbed.

"This has been an evolution for me," Tsvangirai said as we sat in his office. "I was politically conscious, yes—but never in my wildest dreams did I expect to be in this position." The hyper-educated Mugabe derides him as "an ignoramus" because, as the eldest of nine children of a poor bricklayer from the southeastern province of Masvingo, Tsvangirai dropped out of high school to support his family. He became a mine worker and moved up the ranks to lead the trade-union movement. By 1997 he had broken with Mugabe's ruling party over what he calls its "misrule, official corruption, and dictatorship." Soon after, he became the founding leader of the Movement for Democratic Change.

The M.D.C. has always been, as its name would suggest, more a movement than a party—a grab bag of opponents to Mugabe. It attracted support mostly from the urban working class, but also from the educated elite, white farmers,

churchmen, academics, industrialists, and ethnic Ndebeles (the southern tribe that had been the target of the Matabeleland massacres). Mugabe has done his best to portray the M.D.C. as the bastard child of revanchist whites and neo-colonial Western governments. But 99 percent of M.D.C. supporters are black. And white farmers threw in their lot with the M.D.C. only after Mugabe announced he would summarily confiscate their farms without compensation.

From the very start of his political career, Tsvangirai has had a hard time of it. In 1997, Mugabe's war veterans tried to bundle him out of a 10th-story window. Since then he's been arrested and imprisoned multiple times, and charged with treason on two separate occasions. He has survived two more assassination attempts. Several of his bodyguards have been murdered. Last year he was tortured while in police custody. The freelance cameraman who smuggled out footage of the badly injured Tsvangirai was himself abducted. His body was found a few days later, dumped at a farm outside Harare.

Despite such tactics, Zimbabweans remain resilient and defiant, as I discovered when I myself was arrested. I had wanted to attend a service at Christchurch, where my father and sister are buried, but arrived to find the congregation blocked at the entrance by a platoon of armed riot police. The congregation, about a hundred strong, almost all of them black, mostly middle-aged women in their Sunday finery, refused to disperse. They joined hands and, in harmony, sang the hymn "On Jordan's Bank." Then the police commander noticed me and suspected the presence of a journalist. "*Batai murungu,*" he ordered—"Get the white man."

The worshippers would have none of it. First the priest, then his deacon, and then the entire congregation came to my defense, refusing to give me up. So the police arrested the entire crowd, and because we were so many, they herded us on foot to the police station. During the march, one by one, members of the congregation came up close behind me and surreptitiously removed incriminating notebooks and cell phones from my bag, slipping them under their dresses. While I was being interrogated inside the police station, they refused to leave, loudly singing hymns, until finally, after a couple of hours, the police, perhaps shamed by this chorus, let me go.

Dreamland

Zimbabwe's runoff election was scheduled for June 27. Morgan Tsvangirai and the M.D.C. withdrew from the contest a few days beforehand, unable to compete in safety or with any guarantee of fairness. The party had effectively been prohibited from campaigning. Rallies were banned. Tsvangirai himself was arrested and detained five times. Mugabe's slogan in the runoff election was "The Final Battle for Total Control." With no competition he won handily.

By then the body count from Mugabe's pre-electoral spasm of violence stood at a hundred, with another 5,000 people missing, many of whom must be presumed dead. Bodies have been found collecting at the spillway of a Harare reservoir. Others have been found in the bush, sometimes mutilated, hands or feet cut off, eyes gouged out. In the months leading up to the runoff some 10,000 people had been tortured. Some 20,000 had had their homes burned down. Up to 200,000 people had been displaced.

Thabo Mbeki, the president of South Africa, has been Africa's and the West's designated negotiator with Mugabe, but in truth he has functioned mainly as his protector. He continues to insist that the solution in Zimbabwe is not a free, internationally observed election, but, rather, a coming together of the tortured and the torturers, a "government of national unity." (Zimbabweans look at the acronym formed by those words and say the result would be not a gnu but a wildebeest.) The African Union held its annual summit in Egypt immediately after Mugabe's inauguration, and shrank from any direct action. Mugabe himself was there, and in a closed-door session challenged African leaders to cast the first stone. I may have dirty hands, he said, but many of you have hands dirtier than mine. The African leader who has been the

most outspoken proponent of democracy in Zimbabwe, Zambia's president, Levy Mwanawasa, was felled by a stroke on the eve of the summit. Mugabe must have shed crocodile tears.

The world's major powers are unlikely to take significant steps against Mugabe. Zimbabwe lacks both of the two exports—oil and international terrorism—that attract direct intervention. The German government did finally press the banknote company Giesecke & Devrient to stop sending banknote paper to Mugabe, and G&D acceded to this request in July. Even as the West adds diminutive darts to its tiny quiver of sanctions, the greatest pressure is likely to come from within Zimbabwe, as its society continues to fall apart.

Or Mugabe's demise may come some other way. "How do you fight a dictatorship using democratic means?" Morgan Tsvangirai asked me. "In Africa, they usually use the gun. We have resisted that." The unspoken words were "so far." Tsvangirai had gone out of his way during the campaign to give assurances that any transition would be peaceful, offering amnesty to Mugabe's coterie and promising to make no move against their bank accounts. Times change. In Johannesburg, during the period of The Fear, a senior M.D.C. figure had offered a vision of the future. If cheated at the ballot box, he said, the M.D.C. could pull out of the political process in Zimbabwe entirely, set up a government-in-exile (possibly in Botswana), and appeal to the world for recognition as the legitimate government of Zimbabwe. And then elements within the M.D.C. would fight back, launching an armed guerrilla resistance. The senior official described all this to me as a "worst-case scenario"—but also as something for which plans were being laid.

Not long after this conversation, back in Zimbabwe, I attended the Harare International Festival of the Arts—another of those jarring juxtapositions. It came as Zimbabwe awaited the results of the first round of voting in the presidential election—and as Mugabe's militias were raining violence upon the land—but at the opening, men and women gathered in formalwear and sipped champagne.

The festival began with a musical revue called "Dreamland," by the South African director Brett Bailey. It had a single scheduled performance, in a downtown park, and given the nature of the show, it would not have been granted a second. No amount of metaphorical distancing could disguise its meaning. It started with a gigantic figure, the tyrant king, wearing a bloated, blood-red mask and a white military uniform, who made his way out to the end of a lonely ramp that jutted into the audience. "A long time ago, in a beautiful land far from here," the narrator began, "there lived a king who had bewitched his people."

Onstage the members of a choir, dressed in striped pajamas, were beaten down by baton-wielding hyenas in military fatigues. The singers vomited votes into ballot boxes, then fell into a trance. "The king swallowed the songs of all his people," the narrator continued. "And the only sound to be heard in that beautiful land was the drone of the king's voice."

The tyrant king remained on his lonely perch. The narrator went on: "But in that time there were songs that the king could not reach. These were the people's most precious songs: the songs they sang in their dreams.... In the dry valleys of Dreamland the silent choirs sang their songs: The battered men in forgotten jails. The broken women on foreign soils. Families resting in unmarked graves. The hungry, the lost, the landless. And their songs rose like thunderclouds over the land."

Then, suddenly, a choir of children began to sing "Over the Rainbow" in pure, piping voices. The prowling hyenas came up behind them and, one by one, pulled rough hoods over their heads and hauled them off, until at last there was only one little girl left onstage. She made it to the last line—"Why, oh why, can't I?"—but before she could finish, she, too, was hooded by the hyenas and dragged away.

All around me in the packed arena Zimbabweans wept for their country. And so did I.

Native Zimbabwean **Peter Godwin** is the author of *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*.