

# Political Tsunami: An End to Hegemony in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

ON the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2017, Zimbabwe woke up to a story which signalled an end to the leadership of long-time president Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Mugabe had been in power since 1980 when Zimbabwe attained independence. Viewed as enigmatic, Mugabe's political career is characterised by scheming, duplicity and worse he is considered a sheriff in a club of dictators [1]. In other circles, he is viewed as an icon and perhaps, one of Africa's best nationalists. By squaring up to the might of the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA) over the land issue, Mugabe is viewed as courageous. It is the issue of land that saw the landless majority of black Zimbabweans waging war against British settlers. Before land reform, most of the prime land in Zimbabwe had been in the hands of a minority 400 white farmers of European descent. Notably, Mugabe alongside the late Joshua Nkomo among others led the struggle against colonialism. In some quarters, Mugabe's leadership can be understood better through a Machiavellian lens. Although there are some positives associated with Machiavellianism, in simple terms particularly in the context of this paper, the concept is a byword for "scheming, plotting and debauchery". Quite notably, Mugabe's political career is sometimes associated with the shenanigans of Machiavellian politics. The general view is that Mugabe overstayed his welcome in power, having been at the helm of Zimbabwe's politics for an uninterrupted 37 years.

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He is one of Africa's longest serving presidents such as the late Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi. Having been in power for so long, Mugabe must inevitably have trammelled on some people's toes and hurt the ego of others. From the UK, the Queen came short of withdrawing Mugabe's knighthood (an honour bestowed by a British king or queen for one's achievements or service to his country). This paper is a historical choreography of the fall of Mugabe from political power. Undoubtedly in itself a proverbial "political tsunami", the departure of Mugabe from politics deserves a context, if not a proper one. A tsunami is a series of tidal or seismic sea waves caused by the displacement of a large volume of water which result in cataclysmic consequences. A recent example is the tsunami that ravaged parts of Asia around 2007. The quest for knowledge about Mugabe's downfall and the concomitant issues around the event lends traction to the paper. These and other issues are discussed in this paper through the discourse analysis, interviews and informal discussions. Informal discussions can simply be referred to as chats. Notably, chats are a powerful tool for the collection of information despite the clandestine nature through which they operate which appears unethical at face value. The qualitative instruments highlighted above were the analytic tools for the information used to complete this paper.

**Keywords:** Mugabe; Tsunami; Zimbabwe; Hegemony.

### **1. The Fall of Mugabe: An Introduction**

The paper provides an analysis to the events about the fall of Mugabe. Having survived the onslaught of the mighty of Britain and the United States of America (USA) for more than a decade, the sudden departure of Mugabe from power through a military-led manoeuvre popularly dubbed *Operation Restore Legacy* required analysis. The marriage of interests between the military and the public representing categories of Zimbabweans such as the church, political parties, war veterans, races, occupations and (even) tourists is historic. This forging of relations (between the military and the public) never before documented in the annals of the history of civil-military conduct of Zimbabwe puts a spectre to the idea of a coup. Notably, a coup thrives on the capture of the pillars of the state (the legislature, the judiciary and the executive). It also thrives in a state of emergence in which civil rights are shelved and Marshall Law introduced.

Surprisingly for what appeared a coup Mugabe according to some Zimbabwean military commanders had the luxury to observe the multitudes of demonstrators from all walks of life demanding his ouster from a helicopter provided by the army [2]. As chancellor of State Universities in the country, Mugabe was also even allowed to grace the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), graduation ceremony in which he conferred graduands with certificates and diplomas although he had long since been put under house arrest. The Zimbabwe National Army explained Mugabe's confinement in two ways. Firstly, to rid him of the criminal elements around him and secondly, to protect him from the generality of demonstrators who in the moment of madness might have meted street justice on the former president.

The philosophical meaning operation to Restore Legacy is something worthy of this paper's attention. Indeed, this issue is dwelt within the results section of this paper. If not for its historical poignancy and the clinical manner in which Operation Restore Legacy was executed, then the traction of this paper lies in the philosophical desire in which all thinking "men" and "women" are generally interested in the generation of knowledge about

the events of the world. The desire for knowledge, in the views of Clever Chirume, can be traced back to the biblical observation in Hosea 4, verse 6, in which God observes “my people perish because of lack knowledge” [3].

Quite notably, for a people who had grown accustomed to Mugabe’s leadership and believing and living in fear that any change to the country’s leadership might be cataclysmic and detrimental, insights about Mugabe’s sudden departure from power are significant in scholarship. Such insights may illuminate the nature of fear associated with Mugabe’s leadership. The insights could also illuminate the attendant psychological shackle of the former president’s leadership on Zimbabweans. The analysis also sheds light on how Mugabe’s hold on power was to be suddenly broken. Quite notably also, the acceptance by Britain, Germany, Russia, China and the USA among other countries of the events leading to the “resignation” of Mugabe is also critical for analysis. Apart from tapping into the rich tapestry of the events leading to the fall of Mugabe this paper is an appreciation of the transformation of Zimbabwe’s political landscape.

## **2. Making sense of ‘Mugabe’s Political Tsunami’ and his departure from power: A literature Review**

Whilst a plethora of views concerning Mugabe’s downfall have been offered across global media outlets, the analysis has been largely conjectural and thus lacking in quality. Therefore, gaps that need analysis still exist. Observations are that towards his last days in power, Mugabe had literally become “a shadow” of his former self, an “opposition leader” within his own Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party. Factionalism (one of his major survival instruments) had had a backlash on his hold on power.

Factionalism had corroded his power and whittled his hold on the levers of control in ZANU PF. Observers opine that for years Mugabe had used factionalism as an effective weapon to shield himself from direct criticism and to deflect attention of opponents from his party from focusing on his mistakes.[4]. Observers note that Mugabe had once told the late Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party, that in as much as he wanted to retire from politics he needed more time to resolve factionalism in his ZANU PF party. In a way, factionalism also became the reason why Mugabe would stay put at the helm of ZANU PF for a long time. The MDC is the main opposition political rivalry to ZANU PF in Zimbabwe.

## **3. A Philosophical Approach to Factionalism in ZANU PF**

Although the motives behind factionalism in politics and its nature vary, there is no doubt it is an integral aspect of politics [5]. Notably, the differences could be of strategy, thought and preferences. The 1950s witnessed the development of a national consciousness among Africans in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), and the concomitant rise of nationalist political parties committed to the end of colonial rule.

The question of ‘how to prosecute the war against the settlerism has been central to the differences in strategy among the nationalist. While some within the liberation movements preferred the militant approach to the uprooting of colonialism others had preferred the non-violent methods [6]

Forced into still-birth largely through the counter insurgency operations of the Rhodesian security apparatus the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC) was to be later integrated with the City Youth League by Joshua Nkomo in 1957 and the new party the National Democratic Party ((NDP) emerged [7]. Ultimately, the NDP was transformed into the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) [6].

The ZANU's military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) members, received training and fighting equipment mainly from China and ZAPU's military wing, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), from Russia The source and nature of training for ZANLA and ZIPRA is critical at understanding some of the subtle differences between the two military wings.

A breakaway party, the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), was later to emerge from ZANU in 1973 [8]. FROLIZI is a result of intense infighting within ZANU. The death of Herbert Chitepo on 18 March 1975 led to greater turbulences in ZANU as the party had lost a unifying leader. Ndabaningi Sithole, who assumed the leadership of ZANU at the death of Chitepo, was soon to be challenged by colleagues on the claim that he was a "hero of bargain". The fissures in ZANU led to the Mgagao Declaration in which nationalists and guerrillas pronounced an aggregate dissatisfaction with Sithole subsequently leading to an enormous split of ZANU. Two One faction was led by Sithole, and the other by Mugabe. Apparently, Mugabe had received the support of a larger part of nationalists and guerrillas. Sithole disavowed a violent struggle whilst others such as Mugabe and Simon Muzenda were in favour of such a revolution.

These factional fights in ZANU were to be carried over into the post-colonial era. Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980. By the 90s factional fights in ZANU PF were focused mainly on succeeding. These were exacerbated by the backlash of the Structural Adjustment Programs during the same period, which were imposed on Africa by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank ostensibly for the development of Africa. In 1997, Zimbabwe experienced a 'stay away' and in January 1998 there were food riots which literally brought the country to a grinding halt. Solomon Mujuru, otherwise known as Rex Nhongo, one of Mugabe's commanders in independent Zimbabwe and a factional leader turned out to be a thorn in the flesh for Mugabe as he continued to devise fresh narratives of ousting his leader from power and replace him with the former Vice President and his wife Joice Mujuru [9].

In 1999 at a ZANU PF Congress, Solomon Mujuru hatched a plan to contest the continued stay of Mugabe in power. This was thwarted by Mugabe with the help of a rival faction led by Emmerson Mnangagwa. In 2008 elections, Mugabe emerged victorious despite the "Bhoramusango strategy" (literally translated as shooting the ball astray" strategy) in which ZANU PF supporters were instructed to vote for the other ZANU PF candidates on all other levels of the elections (councillors, members of the house of assembly) except Mugabe in the presidential plebiscite. As a result, while ZANU PF had the popular vote its presidential candidate failed to garner 51 percent majority. This resulted in Tsvangirai narrowly leading Mugabe in the election with a 47 percent forcing the nation into a re-run of the presidential election. In brief, factionalism is a tool which Mugabe had employed effectively to survive yet it provided the Damascus moment for him.

#### **4. Negotiating Gatekeeping Power and the Research Practice: Methodologies and Methods of Researching**

## **the fall of Mugabe**

This is a historical study. The study chronicles issues about the fall of Mugabe from power. Essentially, the historical method comprises techniques and guidelines researchers may use to collect information or data to complete a historical paper. The techniques and guidelines of the historical method (especially those employed for the purpose of this article such as secondary data, interviews and observation) are not without criticism. The weaknesses of these methods are numerous to be captured in a paper of a limited scope such as the current one. The study tapes information about the events on the fall of Mugabe from secondary sources (mainly newspapers) and primary sources of information such as the interview method and observation. The population interest for the study comprised selected newspapers, media analysts, critics and government officials. Whilst media critics involve academics and intellectuals who specialise in the analysis of the mass media, media analysts deal with wide areas of media analysis, including policy, infrastructure, technology, investment, regulation and law [10]. Media critics are identified as those who evaluate the contents and programmes of the media. Issues of a historical event have been the domain of bureaucrats in government and perhaps a few in the society with the kind of ‘mental software’ capable of the interpretation of the unfolding events in society. A judgemental purposive sampling plan was used to collect information to complete the paper. This meant that only critical sources of information with the potential to yield verifiable insights on the fall of Mugabe were consulted [11]. At least 7 interviews were conducted to complete the paper. Leedy and Ormrod state that a reasonable and meaningful qualitative study can involve 5 to 25 interviewees. Reasonably meaningful patterns of a phenomenon can thus be based on at least five interviews as outlined in the guideline above [12]). The fall of Mugabe is difficult to research for various reasons. First and foremost, Mugabe had to be forced into retirement through an operation whose ‘character and nature’ as observed by some interviewees bodes well for secrecy. Secondly, the interviewees also pointed to the sensitive nature of the circumstances through which Mugabe had to leave office as something that made some sources of information reluctant to participate in the study. Thirdly, also some observers noted that the story about the fall Mugabe is relatively ‘fresh’, carrying all sorts of ‘emotions. It will take time before tempers and emotions can settle before real analysis about the fall of Mugabe can occur.

## **5. Findings**

Whilst the coverage of Zimbabwe’s political tsunami relating to the departure of Mugabe from power covered different aspects about the event, some observers believe the real issues about the event are yet to be developed. Notably, issues relating to the involvement of powerful nations such as Britain, USA, Russia, Germany in the event, Mugabe’s own mistakes during the tenure of his leadership, the role of Zimbabwe’s neighbouring states in the Southern Development Community (SADC) were, in our view, some of the silent and salient issues about Mugabe’s demise.

As observed by an interviewee:

Although Mugabe had mastered the art of playing his foes one against the other, his prowess in doing so had become whittled by the vicious nature of factionalism within ZANU PF in which family members such as

Grace, his wife, were now players. Advanced age for Mugabe also compromised his capacity for brinkmanship in managing factionalism in his ZANU PF party. Advanced age left Mugabe vulnerable to the nefarious intentions of those who sought to exploit him for their personal desires. Mugabe's political style simply could not blend with the strategies of the upstarts and novices who formed his Generation 40 faction allegedly led by his wife Grace. In terms of the style of Mugabe's leadership strategy belonged to those employed by the opposing group led by the belligerent Emerson Mnangagwa. After all, Mugabe and Mnangagwa had been long time political associates from the 60s during Zimbabwe's war of liberation [13].

In general, it is alleged that the media also failed to confirm the veracity of the allegation that significant members of the G40 such as Grace Mugabe and Jonathan Moyo were moles for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) whose major purpose, as observed by interviewees, were to decompose ZANU PF and destroy it from within and thus completely erasing the legacy of Mugabe and his ZANU PF. In a dated submission by John Moore Cornwell, a mole is understood as a spy from within. A mole sells the secrets of their party to enemies for personal ulterior motives such as the destruction of the party. A mole thus operates under the cover of loyalty. It is further alleged that the media failed to capture the issue that the survival of Grace and Moyo in ZANU PF was guaranteed only through the presence of Mugabe in the party. He was the centre of gravity for their strategy. The media also played down the issue that Grace and Moyo had brought an ethos alien to the culture of ZANU PF typical of the events that led to the Mgagao Declaration in October 1975 in which observers also note that the media also failed to draw parallels to the events of Mgagao and Operation Restore Legacy which culminated in the resignation of Mugabe and the elevation of Mnangagwa to be the head of the state of Zimbabwe [14].

The involvement of the international community and even of SADC countries is pertinent in understanding the fall of Mugabe. Within SADC, if not Africa, Mugabe had become an impediment to development. His politics of confrontation and brazen strategy no longer boded well for the region. Mugabe had become the odd leader among young leaders in the region as most of his peers such as Nyerere of Tanzania, Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia had long since left politics. As for the Western world, the aspiration to tap into the rich minerals of Zimbabwe was reduced to a burning desire as these countries feared being associated with Mugabe's leadership. Essentially the international community involvement is motivated by the need for business as Zimbabwe is one of Africa's mineral-rich countries. Among those jostling to succeed Mugabe in the intensifying factionalism war within ZANU PF the British had endorsed Mnangagwa as potentially capable of the muscle to lead Zimbabwe. An interviewee observed that the British view Mnangagwa as a credible and solid candidate who would guarantee stability and security in Zimbabwe. Remember the British consider Zimbabwe as their second home from Britain.

The visit of Chiwenga to China shortly before Operation Restore Legacy and also at the heels of the dismissal of Mnangagwa is another interesting issue that observers view as underplayed by the media. An interviewee highlights that the events of 1966 in China, in which the Gang of Four almost usurped power through cunning duplicity, which is relatively similar to attempts by four members of the G40, namely Grace Mugabe, Patrick Zhuwau, Jonathan Moyo, and Saviour Kasukuwere provided Team Lacoste (the faction led by Mnangagwa)

with notes on how to deal with G40. Just as the Gang of Four in China, G40 also employed crafty manoeuvres to wrestle power from rivalries in ZANU PF. Observers believe also that Chiwenga went to China to learn how the Chinese had dealt with the Gang of four. Also observed is that having entered into multi-billion deals during Mugabe's tenure, the Chinese had endorsed Mnangagwa to ensure continuity so that their investments would be secured. In endorsing Mnangagwa the Chinese were looking for a relatively young leader, one who could also ensure continuity in terms of the interview, 2018 good relations between the two countries. Furthermore, Mnangagwa had received military training from China.

Another observer noted that factionalism, coupled with Mugabe's advanced age exposed him as vulnerable. The former president's bad temper and subsequent firing of his second in command at the Bulawayo youth interface rally at which his wife was booed during a speech, demonstrated the loss of his lustre as a skilful tactician. Mugabe became emotional and completely lost balance, playing into the hands of Mnangagwa whom he fired the next morning. Unbeknown to Mugabe, this became the proverbial Sarejevo incident which galvanised sympathy for Mnangagwa. Using the tactics of the Blue Ocean Strategy, Mnangagwa, in the art of a general, promised to come back from exile in exactly two weeks to take the levers of power not (from Mugabe his long-time leader) but from criminals around him. Quite notably, he would wrestle power from Grace who had effected what others described as 'a bedroom coup' and had already been anointed the queen of Zimbabwe. It is worthy of note that the Sarajevo incident sparked the First World War[D].

The wars of attrition pitting Team Lacoste and Generation 40 had burrowed deep into Mugabe's capacity for brinkmanship in party politics. The neutralisation of Mugabe's brinkmanship could partly be a result of the role of his wife. Grace lacked the skill, tact and even knowledge about politics. Interviews suggest her husband had warned her of engaging Mnangagwa as he knew him as a great strategist (interview with B; C). In another interview it is alleged that team G40 railed against Team Lacoste at the encouragement of Professor Jonathan Moyo who had assured them that Mnangawa was an overrated lizard. This resulted in team G40 underestimating their opponents against Sun Tzu's advice of never under estimating one's opponent.

The seeming usurpation of power by Grace worsened the situation for Mugabe who was now viewed as incapacitated. This was the basis through which people could gauge how weakened and compromised Mugabe had become. Mugabe had always ensured that he survived his political rivalries in his ZANU PF through stocking factionalism [16].

The operation by the military should be interpreted as a clear statement that never again will Zimbabwe move out of the culture of the liberation struggle. Another issue which the media failed to observe was the impact of the dirty politics of factionalism on the economy. As political attention was focused on fighting each other, the economy suffered immensely. Politicians and other senior officials of government started looting. It is alleged the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe became Grace's personal bank. Grace withdrew hard currency, gold and other precious minerals to buy properties across the world whilst the ordinary suffered. Apart from command agriculture ZANU PF politics had been poisoned for personal aggrandisement. Old people behaved like kids. Nobody cared about the masses.

Another interviewee pointed to the need for a common understanding of the legacy the ZDF sought to restore. The interviewee said the legacy was about 'the story of the liberation struggle'. It was about the narrative of how thousands left the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, for other countries to train as guerrillas, came back into the country and liberated it from colonial rule. It is about a story of the origins of Zimbabwe. Restore legacy is a foundational story which, as time goes on, will become a legend and, later on, a creation myth about the birth of Zimbabwe.

To talk about the birth of Zimbabwe is also to talk about the strength of a shared vision which inspired many to action; it is to talk about a shared set of objectives, about a strong sense of solidarity and commitment, it is about the indomitable willpower of blacks over a white fortress of a country called Rhodesia. These principles-cum-values and ideals are part of a legacy bequeathed to Zimbabweans by those who lost their lives during the country's liberation war. The Zimbabwe born in 1980 is defined by war. It is at that point at which Mugabe started downplaying the role played by others during the liberation struggle that he invites the wrath of war veterans. Mugabe had destabilised the historical consensus around the narrative of the struggle. It is also when he begins to create a political space for his garrulous and clueless wife as to what the liberation struggle was all about that he runs against the grain of the liberation narrative [17].

The interviewer said, put mildly, the less than perfect performance of the then first lady during the so-called interface rallies left everyone in no doubt that Mugabe was heading for serious trouble.

Another observation is that whilst it appears at face value as if Mugabe triggered his demise by firing Mnangagwa his deputy, Mnangagwa anticipated, expected and manoeuvred Mugabe in to firing him. Having a comprehensive psychological profile of Grace, Mnangagwa's team goaded Grace into overdrive through innocuous yet irritating little rumours attributed to Mnangagwa- the type of rumours that drove Grace to the edge and ultimately self-destruction. Mnangagwa's team needed Mugabe to cross a certain line ... firing a long-time confidant and the highest ranking deputy was that line [G].

## **6. Conclusion**

It is within the context that advanced age on his party, the less than perfect performance of the then first lady Grace Mugabe in public, factionalism an unhappy international community that the military and the masses were agitated to intervene in the events that saw Mugabe removed from power. The mistakes that Mugabe's garrulous wife Grace committed estranged his husband from the liberation ethos which had always been Mugabe's trademark.

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