

Here's a story about a man. He was born in a country called Rhodesia. His father was the caretaker of an outdoor centre run by an international organisation that was begun in the UK. His mother was a maid in the homes of the white instructors who were employed there. His family had lived in Rhodesia since before it had that name, and have farmed the same small piece of land as far back as anyone can now remember.

Like his President, he went to a missionary school, where he was taught history, maths and how to read and write in English (but not his own language of Shona), as well as about Jesus.

He grew up with racism and colonial rule, and for a long time never knew there was any other way. He was too young to fight in the war, but old enough to realise the significance of independence for the new Zimbabwe.

When he left school in this new country was able to train for a job previously restricted to whites. He became an outdoor instructor in the centre that he had grown up in, working alongside white men. He was paid the same wage, had a home as they did and eventually married and began raising his family there.

Together they ran the first mixed race courses, bringing together men and women who had been on opposite sides in a bitter war, helping them learn to understand each other, hoping to bring people of the same country together. It was so successful that he was one of a group of staff who travelled to Soweto to help set up a similar programme for their neighbours.

When he had time off, the man travelled to his home village, helping to care for his extended family in the traditional way, including his now elderly parents.

None of the seized farms, which came with so much blood on them, have come his way. Those farms were never for the ordinary blacks, but went to the elite

friends of the government and the army. Not farmers, but rich city workers looking for holiday and weekend homes.

Instead, he continues to live and work in the outdoor centre. He has taken an orphaned nephew into his family. He has not had any pay since December, but he has a home and his family get fed most days. Bizarrely the courses continue to run, and there is always the hope that one day the pay will start to come again. They are relatively safe where they are, and life goes on in a funny way. People help each other out and somehow they get by.

Unlike many of his white friends, he never salted money away in accounts abroad. He has no relatives in other countries that can sponsor his emigration. He doesn't even have a passport any more. It was taken off him after he made too many trips to see his brother in Zambia. Even if he could leave, it would mean abandoning parents, cousins and extended family that depend on him for their lives.

He travels to one of the bigger towns every month, where friends that have left transfer American dollars to him (the only currency that can buy much needed cooking oil, soap and maize). The bus company that he travels with will not sell him a return ticket, as inflation is so volatile, that they cannot be sure what the price will be by the end of the day.

He risks his life every time he travels, or makes a call to his friends abroad.

When he sets out on the journey his family do not know if he will return. But he can do nothing else.

On Sunday I watched Mugabe being sworn in as President of Zimbabwe. He stood in front of a row of judges who looked as if they had come straight from the High Court in London. As I listened to him swear to a Christian god, I wondered about the confused history of what is now this small African country.

I wondered too about the mindset of Mugabe; abandoned by his father and brought up with books and learning instead of love and friendship. Who spent ten years in jail while fighting for the freedom of his country. Who brought in a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe but who resented having to live in the shadow of the charismatic Nelson Mandela.

I don't know what happened to this beautiful country and what is going to happen to the gentle people who belong there. I am afraid it will be many generations before the country achieves the harmony and prosperity that was in its grasp for such a short time. Britain will not help the people of Zimbabwe, and as much as I want to help the man in this story, I know that by doing so I am helping to prop up a dictator and a failing country. I wonder how it all went so wrong

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