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Robert Mugabe's rhetoric of justice, and how it was used to take farmland.

How the former president Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe justified his land reform in the period between the 1990s-2000s

Abstract

As a result of Zimbabwe's colonial past much of the arable land was owned by a small white minority. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the Zimbabwean parliament passed several laws aimed at reforming land distribution in the country. This policy evolved from voluntary sales by white owners, to forced acquisition by the government. The latter policy resulted in a few violent incidents such as one where a group of veterans from the Bush War seized a farm and forced the people living on it to flee. Mugabe's regime did not compensate them for the loss. The land that was taken, however, was never redistributed amongst the people, instead it was given to Mugabe's friends, family, and other allies. With the incidents increasing in number it did not take long for the international community, predominantly those who are considered to be part of the Global North, to denounce this policy, with then prime-minister Tony Blair's cabinet implementing sanctions in order to condemn the actions undertaken by the Zimbabwean government. Mugabe would seek to overturn these sanctions, and would try to defend his policy time and again in UN assemblies. Though most research regarding Zimbabwe under Mugabe looks into the consequences of this land reform and the many failures of the state, they all take a somewhat deterministic approach. Mugabe's given reasons are rarely if ever explored in a manner that gives proper credence to the very real complaints he levied at the international community. This paper seeks to understand, and analyse the justifications given by Mugabe in order to help create a grander understanding of the African point of view, and add an additional layer to the discussion of African history that does not solely rely on a eurocentric point of view. This is done through an exploration of the colonial past of Zimbabwe, Mugabe's verbal sparring with the United Kingdom during the early twenty-first century, and the socialist themes present in his rhetoric. The combination of these factors will lead to a deeper understanding of Mugabe's justification and by extension a deeper understanding of the subaltern perspective.

KEYWORDS: Africa, Zimbabwe, International Relations, Robert Mugabe, Land Reform

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Introduction

“It could never be a correct justification that because whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the blacks must oppress them today because they have power.”¹ The famous words uttered by former president Robert Mugabe promised a peaceful and equal future for the young nation of Zimbabwe. They were words he kept referring to even when over a 100.000 people fled his country. Words that kept being alluded to even when thousands more were stripped of their land. Words that turned out to not be as true as he claimed.

As a result of the country’s colonial past much of the arable land was owned by a small white minority, something that Mugabe’s regime sought to rectify. It made no sense for a small minority to control most of the land. In the late 1990s and early 2000s the Zimbabwean parliament passed several laws aimed at reforming land distribution in the country, which evolved from voluntary sales by white owners, to forced acquisition by the government. The latter policy resulted in a few violent incidents such as one where a group of veterans from the Bush War seized a farm and forced the people living on it to flee. Mugabe’s regime did not compensate them for the loss. The land that was taken, however, was never

¹ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, “Speech on the day of Zimbabwe’s independence” Apr. 17, 1980. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. p. 17.

redistributed amongst the people, instead it was given to Mugabe's friends, family, and other allies. With the incidents increasing in number it did not take long for the international community, predominantly those who are considered to be part of the Global North, to denounce this policy. With then prime-minister Tony Blair's cabinet implementing sanctions in order to condemn the actions undertaken by the Zimbabwean government. Mugabe would seek to overturn these sanctions, and would try to defend his policy time and again in UN assemblies. How could he defend this however? This research seeks to answer that exact question. Or more specifically how did Robert Mugabe justify his land reform policy in the period between 1990 and 2010?

This question will be answered by focusing on the various aspects that made up the rhetoric present in his speeches. This will be done according to a three chapter structure. The first chapter will seek to answer the question: How did he use the legacy of colonialism to justify land reform? This is arguably the most central part of his rhetoric as it lays at the centre of how he seeks to appeal to his direct African neighbours, while simultaneously disparaging the western states that imposed sanctions on his nation. The second chapter will seek to answer the question: How did he use the concept of sovereignty to justify land reform? The second prong of his rhetoric relies on the right of his government and state to be in control of their own internal affairs. While it is continuously linked to the previous prong it does stand on its own. The last chapter will seek to answer the question: How did he use the ideals of Socialism to justify land reform? This part of his rhetoric is less explicit. While he never directly mentions it, the influence of Marxist thought is present throughout most of his speeches

Historiography

How has Mugabe's rhetoric manifested change in public opinion is something that has been a part of the debate regarding Zimbabwe's governance, but has not been answered in this manner by academics. It does fit into the wider debates regarding post-colonial Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole, however. It is a question that fits into the wider debate regarding the consequences of the rapid wave of independence that engulfed the continent. To answer this question however, the underlying trends and opinions of academics must be understood. Because of the limitations of this paper, only around ten works will be discussed, all of which were published in the twentieth century. Some of these works originate from fields other than that of history. The fields of law, economics, and Africa studies for example have valuable

insights that can prove themselves to be vital to answering the aforementioned research premise. Furthermore, this multidisciplinary approach removes researcher bias by not only focussing on subjects that historians find interesting, but rather on a more holistic field of view.

Much of the debate on Zimbabwe and its sovereignty revolves around one of two axes: the country's economic struggles, and the way in which its democracy functions. More often than not it is portrayed as failing in both of those aspects. The primary focus however on which factors play the most important role in the struggles the country faces depends on which scholar is approaching the subject. Most if not all of the scholars that will be discussed however do agree that there are multiple major problems which the country has to face. While there is very little on the rhetoric of Mugabe himself there is a lot describing the failures of his regime, seeking to explain it from different angles. The most prominent change in trends that can be linked to the rhetoric of Mugabe is the change in denunciation of scholars of his regime. Over time the scholarship regarding his regime, which is of course partially impacted directly by the way he presented his regime and country, changed. While at first the lack of democratisation was deemed the primary evil of his regime, as the times changed and his rhetoric continuously highlighted the hypocrisy of western standards, there seems to also be a refocusing of the lens. The articles focused more on direct harm done to humankind, rather than a focus on western ideals in the form of democracy. This historiography will seek to explore the currents of research through a chronological lens in an attempt to explore how these currents have changed over the last few decades.

The first trend that typified the field of Zimbabwean studies was a research approach that relied on western ideas of what made a state successful. Scholars were almost utterly convinced that the failure rested solely on the corrupt officials with Mugabe being an exemplar of this thought.

In their work “Sovereignty, Democracy & Zimbabwe's Tragedy” Bush & Szeftel approach Zimbabwe and its struggles from a top-down perspective. It delves into the goals of the independence movements, how they were not achieved, and why this is the case.² Most importantly for the purposes of this paper and the overall discourse regarding the struggles of Zimbabwe, there is a focus on two major factors that have influenced the course of the

² Ray Bush and Morris Szeftel, “Sovereignty, Democracy & Zimbabwe’s Tragedy,” *Review of African Political Economy* 29, no. 91 (2002): 5–6.

nation's history. Namely: international influence, and local corruption.³ They stated that a departure from the ideals of democracy is a vital component to the struggles of the country now. It is made clear by looking at how local bourgeois and the banks and their corrupt practices bankrupted the nation that their anti-democratic actions are to blame for the struggles. This however, was according to Bush and Szeftel partially possible because of foreign influence in the country, which allowed these people and institutions to stay in place.⁴ They finish off by stating that sovereignty is an issue that is irrelevant if it is divorced from the principles of democracy. For, according to them it merely disguises dictatorial regimes and allows them to prosper with less opposition.⁵ Their insights into what lays at the heart of the issues for Zimbabwe particularly their concerns regarding democracy seem to be echoed further in other works in this same field of study.

Specifically Bush and Szeftel's analysis regarding democracy seemed to resonate. In the piece "In Defence of National Sovereignty? Urban Governance and Democracy in Zimbabwe" by Amin Kamete similar concerns are brought to bear. It specifically tackles the democratisation of the urban centres of Zimbabwe and the underlying reasoning behind it.⁶ It expands on the same ideas of earlier papers by focussing on a smaller aspect of the overall process. Rather than take a holistic approach like Bush and Szeftel, this paper puts more emphasis on the urban councils. The work has a more predominant focus on local affairs rather than national ones, and is an outlier in the overall debate because of it. The central premise, however, is almost identical. The government of Zimbabwe is a power hungry institution which is one of the root causes for the struggles of the nation as a whole.⁷ One of the major flaws being that it does not seek to be democratic for the sake of it, but rather because it guaranteed this same government a measure of power not held by them before the measure was taken.⁸ It is this lack of "proper" democratisation that is the issue that causes the other ills. This way of understanding the problems Zimbabwe faces, with the lack of democracy at the forefront, seem to be the main sticking point for scholars in the early twenty-first century. This is a trend that continues for the rest of the zeroes, though it does start altering slowly but surely.

³ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Amin Kamete, "In Defence of National Sovereignty? Urban Governance and Democracy in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21, no. 2 (July 1, 2003): 193-194.

⁷ Ibid., 210-211.

⁸ Ibid., 201.

In the second half of the first decade of this century the focus seems to shift ever so slightly. While democracy and the lack thereof are still some of the main concerns, the academic work started highlighting the atrocities of the regime more and more. There was a distinctive shift away from more overtly liberalist sentiment. The field started focusing less, if only slightly at first, on the ideological issues of dictatorial states, and more on the practical dangers of these states. In doing so there was a move away from fully blaming the lack of democratisation, and much rather it became a focus on bad faith individuals. There did however seem to be more of a moral component taking the human factor into account, which will be elaborated upon in the following paragraph. It is imperative to keep in mind that this change from ideological towards more moral perceptions seem to coincide with Mugabe's speeches and land reform policy. Though whether there is a causal link or not is difficult to ascertain, it can be concluded that this was a time period in which the morality of the Zimbabwean issue became more prevalent, as highlighted by the next few works.

The next few articles showcase this realignment found in newer works, which start to focus more and more on the issues of human rights, and how they are violated in Zimbabwe under Mugabe's regime. The article "The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left", for example, by Brian Raftopoulos still has the issue of democracy as a central linchpin to the subject. It does however revolt against the overly economic tone some of the preceding works have taken.⁹ Rather he wants to focus more on the issues of human rights violations happening in the country.¹⁰ While there is still a lot of the ideological thinking of previous years present, there is a departure from the norm by zooming in on the human aspect of it all. The works that came before do indeed seem to focus more on the grand political ideas, leaving human suffering outside of the debate merely stating that it is part of the regime's strategy or ignoring the issue altogether. An approach that seemed to become less and less popular starting in the period 2006-2010.

The paper "In the name of sovereignty: Displacement and state making in post-independence Zimbabwe" by Amanda Hammar does highlight, however, that this shift in focus was by no means universal in academia. Her work highlights the human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, but it does this in a rather top-down matter of fact manner. Instead of the impassioned plea for a better future that was present in Raftopoulos's work.¹¹ She highlights

⁹ Brian Raftopoulos, "The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, no. 2 (June 1, 2006): 203–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070600655988>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. conclusion.

how ZANU-PF policy uses the ideological buzzwords and reasoning that was discussed in older works in order to justify its brutal repression of certain peoples within the state.¹² More specifically, the work focuses on how sovereignty, and the acquisition of it, is used as an motivation for harmful policies. While still providing a seemingly more neutral and detached perspective than Raftopoulos, she still puts human suffering at the centre of her work rather than reducing it to a side note which early works tended to do. This perspective however does not become the dominant one when it comes to discussing Zimbabwe. Instead it rises to be another perspective than can be used and is equally valuable. Rather than clashing and supplanting the older methods, it becomes an alternative way of studying. A new option, rather than the new option. This can perhaps be linked to a growing sense of Western guilt regarding the colonial past, though this is a difficult claim to fully explore in the scope of this research. Though it is interesting that the continuous rhetoric denouncing colonialism seems to have hit a note in the researchers of this period. Quite simply there seems to have been a switch in scholarship that no longer saw the western values imposed upon Africa as the primary measure by which a non-western country's success ought to be measured.

The academics of the 2010s have combined these two methods of working into a more holistic and complete representation of reality. This way of looking at the issue combines the previous two methods of exploring Zimbabwe, by focussing both on political concerns and highlighting the very human aspect of the issues by putting this at the centre of the more impassive academic one. Signifying a change in approach from the zeroes into the twenty-tens. The piece “The International Law Principle of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources as an Instrument for Development: The Case of Zimbabwean Diamonds” by Chekera and Nmehielle highlights the need for new policy by highlighting how the dictatorial policy of access to the country’s resources prevents development for the people of the country.¹³ Simply said they show how the state of Zimbabwe functions as a kleptocracy under the rule of then president Robert Mugabe, highlighting how the resources native to Zimbabwean soil should be able to help develop the country, but these resources are squandered by the local elite for selfish gain.¹⁴ Chekera and Nmehielle examine the issues

¹² Amanda Hammar, “In the Name of Sovereignty: Displacement and State Making in Post-Independence Zimbabwe,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 417–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000802481999>.

¹³ Yolanda T. Chekera and Vincent O. Nmehielle, “The International Law Principle of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources as an Instrument for Development: The Case of Zimbabwean Diamonds,” *African Journal of Legal Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 69–101, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17087384-12342021>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

that this causes from a slightly different angle, however. According to the article the problem is a legal issue in addition to being an humanitarian and political one.

The piece “Narratives of the Zimbabwe Crisis, National Sovereignty, and Human and Media Rights Violations” by Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri continues on this trend of invoking human rights as a primary concern when discussing Zimbabwe. It does however harken back to older works on the subject. The focus shifts from the responsibility and accountability of local actors, never losing track of them however, and shifts towards a more global perspective. Focusing on how the inability of foreign powers to help resolve the humanitarian crisis is actively making things worse in the country.¹⁵ According to him it is a combination of local actors such as the ZANU-PF and the neighbouring countries such as South Africa which allows for the human rights abuses in the country to continuously be propagated.¹⁶ This work, therefore, seems more in line with the older works from the zeroes of the twenty-first century. The renewed focus on grander issues such as the state of democracy and the duty to protect from foreign powers is indeed something more common in older literature. This does not mean, however, that the work is unaffected by the changing trends, as the human rights violations and the need for them to be resolved remains at the front and centre, which was a rarity for the older works. Once more showcasing that the overall perception seems to have changed over time to once more put the more objectively harmful aspects of his regime front and centre.

The aforementioned works all broadly fall into the following rhetoric regarding Zimbabwe, a telling of events which reduces the failure of the Zimbabwean state to that of a corrupt government, actively destroying their nation, by failing to adhere to northern standards of rule. A somewhat simplified summary, yet one that all seem to agree on for the most part, they are not the only perspectives of the Zimbabwean issue. This interpretation was however the most common and till this day seems to be the predominant way of viewing things, there are exceptions to this rule.

Another piece of work adhering to a similar method and scope is “Frantz Fanon and the Problematic of Decolonization: perspectives on Zimbabwe” by Munyaradzi Hwami. This piece focuses on the failure of the Zimbabwean state to reach a level of development expected of a nation with that amount of inherent mineral wealth. It recontextualizes the

¹⁵ Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri, “Narratives of the Zimbabwe Crisis, National Sovereignty, and Human and Media Rights Violations,” in *National Democratic Reforms in Africa: Changes and Challenges*, ed. Said Adejumobi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 165–166, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137518828_6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

debate by highlighting the issues introduced by capitalism and decolonisation, and showing how the combination of these factors led to the lack of development observed by scholars.¹⁷ It combines the earlier focus on ideology and the new focus on the people themselves. As a distinctly Marxist interpretation of events, it does stand out from the other works as it highlights the conflict between classes rather than that between the government and the people.¹⁸ Yet it can still be considered to be a part of the same trend as the aforementioned works, simply with a slightly different perspective based on ideological convictions. It also introduces the concepts of decolonisation, not to the field but rather this overview of the field. A concept that is inherently linked with that of sovereignty when it comes to the Zimbabwean context. This will be discussed and elaborated on further on in the paper, however.

This Marxist critical approach is certainly not the only one. For there are also more postcolonial papers, though they tend to be rare compared to the first group of scholars discussed, who would challenge some of the basic underlying principles that were assumed by older pieces. There are a number of post-colonial approaches that seek to grant an alternate point of view.

In the work “Sovereignty in International Politics: An Assessment of Zimbabwe’s Operation Murambatsvina, May 2005” by Chidochashe Nyere for example, the central thesis revolves around the folly of the premise that sovereignty is a sacrosanct right for all states.¹⁹ Rather he refocuses the lens and highlights how sovereignty can be used as an excuse or justification for potentially harmful policy.²⁰ This fits with the postcolonial approach that will be elaborated upon in the sub-chapter regarding the theoretical basis of this paper. Namely it challenges western ideas and the idea that they are to be applied universally without clear consideration of the cultural, and temporal context. Nyere’s research hits on a similar aspect of the entire phenomenon as this paper, namely the way rhetoric is used by Mugabe to justify his actions. One of those reforms being the infamous Operation Murambatsvina in which thousands were displaced. The argument he makes is that the government was able to hide from international scrutiny behind the concept of sovereignty. It has the right to do what it sees fit in its own territory, which if the concept of sovereignty is taken to its logical

¹⁷ Munyaradzi Hwami, “Frantz Fanon and the Problematic of Decolonization: Perspectives on Zimbabwe,” *African Identities* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 19–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2015.1100107>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Chidochashe Nyere, “Sovereignty in International Politics : An Assessment of Zimbabwe’s Operation Murambatsvina, May 2005” (Dissertation, South Africa, University of South Africa, 2014). 154-155.

²⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

conclusion, is something that cannot be argued with. The conclusion therefore made by Nyere is that sovereignty cannot be taken as sacrosanct and has to be altered according to the times, in addition to being trumped by certain international codes and laws.²¹ This argument is not entirely unique nor new, however. The aforementioned piece by Bush and Szeftel makes the same argument though in different words. Showing a throughline of continuity in the way of thinking popular amongst scholars researching the case of Zimbabwe.

“From ‘Defending Sovereignty’ to ‘Fighting Corruption’: The Political Place of Law in Zimbabwe After November 2017” by Susanne Verheul takes a different approach to this debate, however. In her works she focuses more on the practical philosophy of the country’s rulers regarding sovereignty.²² She explains that in the Mugabe era there was indeed this focus on sovereignty to justify the regime's actions. A state should be able to act according to its own will within its own border for the good of its own people, this was the central philosophy espoused by the regime according to her during the rulership of Mugabe.²³ This did change however. The new philosophy is to root out corruption and punish those who would harm Zimbabwe. Though according to her these are two sides of the same coin, merely excuses that allow the government to imprison and punish its rivals and opponents.²⁴ She writes further about how this negatively impacts the local population, predominantly those that would seek a different future in the country. It is a slight departure from the previous works, as it focuses on the party line and how this changed. This can easily be explained away, because of the fact that this is the first work mentioned that was written after Emmerson Mnangagwa’s coup d’etat.

These last three works are the rare type of research into this subject. As they each use critical theory approaches to the Zimbabwean question. They seek to evaluate and explore more of the underlying contents of this subject. It is within this context that this paper will be placed. A retrospective of the former president's justification, this study focuses on how his rhetoric was formed, and potentially what its impact was. It was vital to understand the more classical and common forms of looking at this subject in order to fully grasp why the critical approach is more appropriate. This approach is one that does not merely take the classic western perspective for granted, but rather seeks to inform itself with the context of the African

²¹ Ibid., 154-156.

²² Susanne Verheul, “From ‘Defending Sovereignty’ to ‘Fighting Corruption’: The Political Place of Law in Zimbabwe After November 2017,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56, no. 2 (March 1, 2021): 189–203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620986587>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

experience. The basic assumptions however must be deconstructed and reconstructed in order to gain true understanding. The exact method and theoretical basis for this paper can be found hereafter.

Theoretical Basis

For the purposes of this paper the theoretical basis will be that of the postcolonial school of thought. While the base assumption could be that this theory was chosen merely because the subject matter of this research could be typecast as a stereotypical example of postcolonial scholarship, this choice was not made on a whim. On the contrary, the choice of this theory was anything but certain at the start of the research. While most definitely a legitimate framework, there is a danger with applying postcolonialism to this case. The utilisation of such a popular theory in this specific field creates a situation in which the work can simply be reduced to another basic example of how the theory can be applied, rather than a study of reality in which theory turned out to be applicable. A misreading of the research could easily reduce this very real subject, into a stereotypical framing of the African continent as one stricken by the spectre of colonialism, and corruption. It was, however, decided that this theoretical basis may be useful.

The reason this theory was selected was because the speeches of Mugabe adhere to some of the core tenets of this school of thought. These core tenets being the rejection of western concepts and standards as the norm for humankind, a challenging of the perceived global order, and the aim to reorganise this global order in a way that realigns the levers of power to ensure equality. This is however a very simplistic way of explaining any theory and therefore the following explanation seeks to elaborate on the aforementioned three tenets. The impact of this school of thought on real world politics will be the subject of research.

As with any theory, interpretations are mostly dependent on the scholar or layman that interacts with them, reflecting the diverse perspectives of its interpreters. Therefore, it becomes crucial to establish a concrete definition to ensure internal coherence. Postcolonial scholars diverge from eurocentrism in their quest to uncover and validate truths previously

muted or marginalised.²⁵ Primarily focusing on those subjugated under European Imperialism, they endeavour to reshape the conventional narrative, granting agency to those traditionally excluded or disparaged as the “Other”. This paper will seek to address similar concerns by trying to explain an African phenomenon from an African perspective.

Firstly, there's the repudiation of Western norms as the universal standard for humanity. Often, disciplines like international relations are predominantly framed within a Western context, disregarding the diverse viewpoints of marginalised groups. The assumption that Western ideas inherently supersede others is challenged by postcolonial theorists, who advocate for the recognition of alternative voices.²⁶ This doesn't entail a complete rejection of Western thought but rather questions its unquestioned dominance.

Secondly, which challenges the notion of international anarchy upheld by Western theories like realism and liberalism. Instead, postcolonial theory portrays the world as dominated politically and economically by the West, with Western norms perpetuating this power dynamic. For instance, the concept of national sovereignty, central to Western IR theories, proves problematic when applied to African countries created through colonial imposition, resulting in ongoing struggles for self-rule.²⁷

Finally, like other critical theories, postcolonialism is inherently prescriptive, aiming to address existing inequalities and foster global equality. Beyond highlighting systemic flaws, it strives to transform the current paradigm by crafting a new narrative capable of fostering understanding and change. The objective is to dismantle the prevailing international hierarchy, replacing it with a world where multiple truths coexist, rather than a uniform system dictated by the powerful and endured by the weaker.²⁸

Why is this relevant, however? As was highlighted in the historiography, the research into Zimbabwe and Mugabe's land-reform tends to be explored from an entirely western understanding of the world. Zimbabwe's failures are framed as being caused by the country's failure to adhere to a western model of development. This northern point of view often

²⁵ Alpana Roy, “Postcolonial Theory and Law: A Critical Introduction,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, 2008), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2620107>. pp. 322-324

²⁶ Ibid. 322-324.

²⁷ Ibid. 322-324.

²⁸ Ibid. 322-324.

neglects the cultural and historical context of the country. It is not internal challenges, caused by the legacy of colonialism that is considered, nor is it the way in which the unstable transition of power laid a rotten foundation, that are cited as root causes for Zimbabwe's issues. That seems to be the most pervasive view, a view that ought to be amended. This is where this paper will seek to challenge the current academic paradigm. Rather than merely repeating the same western talking points, this examination of Mugabe's rhetoric seeks to bring the focus back on the southern point of view. How the global south interprets and interacts with the world. This move away from the more traditional point of view will hopefully seal the gap in the academic field.

This northern point of view is often deterministic in nature, ignoring the justification given, and immediately jumping to the end result. While it is most definitely true that the end result of this land reform is more often than not perceived as a failure, this is a view that can hardly be argued with in good faith. The land reform was predominantly a negative influence on the country. This does not, however, invalidate the very real and legitimate reasoning that was used to justify it. Those justifications that will be explored further in this paper are almost entirely absent from the academic debate, and deserve to be highlighted more.

Main Sources

The first and most definitely the most important set of sources is a variety of speeches given by Robert Mugabe, the former president of Zimbabwe in United Nations assemblies. The prominence of these speeches in the research is mainly due to this being the primary way in which he defended his actions. As dictator of Zimbabwe he held a large amount of power and was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the narrative that is the subject of research here. The strengths of this source lay in the fact that it is the subject, study. These speeches are an indispensable cornerstone of the formation of the narrative that will be explored, and thus they are inherently a reliable source for this specific purpose. Their use therefore seems almost self-evident.

One potential issue however is the source from which these speeches will be drawn has one notable flaw. The editor is anonymous. Simply referring to themselves as Leftistcritic.²⁹ Because of this the entire work is somewhat called into question, as the 32

²⁹ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, *Speeches through the Years*: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>.

speeches in the compilation must be traced individually and verified. While definitely labourious, the compiled speeches found within the work are still valuable, and where after verification they are found to be correct a reference to the collection will be made. Besides this another potential issue with the sources is that they cannot be taken at face value. There was clearly a hidden agenda behind them, one that normally should be accounted for. For the purposes of this research however, this limitation is significantly reduced, as the subject matter is not necessarily whether or not he was truthful in his justifications, but rather how he justified the choices of his regime. In this way this potential flaw is almost completely nullified, though there will most definitely be some analysis on how the manifestation of his policy actually was a major influence in global politics. An understanding of the context is important to form an understanding of the rhetoric of Mugabe.

His speeches must be placed in the context of the time where possible as it creates a second dimension to his explanations. While this part will be elaborated upon more in the methodology section, for now the primary takeaway is that the context matters. In order to understand the context of the land reform the Zimbabwe Gazette will be used. This is a government newspaper that reports on almost all legal happenings in the country. This newspaper, while potentially biased, will provide the most accurate account of how the land reform was put together from a legal angle. It is however unavoidable that some reports will not represent the reality of the policy, and therefore British news reports on the land reform, and the sanctions imposed by Blair's cabinet, specifically from the BBC, will occasionally be used in order to verify that the contextual side of things remains as close to reality as possible. This will however be nowhere near as prominent as the usage of Mugabe's speeches, which will evidently provide the vast majority of evidence for this research.

Methodology

It is however important that it is made clear how this research will be conducted. The primary approach will be to explore the justification from a Zimbabwean perspective. Rather than focussing solely on global or western perceptions, this paper would seek to explore how local rhetoric was utilised in a global setting, and how maybe this local rhetoric was not as localised as one would maybe assume.

By taking this approach this paper also seeks to acknowledge the agency of local actors. More often than not history is something that happens to Africa, not because of

Africa. As will be discussed in the historiography chapter, there is a tendency to forget about Africa and its battlefields, and if they are acknowledged they more often than not are seen more as a backdrop for the battle of outside forces. By approaching this subject from within Zimbabwe itself, this paper will seek to aid (in a miniscule way) in giving more agency to African countries and their ability to write their own history.

The primary method of doing this will be through the use of discourse analysis. This paper will seek to explore the language and argumentation used by Robert Mugabe in order to gain an understanding of the meaning, both the literal meaning of his words, and their cultural meaning with temporal and geographic context. His speeches will be scoured through from three different angles, those being: The rejection of the west as the universal standard, the reevaluation of western concepts, and the drive to bring about change, which in this case would be a change to the academic field. The first prong will explore the legacy of colonialism. Specifically, how his speeches appeal to an audience consisting of the people who experienced the colonial system and their descendants. This part of the research will seek to highlight the language and ideas used, and how their usage, put into this context creates a certain understanding of just behaviour. By scouring the speeches given by Mugabe for language that hits on this specific pressure point one part of the main research question can be answered.

The second prong will focus on his language regarding sovereignty. This western concept is rather controversial in postcolonial circles³⁰, but less so in political circles. By investigating how Mugabe repurposes this concept to be a part of his anticolonial rhetoric another dimension of his justification will be laid bare. This part of his rhetoric seems primarily aimed at governments of other nations, as it lies at the heart of their legitimacy. Therefore, the analysis will focus more on the global context of this concept rather than the continental one. The analysis will focus on how this language and this concept is used in the context of global politics, and to what effect.

The last chapter will once more adhere to discourse analysis but now it will once more be reframed to seek to gain an understanding of the socialist subtext of many of his public addresses. For this analysis most of the reading will be done between the lines. As the leader of a socialist party, at least in name, Mugabe had to appeal to socialist thought as well in his speeches. This was not done for the benefit of the international community, however, this seems to be more of a local part of his rhetoric, reassuring the people of Zimbabwe itself.

³⁰ Alpana Roy, "Postcolonial Theory and Law: A Critical Introduction," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY, 2008), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2620107>. pp. 322-324

By examining the language used in his speeches, and how different uses of linguistics affect different target groups, the question: “How did Robert Mugabe justify his land reform policy in the period between 1990 and 2010?”, can be answered.

Chapter 1: Legacy of Colonialism

“It could never be a correct justification that because whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the blacks must oppress them today because they have power.” - Robert Mugabe³¹

The first chapter of this piece of research will seek to explore the way in which colonialism and its legacy are prevalent within Mugabe’s rhetoric, and in doing so will answer the question: How did Robert Mugabe use the legacy of colonialism to justify land reform? The history of British colonialism in this region of the African continent has left numerous scars that have yet to heal fully. There is no place where this was more evident than the southern tip of this landmass. It is, therefore, not surprising that Robert Mugabe used this as a vital part of his rhetoric. This legacy of colonialism is at the heart of the problem that caused the land reform. What, however, was exactly the problem and how was it resolved? More importantly, how was it stated to be a problem and how this was stated to be resolved by the former president? This will be explored in this chapter, in order to get a deeper understanding of why and how Mugabe Justified his land reform. Or, to put it more concretely, this chapter will seek to explore how the legacy of colonialism informed Mugabe's rhetoric, and in addition to some extent to what effect. It is important to note, however, that this will not include an examination of the responses to his rhetoric, this is a paper focused on the rhetoric itself after all, but rather it will involve an analysis of the stated justifications and looking at how this language seeks to invoke specific reactions or thoughts in its audience.

The way this chapter will tackle this issue is through the following means. Firstly, because this is a subject that most are not familiar with, The most important pieces of cultural and historical context will be examined and explored in the way that they are relevant to this paper, the subject of this paper, and Mugabe’s rhetoric. It is imperative that one understands the context before one delves into this subject. This part of the Chapter will seek to impart this necessary information in an adequate and holistic, yet concise manner.

After this context has been established, the focus of this paper will switch back directly to the way Mugabe justifies land reform with a more specific focus on the legacy of

³¹ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, “Speech on the day of Zimbabwe’s Independence” Apr. 17, 1980. *Speeches through the Years*: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. p. 16.

colonialism. The two prongs of Mugabe's anti-colonial rhetoric, in the way in which they impact his domestic decisions, are as follows:

The first prong is a denunciation of Western powers in general and their attempts to impact Zimbabwean politics by referring to these sanctions or interventions as forms of colonialism and imperialism, which is a subject that is directly linked to the second chapter in which sovereignty will take the spotlight. The entire argumentation, however, is linked internally between the three subjects set out in this paper, however, instead of throwing them all together, they will be isolated, to be combined again at a later stage in this thesis. Besides this moral denunciation of the West, there is another part of the legacy of colonialism that is vital to the justifications given.

Namely the unequal distribution of land and more specifically arable farmland. In his speeches, Mugabe routinely refers to the stranglehold that white farmers have over the nation's agricultural industry. Laments that as a result of the colonial past they hold over 70% of the good farming land.³² He favours redistributive justice in which these lands are redistributed amongst the people, or at the very least that's what he states that he believes. Those familiar with the subject, however, will know that this is not how it panned out. This idea of redistributive justice does link to the rhetoric that will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis, however. As stated before all of these arguments are intertwined with one another, this chapter will, however, provide the basis for the other two arguments and seek to prove that the legacy of colonialism and the consequences of Western and in this case specifically British imperialism have laid the foundation of these other two arguments. This chapter explores the practical historical context while the other two tend to lean more towards a more theoretical basis of argumentation.

The Colonial History of Zimbabwe

In order to guarantee that the context necessary to understand the rhetoric of Robert Mugabe, as well as this paper's understanding of the set context is known, an exploration of this said colonial past and context is required. While every subsequent chapter will have an introductory subsection of context, the contents will differ from chapter to chapter.

³² Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Address to World Summit on Sustainable Development" Sept. 3, 2002. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. p. 22.

Fundamentally they will all refer to the colonial past or the struggle for independence in one way or another, yet this is the only chapter that will focus solely on the colonial past and more specifically the impact of ethnicity when it comes to the distribution of land, in addition to highlighting some of the apartheid's aspects of the regime. This is done as these are the two cornerstones of the postcolonial angle of the justification used by Mugabe.

The white population of then Rhodesia, now modern-day Zimbabwe started growing at the end of the 19th century. With the population of European settlers being less than two thousand, this number then steadily increased up until the end of World War One, which saw a sudden influx of white settlers.³³ This boom in population however would seem relatively minor when compared to the Post World War Two boom for in the period between 1945 and 1955 the white population of Zimbabwe doubled with it eventually peaking somewhere in the 1970s when white people of European descent made up less than 8% of the population.³⁴ Most of these new arrivals consisted of former servicemen and British people living in former colonies who sought to escape the wave of decolonisation engulfing the British commonwealth.³⁵ It is in the southern tip of Africa where these people could find their new way of life or more accurately an old way of life that was rapidly disappearing in other parts of the world. While there was indeed a boom in migration, the overall percentage of European settlers within Zimbabwe when compared to the native population as mentioned before remained comparatively low.

Yet this rather small minority of people owned around 70% of arable land and held a stranglehold on the country's agricultural industry.³⁶ This was something that was certainly not appreciated by the native population, especially after the independence of the country was achieved. It is indeed this distribution of land that is the root cause for the land reform or at the very least the root of the reasoning used by Mugabe. However, it is important to note that even amongst this small minority of the population, the majority of the land was farmed by a vast minority of Europeans. Research done by Angus Selby highlights that only about 2% of the white population during this period owned land, which was used for agricultural purposes. This land was used predominantly to produce cash crops such as cotton and

³³ Angus Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005" (PhD Thesis, Oxford, University of Oxford, 2007). 58-59.

³⁴ Josiah Brownwell, *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race*. London: I.B. Tauris. 2001, pp. 3, 51.

³⁵ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp. 62-63.

³⁶ Annie Schleicher, "Online NewsHour -- Land Redistribution in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe Program," pbs.org, accessed March 20, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20040501103309/http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/africa/land/gp_zimbabwe.html.

tobacco which were meant to be exported and grant wealth to the owners of these lands much to the chagrin of the native population.³⁷ Who had only been granted comparatively small reserves to live off of. This distribution of land undoubtedly aided the ZANU and ZAPU movements which were both based on socialist thought. though neither of these were founded merely because of inequality when it came to the distribution of land. The new planter class that had embedded itself in the country in the period between 1890 and 1970 had formed a distinct social class as well which was granted disproportional political rights and created a system of minority rule.³⁸ By the early twenty-first century, most of these settlers had left the country.

While the layperson might be familiar with Jim Crow in the USA or the system of Apartheid when it comes to South Africa, it is less well known that the system was commonplace outside of these contexts as well even when talking about a non-colonial relationship. With which this paper refers to segregated societies, such as the Apartheid system in South Africa, where slavery is not the primary reason for the denial of rights to people of African descent. Instead, it refers to consistent and systematic denial of equal participation and privilege within a society, based on one's race, or perceived racial heritage. A system such as this was prevalent within the state of Rhodesia which is the direct predecessor of modern-day Zimbabwe. This system came to be in the 1930s when it was codified into law by the settler elite who held all political power in the country and were sponsored by the local British government.³⁹ This alliance, however, between the state and settlers started to break down during World War two when the growing value of tobacco caused strain between the rural tobacco farmers and the urban settler elite. During this time of tension between the two groups, there was a small yet concerted effort by some white farmers to create a black middle class, however, this idea was swiftly denounced and denied by the state as any and all laws that would promote such a project were shot down and segregation was kept in place.⁴⁰ This instability was made worse when the voter base kept expanding as the massive influx of migrants post-World War changed the political landscape.⁴¹ A large part of these migrants had seen the concessions made in former colonies and had decided that this would not happen in their new home. As a result the segregation was made increasingly oppressive, and tensions between the white minority and the black majority started to heat up

³⁷ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." p. 33.

³⁸ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp. 59-62.

³⁹ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp 56-57.

⁴⁰ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp 56-57.

⁴¹ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." p 60.

more and more.⁴² Especially as black landowners were starting to get displaced in order to grant the new settlers land to farm on. The election of an even more right-wing government in 1962, made conflict all but inevitable as the black population feared getting stripped of even more of their sparse rights.⁴³ For the sake of brevity the many injustices will not be fully laid out here, but forceful displacement, and unequal access to education, politics, and economic means, were part of the everyday experience of the local Zimbabweans.

The land reform of Mugabe would seek to rectify these injustices, or at least that is what the stated objective was. This would be done by removing white farmers from most of their land, so it could be redistributed amongst the Zimbabwean people, allowing them to also gain, and act upon, some of the privileges hitherto reserved only for European settlers.

The unequal distribution of land and the injustice delivered upon the black population by the northern whites are the two factors that are vital pillars of the discourse that Mugabe shaped in his speeches, therefore this short contextual exploration was necessary in order to fully understand why this was so ever-present in his addresses. In what ways did he use these two pillars? That will be explored in the following two subsections.

Redistributive justice and how it is important to cleaning up the mess of the colonial past

Robert Mugabe repeatedly attempted to alter the discourse regarding his policies of land reform. One of the primary methods in which he attempted to do this was by reframing the way actors were supposed to approach his regime, and decisions. As highlighted in the historiographical section of this research, scholars and politicians denounce the ethnic cleansing of white farmers in the country. The use of this term was rarely if at all used in discourse, but can most definitely still be applied. The removal of farmers was mainly based on their ethnicity, and while few were outright murdered many were displaced in the process.⁴⁴ Something which was outright stated as the result of ethnic conflict, as Mugabe stated that there would be a focus on removing white farmers, especially racist ones first. Digression aside, there was a lot of critique from other nations, with especially the United Kingdom under Tony Blair critiquing the policy, and going as far as embargoing Zimbabwe

⁴² Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp 60-61.

⁴³ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp 62-64.

⁴⁴ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp 291-292.

as a result. This put a lot of pressure on the already struggling Zimbabwean economy, pressure which had to be relieved in order for the country to re-establish some semblance of balance.

These sanctions were, however, not solely based on the policy of land reform, but also on further undemocratic, and kleptocratic policy by the then-president Mugabe. This does not reduce the importance of this subject as part of the whole, yet throughout the years this subject was somewhat pushed to the background of his discourse. It is, however, one of the primary matches that lit the fire of the anti-western and anti-global north rhetoric coming out of Zimbabwe. As is evidenced by the fact that one of the earliest speeches denouncing these actors mentions the issues of land distribution quite extensively.⁴⁵

In his address to the UN on the 3rd of September 2002 during the *World Summit on Sustainable Development* (WSSD from now on) he attempts to reframe his policy as a revolt, or contra-operation even, against an unequal system imposed on the Zimbabwean people by a foreign power.⁴⁶ This speech is the most specific outspoken one on the connection between land ownership, colonialism, and the struggles of the state and its people, and will therefore be examined especially for this subsection. His rhetoric is distinctly Maoist in nature, when it comes to issues of land reform. He states that agriculture and access to land are primary concerns when it comes to ensuring a sustainable future.⁴⁷ A future that is threatened by imperialist powers that would seek to unduly intervene within the third world as he calls it.⁴⁸

Mugabe highlights that there is food insecurity both within and outside of his country and that this is an issue that must be addressed. He explains that this issue must be tackled as in doing so it allows the “third world countries” to break away from the imperialist intentions of the great powers of the north.⁴⁹ By doing so he makes it clear that he seeks to establish a contra-movement with fellow similarly affected people, against the hierarchical system and those who benefit from it. This is shown multiple times throughout the speech, where he appeals to leaders of his fellow recently decolonised countries.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, “Address to World Summit on Sustainable Development” Sept. 3, 2002. *Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 21-24.

⁴⁶ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp. 21-22.

⁴⁷ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p 21.

⁴⁸ The author is aware that this term is not necessarily politically correct, but in an effort to avoid anachronisms it will be used nonetheless.

⁴⁹ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 21.

⁵⁰ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 19-20.

*“We spoke against unequal terms of trade that made rich and powerful nations enjoy undeserved rewards from world trade. Indeed, we denounced the debt burden by which the rich North continued to take away the impoverished South even that little they still had.”*⁵¹

He continuously links back to this state of affairs in the context of ownership of land, highlighting that white Europeans own a disproportionate amount of land in his country, a controlling share that would threaten the freedom and security of the majority stakeholders, which are the black Africans. According to him it causes poverty, hunger, and removes the ability of his people to exert their rights as inhabitants of the land.⁵²

This rhetoric seeks to reshape the manner in which the issues at the summit are discussed, in addition to attempting to weaken the British position in their bilateral conflict, and appeals to the poorer strata of the global order, by referring to their shared history of suffering, in an attempt to acquire support, which can in turn help alleviate the consequences of the UK’s sanctions. This form of discourse then does impact the perception of the conflict, refocusing the lens, and twisting the narrative of justice, and a fight for one’s own survival. It was a very real and practical issue, which he sought to solve through the means of redistributive justice. While it can most certainly be debated how committed he was to actually delivering this justice, it is most certainly an underpinning of his rhetoric.

The throughline when it comes to this subject is congruent with much socialist thought. It is indeed treated by him as a practical example of common socialist talking points. He identifies a global bourgeois in the form of the great powers of Europe and America and laments their control of the means of agricultural production. Saying in not so many words that this unequal and unfair distribution is purposefully kept in place in order to ensure the greatest amount of wealth for the smallest amount of people. An international elite that holds no stake in the well-being of the population, that is how he portrays the white landowners of Zimbabwe.⁵³ The socialist school that he subscribes to is the Maoist school, which he utilised to a great extent during the Bush War, which will be elaborated upon in chapter three but is already easily apparent in this early exploration of his discourse.

It is through these socialist talking points that he will seek to justify his later more directly socialist, and more theoretical, justifications. He frames this conflict as one between

⁵¹ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p 19.

⁵² Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 21-22.

⁵³ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 21-22.

global social classes, rather than one exclusively on a racial basis. In short, Mugabe reframes the racial justifications for his land reform into one that is not based on ethnic conflict, but rather a class conflict which is racial merely because these classes were created along ethnic lines. In doing so he utilises socialist, and more specifically Maoist rhetoric in an attempt to add a layer of morality to his policy. Which will be highlighted more in chapter three.

Through the use of imagery relating to colonial inequalities, he adds a concise face to a theoretical concept, and in doing so seeks to reframe the discourse surrounding his policy, from one based on violations of human rights to one of justice for past transgressions with contemporary consequences. The exact manner in which this socialist thought comes through in his overall rhetoric will be explained in a later chapter, but this section has hopefully established the link between that socialist thought and the pragmatic colonial history, by highlighting how Mugabe uses the theory behind socialist thought and applying it to the more tangible colonial history of his country. Though it is important to note that most land that got taken from white farmers was indeed not distributed between the African black population, but rather amongst Mugabe's friends, and family.⁵⁴ Which does cast some doubt on the entire justification when it comes to whether or not it was genuine, but even in the case that it was merely a tactic rather than an actual conviction, it remains undeniable that this framing of the issue provides a valid alternative to commonly held beliefs behind the motivations of African heads of state.

The Denunciation of Western powers and their continued influence.

While it is impossible to ascertain how genuine Mugabe felt about this subject, he does consistently highlight the colonial past and how it led to inequality in his country, in a clear attempt to demonise the British. Throughout many of his speeches Mugabe vilifies the global north, and especially the British, making a consistent effort to highlight how their shared colonial past only impacted Zimbabwe for the worst and how the UK seems to not be finished with them quite yet. While he criticises them for their neo-imperialist behaviour this is and will most probably always remain a purely theoretical concept to most people, as it pertains to sovereignty and far off macro-economic policy. It seems probable that in his addresses Mugabe realised this and consistently pairs these concepts with references to

⁵⁴ MacDonald Dzirutwe, "Mugabe's Farm Seizures: Racial Justice or Catastrophic Power Grab?," *Reuters*, September 6, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1VR156/>.

former colonial ties in an effort to make these concepts as concrete as possible. His primary argument seems to boil down to we are sovereign therefore we should be able to handle our own business.⁵⁵ This idea differs from the western notion in one important facet, the sovereignty of Zimbabwe does not hinge on the idea that all states should be sovereign but rather that the country has earned it through a bloody conflict with a morally distasteful opponent,⁵⁶ a slight, yet important difference to keep in the back of one's thoughts, which will be important in the second chapter of this thesis. This subsection will explore the use of vilification, and especially that of the British in Mugabe's address in the way that it pertains to the colonial past.

“ [...] *Having said that, we wish no harm to anyone. We are Zimbabweans, we are Africans, we are not English, We are not Europeans.*”⁵⁷ - Robert Mugabe 2002

With this one quote a rather large part of his discourse regarding the colonial past can be summarised. Mugabe consistently goes out of his way to attack the moral character of the European states. Portraying them as power hungry, selfish, and aggressive. He highlights how their brutality has put them in positions of power which they leverage for personal gain. He laments how the northern powers, according to him, remove the capability for the UN to be truly democratic.⁵⁸ He accuses them of wanting to keep international relations in the state they were in during the colonial era.⁵⁹ When it comes to allowing former colonies to rule themselves, he states that they are hypocritical and overly interventionist.⁶⁰ All of this while they consistently mismanaged and harmed the African nations. With quotes such as: “*They cannot teach us democracy today. They had none to give to us for nearly a century of their misrule here. We scoff at and reject such rank hypocrisy.*”⁶¹ He sends a clear message of moral superiority over these nations. A message specifically aimed at those countries that experienced something similar.

The question then becomes why was this colonial past, and moral bankruptcy of the western powers so prevalent in his speeches? This research would want to put forth the

⁵⁵ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, “Address at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit” Feb. 25, 2003. *Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. p. 25.

⁵⁶ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 23-24.

⁵⁷ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p. 22.

⁵⁸ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp 21-22.

⁵⁹ Mugabe, “Address at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit” pp. 24-25.

⁶⁰ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, “Message at beginning of ZANU-PF manifesto” 2005. *Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 30-31.

⁶¹ Mugabe, “Message at Manifesto” p. 30.

argument that in a similar vein to the usage of land distribution issues, it was used as both a way to reframe the western ethical concerns, as being invalid, for how can it be immoral to remove immoral and unjust influence, and additionally portraying western interventions as mere continuations of the system under which the global south languished for so long.

To elaborate on the first aspect, Mugabe speaks regularly on how the legacy of colonialism has left both his country and others, with multiple social strata divided amongst racial lines, which has caused internal struggle and strife.⁶² In doing so he seeks to remind all that western powers have left scars in his country that could still be felt. He presents himself as someone thrust into power to find a balance, where these scars can be healed, by redistributive justice. In doing so he builds a shield, to protect himself from western criticism. This rhetoric offers him the possibility to rage against the west, as they are punishing him and his people for cleaning up their mess. In doing so he shapes the discourse to be about the way in which justice can be delivered rather than whether or not what he is doing is actually just. By framing the discussion in such a manner his moral justification is made to be self-evident, someone who is merely trying to solve a mess others created. This first aspect then makes him seem like a paragon of morality.

Contrastingly Mugabe often uses language and statements that reduce European concerns to the lashing out of dying empires, demonising their actions as selfish and immoral. He continually links the international developments of his time to the colonial past, in which the imperial powers sought to exert as much influence across the world as possible. He highlights the invasion of Iraq as an unjust extension of empire.⁶³ There are many more examples of this kind of behaviour but it all leads back to the same strategy. By portraying the former colonisers as power hungry forces on the global scale, he reduces the efficacy of their arguments as he seeks to highlight a form of hypocrisy within their arguments.

When one combines these two aspects it creates an image of a moral Zimbabwe struggling against a devilish hegemony that seeks to keep the people of the global south down. In doing so he creates a reality in which their opposition to his execution of national sovereignty is

⁶² Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Address at the World Summit on the Information Society" Dec. 10 2003. *Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 28.

⁶³ Mugabe, "Address at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit" p. 26

seen as a selfish act, rather than the virtuous one that the UK and the rest of the west would like people to believe.

Conclusion Ch. 1

To conclude, this chapter tried to answer the question: How did Robert Mugabe use the legacy of colonialism to justify land reform? In an effort to answer this question the legacy of colonialism in Zimbabwe was quickly explored. Concluding that the European influence in the country led to a considerable oppressive regime under which the local Zimbabweans had to suffer displacement, apartheid, and violence. Then it was explored how this history informed and influenced the way in which Mugabe justified his land reform that saw thousands of white farmers displaced and separated from their property. The first aspect of the rhetoric seemed to be based more socialist thought. The idea that a small part of the population had the ability to control the vast majority of land was deemed irresponsible and harmful to the people of Zimbabwe. This idea was then used by Mugabe to highlight that his reforms were entirely necessary as a form of redistributive justice, that would see the majority stakeholders in the country control the majority of the country. Though it remained somewhat unclear to what extent this was actually believed, this paper does still deem it a vital part of his rhetoric, because his actual belief in what he said is not as relevant when compared to the way in which it could potentially influence.

The second aspect of the legacy of colonialism that impacted the rhetoric was the morality argument which was split into two parts. The first being the idea that Zimbabwe and its people were left with an unequal mess that harmed them, and that they had to burn out the corruption in order to make the country function healthily again. This creates the impression that the actions undertaken by Mugabe's regime are necessary in order to achieve a greater good, in doing so potentially invalidating western moral concerns. The second part considered the immorality of the west. It highlighted that their influence was selfish and harmed those in the global south. Therefore their intervention in Zimbabwe could not possibly be considered as a moral act, and had to be considered as an overreach by the British in an attempt to regain some of the power lost due to decolonisation. The combination of these provide the basis for the idea that Zimbabwe should be allowed to act on its own sovereignty, because it was doing what was right for the country, and those that were against that were immoral actors out for their own gain. By exploring these topics it has now

hopefully been made clear in what way the legacy of colonialism has impacted Mugabe's rhetoric, which is mainly by allowing him to claim the moral high ground when dealing with the western powers.

Chapter 2: Sovereignty

“So (Tony) Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe.” - Robert Mugabe⁶⁴

With the previous chapter establishing the wider structure of Mugabe’s argumentation this chapter will now focus on the concept of sovereignty. As was stated above, the rhetoric of Mugabe relied quite heavily on this concept that his country was well within its rights to govern itself, as he saw fit. In addition it was a point that was also supported by the idea that foreign intervention by former colonisers was unjust, especially as they created the circumstances in which he was *forced* to take the actions that he did. These talking points are all linked to one prominent IR concept, namely that of sovereignty. Something that is not often mentioned by name by Mugabe, but often implied in his rhetoric. He then alters the definition of the concept in a way that benefits his claims. Namely by adding the addendum that while sovereignty is normally a thing every legitimate state possess⁶⁵ Mugabe alters its definition to something that has to be earned through a successful navigation of numerous unofficial trials.⁶⁶ This chapter will seek to analyse how the use of the concept of sovereignty influences and comes through in the speeches given by Robert Mugabe. This will be done in an attempt to answer the question: how does Mugabe alter and use the concept of sovereignty in order to justify land reform?

This will once more be done according to the rule of three. Firstly a bit of context will be provided regarding the Bush War/Chimurenga war. This is the conflict in which the country of Zimbabwe won its independence from colonial (not specifically british) rule. This will be discussed first as Mugabe had a tendency to refer to this conflict when elaborating on why his country had earned the right to self-determination. A proper understanding of this conflict cannot be given in this research due its complex nature, with a massive plurality of sides, each with their own agendas and foreign backers. Though this paper will be able to give a concise enough overview to provide enough context for those unfamiliar with the conflict, at least to the extent where its impact can be reasonably related back to Mugabe’s

⁶⁴ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p. 21.

⁶⁵ Caroline Humphrey, “Sovereignty,” in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 418.

⁶⁶ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” pp. 21-22.

rhetoric. There will also be a short recapitulation of the Lancaster House Agreement that signified the de jure end to the conflict and the start of majority rule in Zimbabwe

The second part will then focus on the alteration of the definition of this concept, but more importantly, on how this was specifically done in a post-colonial context. Mugabe not only uses this concept as it is, but rather shapes it to create a pan-african sense of unity in opposition to the oppressive north. In this part it will be explored how his rhetoric seeks to incite a narrative reliant on how his nation is using its sovereignty as nothing more than a rejection of northern oppression.

The third aspect will focus on how Mugabe uses these concepts to undermine the position of the global north. For while he rejects western notions to an extent, he is also fond of using them to highlight hypocrisy in order to chip away at the foundation of the northern argument. This part will explain how his sovereignty angle comes down to the following: *we have sovereignty, because we earned it, which is different to how Europe operates, we have a right to exert it. We keep to ourselves and respect the sovereignty of others, which is something that the northern power could learn something from.* Sovereignty in his speeches is something that is not inherently owed to every state, but his state has earned it by taking it from European powers that value the concept immensely. Furthermore, Zimbabwe respects the sovereignty of others, which is its duty as a nation. Therefore the sanctions of the north are not only unjust, but also hypocritical, as they imposed the idea of sovereignty and protect their own vehemently, yet seeks to take it from others who have justly earned it. In short Mugabe seeks to undermine the northern stance by using their imposed sense of order against them.

The Bush War/Chimurenga War

The major civil war that erupted in 1964 and lasted for 15 more years, did not start unprovoked. Ever since the arrival of the European settlers the local African majority had been a marginalised people in their own lands, and while the nature of the rule changed overtime it did not diminish the fact that the local populace was rarely an active partner in government.⁶⁷ First being ruled over by the British South Africa Company, and then later by the local settler elite, which as stated before, always made up a fractional part of the population. Under the rule of the white elite the vote was technically open to all regardless of

⁶⁷ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." p. 45.

their ethnicity. However as a result of many requirements such as a property requirement only around 7.2 percent of eligible voters consisted of local Africans.⁶⁸ This state of affairs was almost entirely impossible to swallow for the local population that made up upwards of 90 percent of the population of the state.⁶⁹ With the wave of decolonisation flooding across the continent it would not take long before the unrest boiled over into outright resistance. After the white majority refused to heed multiple calls for majority rule, resistance grew into rebellion. Multiple resistance movements then sprang up across tribal lines. The primary two were the ZAPU led by Joshua Nkomo, who were predominantly made up out of Ndebele tribe members, and supported by the soviets. The second major party was the ZANU led by Robert Mugabe, consisting of Shona, and backed by the Chinese. These two parties rose up to combat the minority rule and fight for their own self-determination and government. Both of these parties were socialist in nature but their exact difference in opinion regarding this theorem will be discussed in the next chapter.

The war that followed was brutal, as wars tend to be. The conflict consisted mainly of guerilla conflicts where the aforementioned ZAPU and ZANU forces would strike at farms, villages, and military targets in an effort to destabilise and combat the Rhodesian rule.⁷⁰ These strikes were swift and brutal. Nationalist forces (these being those of ZANU and ZAPU) would strike hard and then retreat to their camps in the neighbouring countries of Zambia and later also Mozambique.⁷¹ The war was not entirely fought on their terms, however, the forces of the Rhodesian government would also strike out in an attempt to suppress the resistance. These forces would target civilians, and rebels alike.⁷² Refugee camps, livestock, and water supplies were all targeted and destroyed by the Rhodesians. The war led to destruction and mayhem in a way that the Zimbabweans never forgot.⁷³ In the second half of the nineteen-seventies the Rhodesian government increasingly felt pressured to end the fighting. They lost support from their only overt ally South Africa, Mozambique started to openly support the resistance, and there was pressure from both the USA in the form of Henry Kissinger, and from the United Kingdom to halt the war and find a

⁶⁸ P. B. Harris, "THE RHODESIAN REFERENDUM: JUNE 20th, 1969," *Parliamentary Affairs* 23, no. 1969sep (September 1, 1969): 72.

⁶⁹ Harris, "Rhodesian Referendum" p. 72.

⁷⁰ "The Liberation War, 1965-1980 - p. 4," accessed May 8, 2024, <https://www.zim.gov.zw/index.php/en/my-government/government-ministries/about-zimbabwe/460-history-of-zimbabwe?start=3>.

⁷¹ "The Liberation War, 1965-1980 - p. 4,"

⁷² "The Liberation War, 1965-1980 - p. 4,"

⁷³ "The Liberation War, 1965-1980 - p. 4,"

compromise in which the majority got a say in politics.⁷⁴ At this point both sides had exhausted many of their resources, and suffered heavy losses, and were thus compelled to gather round the table to work out an agreement.

The first of these compromises would see a general election in which the local population were at last allowed to vote. This vote, however, was not supported by either ZAPU nor ZANU, granting it a lack of legitimacy which would later be rectified by the Lancaster House Agreement. The agreement contained the conditions of the ceasefire between the guerilla groups and the Rhodesians.⁷⁵ It also included the formation of a new constitution and further arrangements to ensure a proper transfer of power. Furthermore, the agreement would see the region be temporarily reverted back to a British colony so that elections could be arranged. It was in these very elections that Robert Mugabe rose to power as the first prime minister of the new Zimbabwean state.⁷⁶ It is important to note, however, that there was no clear military victor in this war. At the point of the signing of the treaty none of the sides held enough control to claim that they were dominating the others. The end of the war was not a victory for any side but rather a compromise that heavily favoured the goals of the nationalist. This is a minor yet important thing to note when trying to understand the context this war provides to the rest of this research. Mugabe came out on top, but did not win the war.

This all does provide the necessary background to help understand the attitude of Mugabe regarding the former colonisers and their interference within his country. It is entirely logical for a person, or even an entire group of people to resent those they have fought against after being repressed. With the war being fought mainly over the right of self-determination the following forms of addressing foreign interference seem to be entirely congruent with the aforementioned distaste for colonial influence. This context of war, compared with that of colonialism creates an environment of hostility between Mugabe and his European adversaries.

⁷⁴ “The Liberation War, 1965-1980 - p. 4,”

⁷⁵ Lord Carrington, Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo and Delegations, Lancaster House Agreement, September-December 1979, Lancaster House, London.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Sovereignty as reward for overcoming the struggle

The sovereignty aspect of his rhetoric consisted of 2 pillars. The first amongst these is the idea that Zimbabwe has earned its sovereignty and therefore should be allowed to act like a sovereign nation. Which is a notable difference from normal ideas of how states gain sovereignty. In more western notions sovereignty is something states gain as they gain legitimacy over their territory.⁷⁷ The sovereignty of Zimbabwe as described by Mugabe is a concept reliant on multiple conditions that are not found in the northern definition of the word. He makes an inherent link between certain conditions and struggles, and overcoming those being the basis for his country's sovereignty. While in a European context the idea of gaining sovereignty through fighting for it is not an entirely foreign concept, it is most definitely not an inherent prerequisite for attaining it. This differs from Mugabe in the sense where he is clearly of the belief that there is indeed an inherent added value through overcoming struggle.⁷⁸ He never explicitly states that this is the case, yet the way he refers to those struggles as being an integral aspect of the self-determination of his nation. These references can be split up into multiple conditions. The main two that he mentions as being the justification for his country's right to exercise self-determination which will be explained in the coming paragraphs.

The first one comes down to a philosophy of keeping to one's own business. One of the conditions he states as being vital to ensuring that a country is acting within its moral boundaries, is that of non-interference. As he believes that it is unjust for nations to invade others.⁷⁹ Though the manner in which he states it prevents it from being an absolute statement. Mugabe repeatedly highlights this central tenet of his beliefs in the context of European intervention in Africa.⁸⁰⁻⁸¹ His country is an African country, in Africa, run by Africans, for Africans, a country that does not interfere in the business of others, as a result Europeans (in the case of this particular address) have no right to intervene or punish his country for its own policy.⁸² While he specifically refers to European hypocrisy, it seems reasonable to assume that respecting other's sovereignty is integral to being allowed to morally exercise one's own. Mugabe laments how this only seems to apply to those in the

⁷⁷ Humphrey "Sovereignty" pp. 418.-419.

⁷⁸ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 23.

⁷⁹ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Speech to the UN General Assembly" Sept. 18, 2005. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 31-32.

⁸⁰ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" pp. 22-23

⁸¹ Mugabe, "Speech to the UN 2005" pp. 31-32.

⁸² Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" pp. 22-23.

Global South, but this will be elaborated upon in the next subchapter. At the current moment it is only integral to understand that this *keep to one's self* is relevant to gain a proper understanding of his rhetoric. This message lies at the core of this specific aspect of his rhetoric. Yet it is also backed up by another pillar.

This second pillar is that this sovereignty is not something that was granted to them, but rather something that was fought and struggled for, which gives it more inherent value that ought to be respected.⁸³ When it comes to how Zimbabwe and by extent other African nations have gained this right, Mugabe consistently refers to the fight that gave Zimbabwe its independence and its freedom. Stating that this struggle gives them a unique position in which they ought to be allowed to take extra measures to ensure that the end of the struggle is resolved properly.⁸⁴ The struggle against colonialism, and imperialism is what grants Zimbabwe the right to exert its power to end this struggle internally. By implying that a righteous struggle makes the sovereignty of a state valid, he both calls the European system into question, as they are the force to be opposed, while simultaneously strengthening the Zimbabwean global position as a combatant in a conflict against imperial agents and the formation of global hegemony.

By making sovereignty inherently linked to these ideals Mugabe seeks to strengthen his position as the leader of a righteous sovereign nation under unjust attack by outside forces, and in doing so undermining northern efforts to legitimise their own sanctions against him. This is not the only manner in which this is done, however, as he does not only attempt to give his own country the moral high ground, he also seeks to push his opposition into a position of perceived moral destitution.

Sovereignty as a way of discrediting the Global North

Another way in which Mugabe uses the concept of sovereignty is in an attempt to discredit the European and American powers that have imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. Simply making his own state look morally justified is only part of his strategy, it seems imperative to Mugabe to also ensure that the other side looks as unjust as possible. This is once more done through a two pronged strategy. Firstly he exposes the hypocrisy of the north by juxtaposing their behaviour with his own and highlighting the difference in reaction. A primary example

⁸³ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 23.

⁸⁴ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Speech to the UN General Assembly" Sept. 26, 2007. *Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe*, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 40-41.

of this demonising the north comes in his speech to the UN where he speaks on the fate of former Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith.

“Ian Smith is responsible for the death of well over 50,000 of my people. I bear scars of his tyranny which Britain and America condoned. I meet his victims everyday. Yet he walks free. He farms free. He talks freely, associates freely under a black Government. We taught him democracy. We gave him back his humanity. He would have faced a different fate here and in Europe if the 50, 000 he killed were Europeans. Africa has not called for a Nuremberg trial against the white world which committed heinous crimes against its own humanity. It has not hunted perpetrators of this genocide, many of whom live to this day, nor has it got reparations from those who offended against it. Instead it is Africa which is in the dock, facing trial from the same world that persecuted it for centuries.”⁸⁵

In this short quote it quickly becomes clear that want the world to perceive him as a forgiving figure that is being attacked by those that caused massive harm to him and his people. In this one quote Mugabe both highlights the moral persona he has created for himself and heavily critiques the north for their transgressions. In doing so the discourse is shaped in a manner where the accused have to either acquiesce to his accusations or ignore them. This way of portraying the north creates an environment where they have to defend themselves on moral grounds where their footing is weak. This creates a new power dynamic, which is not reliant on actual hard or soft power, but rather on an ethical level. Mugabe’s tactic to call out this moral bankruptcy also ties into the following aspect of his rhetoric.

The second prong highlights the creeping imperial threat that he perceives in the foreign policy of these nations. After the above quote, he calls out President Bush for his many imperialist transgressions in the middle east and elsewhere.⁸⁶ In earlier speeches he criticises all intervention as neocolonial activity to ensure that his country stays economically occupied by foreign powers.⁸⁷ He continuously blames the west for the struggles of his country, and to a large extent he is not entirely wrong. As mentioned before, a vast majority of his country’s land was owned by foreign settlers that had come only 30-40 years earlier for the most part. Yet by highlighting how all of this intervention could be considered imperialism he once more creates a discourse in which the north has to defend itself from

⁸⁵ Mugabe, “Speech to the UN 2007” pp. 39-40.

⁸⁶ Mugabe, “Speech to the UN 2007” p. 41.

⁸⁷ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p. 21.

accusations which are hard to disprove, as most of their opponents would claim that this idea is entirely valid.

Both of these forms of argumentation are used in order to both vilify and delegitimize the north. For in exposing this and comparing it to his self-declared righteous behaviour he fundamentally undermines the northern position which could potentially erode their support base. The purpose of this is therefore, not to directly justify his land reform, but rather it is an effort to delegitimize those who would oppose it.

Conclusion Ch. 2

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the second arm of Mugabe's argumentation. While the first chapter sought to explore the why, why was land reform necessary, this chapter tackled the justification and legitimization of Mugabe's rhetoric. Through exploring the Bush/Chimurenga War the opponents of Mugabe and his policy were highlighted, as those factions that opposed his goals then found their origins in the factions that opposed his goals during this timeframe. While the war ended in a compromise favouring his side, it was no victory, and the resentment remained, if not explicitly then below the surface. This part is clearly highlighted by his moralising of land reform as being something that was inevitable to restore order and balance to a country that was ruined by outside forces. When those forces then criticised him for it he was quick to highlight how his regime was legitimate. He demonstrated that his government refrained from interfering in other states and thereby negatively interacting with their sovereignty, while also highlighting that the sovereignty of his nation was worth so much more because of the previous conflict to acquire it. He put himself as a moral figure trying to rectify the sins of the past. Yet, he also took his speeches as opportunities to further condemn those opposing his goals by exposing their hypocrisy and their own hidden agendas, making them out to be a moral lesser to his state. He used the concept of sovereignty to simultaneously raise himself up and tear the north down, and in doing so added to his land reform justifications by depriving the opposition of proper ground to stand on, and make their accusations from.

Chapter 3: Socialism

“The sustainable empowerment of the poor cannot take place in circumstances where democratic national sovereignties are assaulted and demonised on a daily basis.” -Robert Mugabe⁸⁸

Mugabe’s rhetoric consists of multiple dimensions, two of which have already been explored within this paper. The third and last one that will be explored in order to gain an understanding in the justifications of land reform is the socialist angle. While the previous chapters focused predominantly on the more theoretical aspects of his argumentation; how the north has and continued to harm his nation, and therefore their objections are irrelevant, this chapter will focus on his argumentation directly supporting his actions. Most of Mugabe’s justifications, as discussed before, have, for the most part, not relied on the inherent value of his argument, but rather on the illegitimacy of those opposing his reforms. With a notable exemption in chapter 1, this chapter will therefore focus more on the actual direct justifications as to why land reform was actively needed according to Mugabe.

This argument of Mugabe is often supported by his Maoist ideology, an ideology that was vital during his fight in the Bush/Chimurenga War as it was the ideology under which he unified his side of the fighting. In addition it also aided his organisation as it came to rely quite heavily on foreign backers, with most the notable amongst them being China.⁸⁹ The Maoist influences however did not cease after the war and remained relevant for most of his rule, and were indeed quite visible in his public addresses in which he justified land reform. This chapter will seek to explore how Maoist thought both influenced, and was used by Mugabe in order to justify his land reforms. This will be done through an exploration of the Maoist past of Zimbabwe, which will include a short and concise definition of the ideology, in addition to the way it was a factor within the struggle for Zimbabwean independence. The Chinese influence during the war period will be briefly examined, but while Sino-Zimbabwean relations are interesting and rather dynamic, they cannot be discussed fully within the boundaries of this research. Though there are opportunities for research within this

⁸⁸ Mugabe, “Address to WSSD” p. 21.

⁸⁹ Fani Zvomuya, “China-Zimbabwe Relations: From Liberation to United Front |,” accessed May 9, 2024, <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/china-zimbabwe-relations-from-liberation-to-united-front/>.

specific field in the future, as this is an aspect of Zimbabwean history that ought to be examined in more detail.

This will be followed by an examination of how two of the primary pillars of this school of thought come back in his argumentation. The first of the two aspects that will be discussed is that of agriculture as the foundation for the Zimbabwean economy and national identity, as stated by Mugabe. The second will be the removal of the landowning elite in order to facilitate greater agricultural agency and participation by the economically more disadvantaged. Through the exploration of all three of these factors the more practical side of his rhetoric will be brought to the forefront once more, allowing for a more total overview of the subject. With this final piece of information the paper can finally conclude the purpose of its research.

Maoism and Mugabe

Before the impact of Maoism in Mugabe's rhetoric can be explored, a basic explanation of the ideology is warranted. This is both, because it will ensure that all that are reading this will operate from a similar conceptual understanding, and because it will also highlight the most important aspects of the ideology which the paper uses for the purposes of analysis. This ensures that this research can be criticised in an accurate manner as the concepts used are clearly defined, while also allowing those unfamiliar with the ideology to be quickly informed of its most relevant aspects. The theory of Maoism is a variant of socialism that differs from Marxism and Leninism in a few distinct ways. Firstly it places much more of an emphasis on martial pride and competence, it romanticises the struggle of armed conflict and martial culture.⁹⁰ This is something which has been highlighted more in previous chapters when relating to Mugabe's public rhetoric. He mentions the struggles, and specifically the fighting against the oppressor ad nauseam in his speeches. It also has seemed to influence those fighting under him during the liberation war. As, according to the eye witnesses that were trained by the Chinese during the war, their teachings focused on the philosophical aspect as well as the physical and theoretical aspects of war.⁹¹

The Maoist approach and combat doctrine became vital during the liberation war, and most certainly left their impact on the country, but most importantly Mugabe and the way he

⁹⁰ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Maoism." Encyclopedia Britannica, April 21, 2024.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maoism>.

⁹¹ Zvomuya, "China-Zimbabwe Relations".

shows deference to these ideals in his speeches.⁹² The combination of martial struggle and a united people are both important ideals in Maoism doctrine, and both regularly take front stage in Mugabe's addresses. When demonising the north, as highlighted earlier, it is often accompanied by jubilations of the struggles of his people and how they overcome. While more implicit than the following ways in which this socialist school has impacted the narrative he seeks to create it in its own ways. While this manner of thinking is not entirely unique to Maoism, it is still relevant to note beforehand.

The second manner in which Maoism differs from other communist thought is its focus on agricultural revolution rather than industrial revolution. While the European schools of socialist thought tend to nullify the impact that the farmer class can have on revolution. Maoism in opposition places these farmers at the heart of the revolution and the new state.⁹³ This aspect is the most relevant for the purposes of this research, because, Mugabe uses this line of reasoning extensively when justifying his land reform. Mao believed that the peasant class was a vital part of the revolution and that their plight and work should lay at the heart of his new nation.⁹⁴ The non-northern approach, following Maoist thought, therefore, also follows this focus on planting over production. The global south, especially states like Zimbabwe, have always relied on agricultural exports rather than industrial exports, which can be seen by the fact that throughout the last 100 years, farmers have always been a massive part of governance, as the richest class of people in the country.⁹⁵ While this alliance did eventually break down (with the land reform of Mugabe being one of the primary reasons for the collapse of "friendly" relations) the impact of the agricultural sector on Zimbabwe's economy is massive. Though it is important to note that the mining industry does make up the majority of the exports, and agriculture is actually the smallest economic sector in contemporary times.⁹⁶ Though it was still by far the most prevalent economic sector mentioned by Mugabe not only when justifying land reform but also when addressing the global community in general.⁹⁷ This then indicates how prevalent and important the Maoist school was to Mugabe, as his priorities always remained agricultural when addressing the outside world. While it is of course impossible to ascertain exactly why this is, based on the evidence of him being a staunch socialist and specifically Maoist, combined with his many

⁹² Mugabe, "Speech to the UN 2007" p. 40.

⁹³ Britannica "Maoism"

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp. 45-46.

⁹⁶ "Zimbabwe," in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, May 7, 2024), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zimbabwe/#economy>.

⁹⁷ Based on a thorough reading of all the speeches mentioned in the bibliography, the majority mention agriculture but not industry.

speeches, this does seem like the most logical conclusion. With it now established what Maoism is, and that Mugabe ascribed to its principles, the question remains, how did this thought come through in his justifications for land reform. How does Mugabe use this ideology to justify his actions?

Agriculture as the foundation of Mugabe's Zimbabwe

Mugabe believes that his nation is an agrarian nation which relies on its agricultural products to survive.⁹⁸ It is within this vein that he seeks to justify his land reform. This and the idea that the farming identity, living from the African soil, are part of the national sense of self are the first things that he argues for in his speeches. The economic value of agriculture, as mentioned above, is an interesting claim by Mugabe and will be discussed before the notion of national identity being tied to farming.

The idea that Zimbabwe's economy was reliant on farming is an interesting notion. Mainly because of its blatant inaccuracy when taken into a vacuum. Ever since the boom of white settlers post World War Two the Zimbabwean economic sectors have been moving away from agriculture, and predominantly tobacco as their primary source of income.⁹⁹ The European settlers arrived mainly after a massive economic crisis and sought to establish new ways of gaining income.¹⁰⁰ This led to a rise in mining and industry that has continued well into the twenty-first century. With industry making up 22.2% of the GDP of Zimbabwe compared to agriculture's 12%.¹⁰¹ This leads one to question, why does Mugabe insist that agriculture is so economically relevant, while it is the smallest sector by far? This can be found both in his speeches regarding sustainable development and his general Maoist outlook. In his speeches he consistently laments the economical occupation of his nation.¹⁰² While he was specifically referring to land ownership in that quote it still applies to other sectors of the economy. While most mining is done by foreign investors, the resources have to be exported through a Zimbabwean agency.¹⁰³ This provides some of the necessary information to help explain his focus on agriculture, mining is something for which

⁹⁸ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 21.

⁹⁹ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." pp. 59,63.

¹⁰⁰ Selby, "White Farmers in Zimbabwe 1890-2005." p. 59.

¹⁰¹ "Zimbabwe," in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, May 7, 2024), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/zimbabwe/#economy>.

¹⁰² Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 21.

¹⁰³ 75, "Zimbabwe - Mining and Minerals," February 29, 2024,

<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-mining-and-minerals>.

Zimbabweans do not have the infrastructure, for which they almost completely rely on foreign investors, which would have made it incredibly risky for him to acquire for his own government.¹⁰⁴ This limitation did not exist for farming at the time¹⁰⁵, and therefore it was more attractive to acquire farming land for himself and the people. As this was land that he and his people could actually work and make profitable. This is of course mainly speculation, as it is impossible to look into a deceased person's actual thoughts, but it is compelling nonetheless.

This then causes for an interesting interaction with the idea of national identity. Mugabe repeatedly states that the ability to farm and collectively own your own land (as in the local Africans owning African land, not on an individual but rather a collective basis), are integral parts of the Zimbabwean experience.¹⁰⁶ While both of these are typical Maoist talking points, linking back to his Maoist origins, he does not seem to want to outright state this as being the case. Rather he portrays it as a self-evident truth. It is something that is simply true for his people. Their love for their continent, its wildlife, its plants, its soil, that is a vital aspect of being Zimbabwean.¹⁰⁷ It is this love for their environment that is lacking in the European coloniser that gives him the right to reform his land, for the good of nature and the environment.¹⁰⁸ It shows that the narrative he forms sticks to the same tack as the previously discussed ones, which is the presentation of Africans as the moral superior of the north. This time, however, it is used as an actual concrete argument in favour of land distribution, rather than just a way of discrediting the north and their sanctions. Yet while he never mentions the explicit link with Maoism, the concepts inherent in both his speech and within Maoist thought are quite similar indeed. Though for this specific speech it is important to take into account that he speaks on the environment and its importance, at an event specifically organised in order to discuss the environment and its importance. So it could also be feasible that instead of genuinely believing these things he was merely appealing to the conversational subject of the time. Though this seems unlikely as this idea of the importance of the African land and its value is mentioned throughout his speeches at other events too.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ 75, "Zimbabwe - Mining and Minerals," February 29, 2024, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/zimbabwe-mining-and-minerals>.

¹⁰⁵ Though time showed it was predominantly for himself and his allies.

¹⁰⁶ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 22-23.

¹⁰⁸ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 21-23.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Address at the World Summit on the Information Society" Dec. 10, 2003. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 28-29.

This however marks the end of the rather limited list of arguments that extolled the virtues of his reforms, rather than merely pointing to past injustice in need of rectifying.

The people's right to own their land.

The final argument used by Mugabe, however, links back to all the aforementioned arguments that he has given for land reform. The idea of justice. A large part of any socialist school of thought is the idea that the means of production should not be in the hands of a small elite, but rather in the hands of the proletariat. As expounded upon in chapter 1 the land reforms were prompted by the fact that after decades of colonial oppression, and two decades of "freedom" the country was still economically occupied by "foreign agents" according to Mugabe.¹¹⁰ This argument is almost as consistently mentioned as the immorality of northern intervention, and in actuality consists of two separate arguments that come together to form an overall anti-north narrative.

The first of these two arguments is the aforementioned colonial history. The following quote perfectly encapsulates the narrative that Mugabe tries to form a narrative reliant on the sins of the past affecting the present.

"Economically, we are still an occupied country, 22 years after our Independence."

-Robert Mugabe¹¹¹

Mugabe sees this oppression and the way it impacted his people as an unjust episode in history in need of correction, though his *proposed* method of doing so is distinctly socialist.¹¹² The issue he sees is the theft of his people's land, land that must be returned to the people, all the people.¹¹³ He blames European powers, specifically the UK, for causing this unequal division in order to maximise their own profit. The narrative he once more seeks to form is that of the rich willfully exploiting the poor in order to maximise their own profits at the cost of others. This critique of the pursuit of profit at all costs is entirely consistent with the

¹¹⁰ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" pp. 21-22.

¹¹¹ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" p. 23.

¹¹² Proposed is vital, as though it was not highlighted enough throughout the research, Mugabe talked a big game but did not deliver, preferring to keep the spoils to himself.

¹¹³ Mugabe, "Speech to the UN 2007" p. 40.

socialist thought that marked his earlier speeches during and shortly after the liberation war.¹¹⁴ The wealthy controlling all of the land, which in the case of Zimbabwe is equivalent to controlling the means of production, remains a prime evil in need of combating in his speeches. Though it is noticeable that throughout his speeches post-independence he shies away from overtly linking his actions and beliefs to socialist thought, but rather implicitly referencing the socialist schools of thought. This shift away is interesting, yet hard to conclusively explain within the confines of this thesis, though one could most certainly argue that it would have something to do with his own immense wealth acquired at the cost of his own people.

A people that suffered through much over the last one-hundred years. Suffering war, poverty, and famine all under British, then Rhodesian, and then Mugabe rule. This according to Mugabe was something that was in desperate need of fixing, and throughout his rule he would advocate to foreign powers that he was trying his hardest, but was thwarted by the north at every corner.¹¹⁵ All of Zimbabwe's woes were attributed to northern intervention by Mugabe, who blamed the white farmers for the poverty, inequality, and food-scarcity in his country.¹¹⁶ During the famine in 2008 Mugabe would once more mention to his people that their enemies, were interfering with food imports in order to overthrow their regime¹¹⁷, which while not directly linked to land reform does highlight the consistent throughline of his argumentation relying on the demonising of the north. It shows that Mugabe has somewhat altered his brand of Socialism to fit more with the colonial history of his country. He has transformed the class conflict into one of race, replacing the *bourgeoisie* with the *white man*, and in doing so transferred much of the socialist critiques from class to racial lines, in order to garner a stronger position and justify his removal of white farmers. This seems to be a vital cornerstone of his socialist ideological backing. In forming his narrative to justify the reforms, in which white farmers were targeted, he had to create a sense of justice, for which he needed to demonise all that is white, or European, or northern. For which he used a particularly socialist framework.

¹¹⁴ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Speech to First Zimbabwe Women's Seminar" May, 1979.. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 13-14.

¹¹⁵ Mugabe, "Speech to the UN 2007" p. 40.

¹¹⁶ Mugabe, "Address to WSSD" pp. 21-22.

¹¹⁷ Robert Gabriel Mugabe, "Speech at the Zimbabwean parliament" Aug. 28, 2008.. Speeches through the Years: Cde. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/MugabeSpeeches>. pp. 43-44.

Conclusion Ch. 3

To conclude this chapter, Mugabe's socialist roots do indeed show within his rhetoric though not necessarily in the way one might expect. Mugabe was taught socialism by the Chinese, and their specific brand of it, Maoism, seemed to work quite well with his goals at the time. A brand of socialism he stuck too, even though his economy was inherently more industrial rather than agricultural in nature. A puzzling finding, which begs for another study to explain this perceived inconsistency. Though there are some potential explanations, they fall outside of the scope of this paper and will therefore not be elaborated upon. The central point is that in his speeches, Mugabe emphasises Zimbabwe's agrarian identity and justifies his land reform based on this belief and the idea that farming is integral to the nation's self-concept. However, this argument overlooks the shifting economic landscape that had been occurring for decades, in which mining had become much more of a profitable venture, and provided Zimbabwe with considerably more. Mugabe's focus on agriculture can therefore only be attributed to his Maoist perspective. While he doesn't explicitly reference Maoism, the parallels between his rhetoric and Maoist ideology are apparent. Furthermore his claim that only African people can feel a true connection to the land and therefore deserve seems coherent with this Maoist idea only if the bourgeoisie are replaced with the European coloniser rather than with the rich in general. It is therefore highly probable that the convictions Mugabe portrays are not necessarily as convincingly rooted in Maoist theory, but rather in his own modified version of it. So to answer the original question leading this chapter, how has Maoist thought both influenced, and was used by Mugabe in order to justify his land reforms? It is clearly present in Mugabe's focus on agriculture, even if it was no longer the primary income source for his nation, while also being the basis for his own implicit theory of socialism. A theory that replaces class conflict with racial conflict, and in doing so requires demonisation of the west for his rhetoric to make coherent sense.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis the argumentation and rhetoric of Robert Gabriel Mugabe regarding land reform was analysed and put to the fore. Though there are certain limitations present within the research done. Before the final findings of the research are presented it is important to quickly note the potential shortcomings, and limitations of this research. This research on Mugabe's rhetoric is indeed just that. An examination of his rhetoric and the narrative that is formed as a result of his argumentation. Throughout the thesis there have been short references to the potential veracity of his statements, yet none have gone properly in depth to ascertain whether the statements he provides conform entirely to what Mugabe actually believed. While it is most certainly impossible to ascertain what he thought exactly, there is room within future research to fill in this gap. The disconnect between what Mugabe said and in actuality did is rather stark, and it begs to be explained. Though the cynical amongst the academic sphere could simply explain it away by stating that he was a politician, and politicians are notorious for playing fast and loose with the truth, that does not seem like an appropriate or properly in depth resolution to this question. This paper would, therefore, then also recommend that this very subject, the link between the rhetoric and the actual policy ought to be explored properly and completely in future research. In general this paper would indeed recommend that this subject is researched more from an angle that does not merely consist of explaining the failures of the Zimbabwean state. Something this paper has tried to achieve in an effort to move away from the somewhat worrying trend of only discussing Zimbabwe from a negative lens, and exploring the sides of the country and its history that are not merely expressions of state, and executive failure.

The lack of connection between the rhetoric and the actual policy within this paper is actively regretted, but will not, and should not be amended. This absence is the result of a purposeful choice to limit the parameters of this research. While it is a worthwhile subject, it simply would enlarge the subject matter of this paper to an unreasonable extent, that simply could not have been conducive to providing a coherent and consistent thesis. Therefore this limitation is not necessarily an issue with this paper, in the opinion of the author, but rather a consequence of the limited nature of this research. The attempt however, was still made to answer the question regarding rhetoric in a complete and accurate manner. This was done through a three-pronged approach, in which the following three conclusions were reached.

The first subject that was explored was the legacy of colonial history. The conclusions in this chapter mostly examined the effect of colonial history, and how these informed the narrative that Mugabe spun. It was concluded that there were two primary angles provided by harkening back to the past of oppression. Namely the angles of redistributive justice, and the angle of the immorality of those opposing him.

The first of these angles focusing on redistributive justice, provides a justification of land reform from the lens of justice. Something that Mugabe used extensively throughout his argumentation. What he was doing was justice, nothing more, and nothing less, and while this is most definitely interesting on its own it becomes far more interesting when combined with the findings of chapter three. This justice narrative does not necessarily function completely in its entirety, when put into a vacuum. While it seems somewhat valid on the surface, there is a lack of backing that suggests why redistribution is actually just. Yet, when combined with the Maoist ideology it becomes completely clear why this is such an integral part of the narrative that Mugabe forms. The redistribution does not merely function as a way of taking back something that was once ours, but rather it also functions on a higher theoretical level, namely that of ideology. The argument that is formed is no longer one of justice, or even vengeance depending on the perspective, but rather one of doing something objectively good that will better the lives of the people. The socialist under-, and overtones used by Mugabe mutate his argument lending it more credulity from differing angles. By combining the negative impacts of colonialism with the positive ones from socialism, the narrative he forms gains nuance. It is both idealistic, and moral, it makes his point more robust. If it were to be summarised his argument is transmuted from, we need justice for your sins because we need reparations, to justice will provide the country with a better and more optimistic future. The first argument, and therefore the first half that will answer the central research question goes as follows: Mugabe creates an image of a moral and just Zimbabwe merely doing what is right by its people, and common decency. It is an argument that relies on portraying his people as the victims of a vicious crime, trying to recover and ensure that the future is bright. There is another part to this argument however, it relies on demonising an outside party. For the moral argument to work there needs to be an amoral actor to juxtapose Mugabe's side with another. There needs to be a defence in case the inherent morality of his position is questioned.

This defence can be found in the second angle of Mugabe's rhetoric. Throughout all chapters, but especially the second chapter of this thesis Mugabe's demonisation of the north and white people in general has shone through quite regularly. It seems that as a result of over

a decade and a half of war, in combination with the oppression that preceded it, Mugabe has grown a severe distaste for the Global North. He consistently seeks to undermine northern positions, deeming them to be morally bankrupt and hypocritical for their behaviour in the global community. He cited three primary reasons for this in his rhetoric.

Firstly their robbery of African nations. He rarely fails to mention that his country, and others, were actively oppressed by Europeans for decades. He does this when discussing colonial history, of course, but also whenever the concepts of sovereignty and justice are mentioned. Their past sins are both a driving force behind why he must reform the distribution of his land, but also a reason that northern opposition is inherently inconsequential. They forced his hand after all, why should they be allowed to then also continue to influence the countries that freed themselves from their grasp. It is this colonial past that has caused the pain that needs to be healed in his narrative and furthermore, it also shows that these countries cannot be trusted to take care of his people, as the last time they had that power they used it merely to exploit Zimbabwe's people and soil. When once more combined with his Maoist origins it becomes increasingly more likely that this disdain for the north also finds its roots in his custom version of socialism, where the bourgeoisie has been replaced with the northern white elites. An elite that has sought to oppress the working farmers of Zimbabwe and still continues to try and oppress those that have valuable resources that they want. They will not rest until they have reestablished control over their previous subjects, or so he says at least.

The second point examines the hypocrisy that is inherent in their arguments. It links to both the sovereignty and colonial arguments. The north is hypocritical. They were the ones to steal land first, they violated the sovereignty of independent entities for selfish gain, they caused the hurt, only to then espouse how important sovereignty was. To teach that states have the right to self-determination, and even codify it into international law, only to then completely disregard this rhetoric when it suits their goals. Mugabe points out this hypocrisy so he can disregard northern protest out of hand as being merely hypocritical flexing of power. When this is combined with the history of land stealing by these same powers it does seem rather hypocritical to complain when this land is then taken back by the local populace. It is through this exposition that Mugabe fundamentally seeks to undermine the base on which the northern argument rests. Why listen to someone, if they are only complaining because it happens to them rather than to their opponents, because to him, the north and white people in Zimbabwe are the same party.

This then also links into the third and final line of reasoning that he uses to undermine the critique of him and his policy, the northern powers are still imperialist in nature, and their critique of him is neither genuine, nor safe to heed. His narrative of demonising does not only touch on the past, but also on the potential present and future behaviour of those that he seeks to demonise. According to Mugabe their interference is nothing more than Imperial politics, where a waning metropole tries to reassert its dominance over former territories. A move that can only be respected by the most morally destitute in his opinion. His rhetoric does not only speak of past oppressors, but also warns of how these oppressors still actively seek to garner control, and exert dominance. How then can these hostile actors argue that their interference is anything but self serving. By creating a continuous throughline between the colonial past and the then present he once more seeks to undermine north objections to his policy by further demonising their intentions.

Then to finally and concretely answer the question, how did Mugabe justify his land reform? He used a dual approach of legitimising his actions as being morally just on everyone's front, and discrediting his opposition as being immoral colonisers seeking to reestablish control over a free state. While this defence is most admirable in the opinion of this paper, his own disregard for his own justifications, is both disappointing and the subject matter for further research.

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Containing the following speeches all of which were given by Robert Gabriel Mugabe:

Speech to First Zimbabwe Women's Seminar in May 1979

First speech as Prime Minister in March 1980

Speech on the day of Zimbabwe's independence (Apr. 17, 1980)

Address to World Summit on Sustainable Development (Sept. 3, 2002)

Address at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit (Feb. 25, 2003)

Address at the World Summit on the Information Society (Dec. 10, 2003)

Message at beginning of Zanu-PF manifesto (2005)

Speech to the UN General Assembly (Sept. 18, 2005)

Speech in Harare at Zimbabwe's 26th Independence Celebrations (Apr. 16, 2006)

Speech at the UN General Assembly (Sept. 26, 2007)

Speech at the Zimbabwean Parliament (Aug. 28, 2008)

Speech to the UN General Assembly (Sept. 25, 2009)

Speech to the UN General Assembly (Sept. 24, 2010)

Speech at the UN General Assembly (Sept. 22, 2011)

Speech at 12th Zanu-PF Annual People's Conference (Dec. 9, 2011)

Speech at the National Sports Stadium (Apr. 18, 2012)

Speech at the UN General Assembly (Sept. 26, 2012)

Inauguration speech (Aug. 23, 2013)

Speech to the UN General Assembly (Sept. 26, 2013)

Speech at the Joshua Nkomo Airport (Dec. 2013)

Speech to commemorate the Joshua Nkomo statue (Dec. 2013)

Speech at 34th Independence Day Celebrations in Harare (Apr. 19, 2014)

Speech at Zanu-PF Youth Conference (Aug. 12, 2014)

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Speech to the African Union (Jan. 30, 2015)
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Appendices

Appendix Acronyms

WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army