

## REVIEW

### Mitchell Mackay

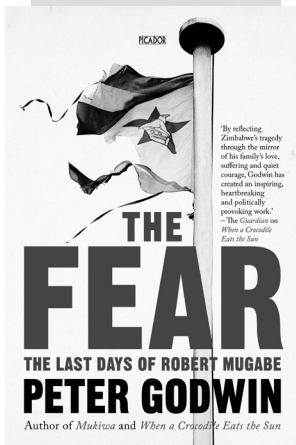
holds a Masters degree in International Relations from the University of the Witwatersrand and was previously an intern at the Helen Suzman Foundation. He is currently an analyst for Pasco Risk Management in their Johannesburg office.

# *The Fear: The last days of Robert Mugabe*

*Zimbabwe has become an accepted tragedy. The crimes against humanity that have played out in the country since the inception of Robert Mugabe's rule are an indictment of the moral consciousness of South Africa and indeed, the entire continent. To the outside observer, this once prosperous country now exists in a perpetual state of political malaise, economic decay and state-orchestrated violence, perhaps too far gone to be retrieved from the depths to which it has sunk. The will of civil society, appointed intermediaries, or the opposition cannot seem to match the insatiable desire for power on the part of ZANU-PF and the powerful military junta which has been consolidating its power for over 30 years. Hope seems to have long since drained from the soul of Zimbabwe, as the long-festering political situation and regional politicking often overshadow the total injustice imposed on the Zimbabwean people. Enter Peter Godwin.*

Godwin's latest book, *The Fear: The Last Days of Robert Mugabe*, drags you kicking and screaming into the dark underbelly of the Zimbabwean tragedy, chronicling the presidential elections of 2008 and its blood-soaked aftermath. In the mind of Godwin, and many other Zimbabweans desperate for reform, the elections were initially seen as a critical opportunity for Zimbabweans to repudiate Mugabe's calamitous rule and usher in some form of political normality. This was predicted to be the curtain call for ZANU-PF and its ailing leader, clearing the way for the popular Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the ever-resilient Morgan Tsvangirai. It was not to be.

After consulting with his inner circle, Mugabe and his cohorts, via the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, indiscriminately doctored the national vote and forced the opposition into an election run-off. The events that followed will surely be documented as one of Africa's most horrendous acts of state-sanctioned violence, an attack on the people of Zimbabwe to which Godwin was to bear witness. A coordinated assault was launched upon those who had not given ZANU-PF their vote and a systematic rooting out of suspected MDC supporters was carried out in and around cities, towns, and rural villages. Through the infamous Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) and the broader state security network, Mugabe's generals were able to ensure that violence and intimidation were able to trickledown from the highest echelons of government to the far reaches of Zimbabwe's borders. Marauding ZANU-PF enforcers carried out rape and torture within their own communities, recklessly burning down households and assaulting those deemed to be opposition supporters. Godwin offers a firsthand account as the hospital wards began to bulge and the scars of a defunct state and a callous regime began to bare themselves on innocent people. This violent retort by Mugabe and his generals became known simply as, *The Fear*.



THE FEAR: THE LAST DAYS OF ROBERT MUGABE, by Peter Godwin  
ISBN: 978 033 0507769  
Published by Picador

In many ways, the post-election violence mimics the *Gukurahundi* massacre of the early 1980s, itself planned and executed by Mugabe and key figures within his security and military structures, many of whom still hold their positions. As *The Fear* plays itself out, Godwin recounts such unpalatable instances of human tragedy and moral injustice that I found myself able to digest only a handful of pages at a time. Yet, in pressing on, one forcefully assimilates the breadth of hardship that has engulfed everyday life in Zimbabwe.

Unlike *Mukiwa*, with its warm boyhood charm and adventurous edge, or the eloquently crafted *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*, Godwin pulls no punches with *The Fear* and is happy to let stylistic nuances be supplanted by the gritty details of human tragedy. This is a heartbreaking book and it puts the reader through a gauntlet of varying emotions and, as one of the few Western journalists in the country during the post-election period, Godwin serves a lead role in the melancholy drama that is Zimbabwe. Godwin put his own personal safety at risk by slipping into the country and documenting a country in freefall, using *The Fear* as a canvass upon which to paint an indescribable portrait of raw heartache. As the Helen Suzman Foundation celebrates Art and Culture in this edition of *Focus*, *The Fear* represents a significant piece of literature, as Godwin's powerful narrative is able to transplant the pain, personal loss and suffering from the crumbling streets of Harare or the rolling hills of Chimanimani and deposit it with the reader. History has no detailed account as to the extent of the brutality that was employed during *Gukurahundi* all those years ago, highlighting the power, and importance, of Godwin's written word amidst the contemporary bloodletting.

---

*As the Helen Suzman Foundation celebrates Art and Culture in this edition of Focus, The Fear represents a significant piece of literature, as Godwin's powerful narrative is able to transplant the pain, personal loss and suffering from the crumbling streets of Harare or the rolling hills of Chimanimani and deposit it with the reader.*

---

This is a haunting book about human tragedy and, accordingly, one shouldn't expect an exhaustive dissection of Zimbabwe's political landscape and the inner workings of a gluttonous and sadistic regime. Through his account of human suffering, Godwin says all that needs to be said about the ruling ZANU-PF. For those who wish to better understand the perverse psyche of Robert Mugabe and the delinquency of the ruling party, Heidi Holland's *Dinner with Mugabe* reads as an excellent complement. *The Fear* was intended to be rough-cut and puts the spotlight firmly back on the human aspect of the Zimbabwe issue.

Godwin's reverence for his countrymen is well known and *The Fear* is a testament to the resilience of innocuous Zimbabweans as they refuse to give up their moral foundations or their persistence in the face of hardship. His inherent knack of illuminating specks of hope is still apparent amidst his recount of modern-day Zimbabwe. Throughout the book, Godwin's own personal anguish is tangible and his passion for his homeland is what gives *The Fear* its authenticity and raw edge. Robert Lee Frost, the American poet, maintained that "no tears in the writer, no tears in the reader". Rest assured, Godwin has wept for his country.