

# Mugabe & The White African

A film by Lucy Bailey & Andrew Thompson  
94 mins, 2009



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## **PRAISE FOR MUGABE & THE WHITE AFRICAN**

“Many viewers will leave “Mugabe and the White African” thinking that they have seen few, if any, documentaries as wrenching, sad and infuriating, and those feelings will be justified.” – Mike Hale, [The New York Times](#)

“Eye-opening chronicle... a remarkably vivid portrait of a land and its people.” – Gary Goldstein, [LA Times](#)

“This incendiary documentary showcases Mugabe's corrupt use of land reform to further polarize a fragile nation already divided along racial lines.” – Ella Taylor, [Village Voice](#)

“Historically, politically, ethically and morally imperative for the world to see.”  
- Amy Handler, [Moving Pictures Magazine](#)

“A politically minded documentary... has both the perilous, buzz-worthy backstory of a [Burma VJ](#) and the patient, landscape-aware mise-en-scène of a Maysles film... as eerily compelling and narratively competent as *New Yorker*-style fiction.” – Joseph Jon Lanthier, [Slant Magazine](#)

“Tense and surprisingly moving... a classy documentary.” - Fionnuala Halligan, [Screen Daily](#)

FIVE STARS! “Superb documentary...thought-provoking, distressing, shockingly tense and always very sad, it is surely one of the best documentaries of the year.”- Derek Adams, [Time-Out London](#)

“The most wonderful film...No screen heroes this year will trump the bravery of (this) family.”  
- Ben Hoyle, [The Times \(London\)](#)

“Potent mix of suspense, pathos and indignation...nerve jangling, intense.” - Ronnie Scheib, [Variety](#)

“This extraordinary profile in courage starkly bears passionate and brave witness as two flinty farmers stand up for their rights in a good vs. evil fight.” – Nora Lee Mandel, [Film-Forward.com](#)

“In essence a thriller...an extraordinary and weirdly entertaining movie.” - Jen Graves, [The Stranger](#)

“Unmissable portrait of courage.” - [Chelmsford Weekly News](#)

“An intimate and frightening story.” - [This Is Kent](#)

“Moving, gripping and important... finest new documentary I've seen this year and, if there's any justice, a surefire nominee in the best documentary category at next year's Academy Awards.”  
- Sonny Bunch, [The Washington Times](#)

“A rare, firsthand glimpse into a country whose trauma has been difficult to capture on film due to the onerous burdens imposed on foreign media.” – James Kirchick, [World Affairs](#)

“A film that needs to be seen, and moreover, discussed ...the film, as a medium, is lyrical in its unfolding, incorporating an organic, moving score by Johnny Pilcher...a true work of art that resonates in a deeply poetic manner.” – [Film Radar](#)

“Bailey and Thompson managed to create a remarkably vivid portrait of a land and its people, while bringing us two unforgettable heroes in Campbell and Freeth.”- Gary Goldstein, [The Chicago Tribune](#)

“A notable piece of filmmaking” – Samantha Ofole, [Campus Circle Newspaper](#)

“This film highlights the importance of the rule of law, it doesn’t matter if you are black or white, any member of society who feels their rights are trampled on should be able to turn to the rule of law... This is about building a house of justice in Africa.” - *Botswanan Judge*

## **AWARDS AND NOMINATIONS**

NOMINATED: Best Film Debut at the British Academy Award, *Jan. 2010*  
WINNER: Best Documentary at the British Independent Film Awards, *Dec. 2009*  
SHORTLISTED: Academy of Motion Pictures for Best Documentary Oscar®, *Nov.09*  
NOMINATED: International Documentary Association Awards for Best Documentary, *Nov.09*  
OFFICIAL SELECTION: International Documentary Festival Amsterdam, *Nov.09*  
WINNER: Hamptons International Film Festival, Special Jury Prize, *Oct. 2009*  
NOMINATED: Grierson Award for Best Documentary, London Film Festival, *Oct. 2009*  
WINNER: Silverdocs 2009, Grand Jury Prize, *June 2009*

“Oh lift high the banner, the flag of Zimbabwe  
The symbol of freedom proclaiming victory;  
We praise our heroes' sacrifice,  
And vow to keep our land from foes;  
And may the Almighty protect and bless our land...  
The land of our fathers bestowed upon us all;  
From Zambezi to Limpopo  
May leaders be exemplary .”

– **Zimbabwe’s National Anthem**

“I’m still the Hitler of the times. This Hitler has only one objective; justice for his people, sovereignty for his people. If that is Hitler, right... then let me be a Hitler ten fold.”

– **Robert Mugabe**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Michael Campbell is one of the few hundred white farmers left in Zimbabwe since President Robert Mugabe began his violent 'Land Reform' program in 2000. Since then the country has descended into chaos. In 2008 Mike took the unprecedented step of challenging President Robert Mugabe in an International Court; accusing Robert Mugabe and his government of racial discrimination and violations of basic human rights. What follows is an intimate, moving and often terrifying account of one man and his family’s extraordinary courage in the face of overwhelming injustice and brutality.

Set against the tumultuous 2008 Presidential elections *Mugabe and the White African* follows Mike and son-in-law Ben Freeth's harrowing attempt to save their farm and with it the homes and livelihoods of 500 black workers and their families. Filmed over 12 months, a gripping courtroom drama unfolds whilst all the time Mike, his family and the farm workers face the all too real threats of Mugabe's wrath on the farm. After months of frightening threats and a horrific attack the Court’s judges finally rule unanimously in Mike’s and Ben’s favour. They return to the farm. But will Mugabe and his henchmen abide the Courts decision?

## **FILM DESCRIPTION**

Michael Campbell is one of the few hundred white farmers still left in Zimbabwe since President Robert Mugabe began enforcing his controversial land reform program. Initially, a policy meant to reclaim white-owned land and redistribute it to poor black Zimbabweans, it has instead been used to 'gift' farms to his loyal supporters. It has left the country in chaos. Since 2000, formerly thriving farms that employed thousands, now sit derelict whilst poverty and hunger thrive amongst the majority of the country's citizens.

Mike, like hundreds of farmers before him, have suffered years of multiple land invasions and violence at his farm, but this genial 75 year old, with a dry sense of humour, has refused to back down. In 2008, Mike took the unprecedented step of challenging President Robert Mugabe and his 'Land Reform' program in an International Court. He accuses Robert Mugabe's regime of illegal racial discrimination and violations of basic human rights.

Set against the tumultuous 2008 presidential elections, Mugabe and the White African, follows Mike and son-in-law Ben Freeth's harrowing attempt to save their farm and the lives and livelihoods of the 500 black workers that live and work on the farm. It is an unprecedented case, on whose outcome rests not only Mike and the families' future, but also the future of millions of ordinary Zimbabweans who continue to suffer at the hands of one of the world's most infamous tyrants. On the brink of losing everything, Mike and his family (wife Angela, daughter Laura who runs her own linen business, and her husband Ben Freeth) stand united by their courage, their faith and their hope.

In an intimate and often terrifying film, this is the only documentary feature film to have come out of Zimbabwe in recent years, where a total press ban existed.

## FILMMAKER BIOS

### **Lucy Bailey – Director**

Lucy has over ten years experience as a director in television, the majority of which was spent shooting on the African continent, often covering sensitive subjects. Lucy has a background in anthropology and a huge passion for Africa. She specializes in bringing emotion to the forefront in her films, including Lorenzo's *Oil – Miracle or Myth* (BBC 2004,) and *Saving Turtles* from the *Saving Planet Earth* series (BBC 2007.) Lucy has recently been working for Comic Relief to make their appeal films for Red Nose Day (2007) and Sport Relief campaigns (2006, 2008) and for this work was nominated for the One World Media Popular Features Award in 2008.

### **Andrew Thompson – Director/Cameraman**

Andrew is a BAFTA and RTS nominated cameraman who has over 12 years of experience filming all over the world for C4, BBC, National Geographic and Discovery. Whilst most of his time is spent as a director of photography, he increasingly has focused on directing. He shoots on all formats from Super 16mm to HD. He has extensive film-making experience in hostile environments and has worked in many parts of Africa. Previous credits include; *Sex Traffic* (C4, 2008), *Inside The Kingdom* (BBC 2007), *Brain Keenan: Back to Beirut* (BBC 2007,) *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan* (SKY 2007,) *Geldof on Africa* (BBC, 2004.) Lucy and Andrew have filmed together on many occasions, and have developed a unique style and way of working. This is their first feature length documentary. In 2008 they formed Explore Films.

### **Elizabeth Morgan Hemlock – Producer**

Elizabeth's career began at Working Title Films (*Four Weddings and a Funeral; Bridget Jones' Diary; Notting Hill*) before spending ten years as a leading talent agent in London representing actors and directors. She has been a script development executive and development producer on various feature films through her company, Wild Films. She was a producer for *Journey Man*, and an associate producer for *The Mentors*, a Sci-Fi series for Flextech. Elizabeth and David run Arturi Films and co-founded and launched the International Screenwriters' Festival in June 2006, now in its fourth year with Oscar and BAFTA winning talents in the line-up. Elizabeth runs their feature film slate at Arturi Films.

### **David Pearson – Producer**

David has over thirty years experience as an award winning director, producer, executive producer and commissioning editor. He has successfully managed hundreds of productions, many of them on controversial subjects including *Adopt Me I'm A Teenager* (C4 2005,) and, for the BBC, *Under the Sun; 10x10; Comic Relief; Signs of The Times* and *Them and Us*. As a producer and director he was nominated for the Prix Italia (for *Whose House is it Anyway*), twice nominated for the Grierson Award and BAFTA, and once for the Prix Nicki. David also founded the International Screenwriters' Festival in the UK for which he is Festival Director. It attracts 500-600 writers, producers and directors from 15 countries each year to celebrate the art, craft and business of screens story-telling.

### **Jonny Pilcher – Composer**

Jonny Pilcher is a sonic artist with a wealth of experience in numerous professional capacities. In 2008, in addition to his score for 'Mugabe and the White African', Jonny also composed music for a three-part documentary on science and religion. He wrote music for a number of television broadcast 'idents,' for the BBC 1, BBC 2, Sky Sports, GMTV and Nickelodeon He also provided music for Sara Crow's arts council funded dance theatre production *In the Days that Followed*. Jonny co-composed music for Darren Johnston's dance piece 'outré' which enjoyed a critically acclaimed run at the Aurora Nova venue at the Edinburgh festival. He composed the score for *The Smallest Things*, a dance-film and live work, also by choreographer Sara Crow, performed at numerous venues across London and Eastern England. Jonny composed the score for a short film by Jamie Paul Quantrill called *Valerian* which was premiered at the Curzon Cinema in Mayfair. Outside of his contributions to film and theatre Jonny plays for his band Weevil. Weevil recently supported on tour with Athlete & Snow Patrol.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

We have worked together for eight years - and much of that time has been spent filming in Africa, for which we have a huge passion. We've recently been working on short films in Africa, where we have been privileged to tell the stories of people who are so poor that they would never have 'mattered' otherwise.

We have been in many life and death situations with our contributors and have cried and laughed with them as we shared some of the most intimate moments of their lives. Partially because of this, we have been developing and working on longer format documentary ideas in Africa for some time now. The story of *Mugabe and the White African* is a story that we feel the world should hear.

Much has been reported about the eradication of white-owned farms in Zimbabwe and the deterioration and the subsequent collapse of the country. We have all seen news images of beaten up farmers and seen the desperation in people's eyes as they live in hunger, hopelessness and fear. We wanted to make a film about a big issue like the land reform program policy in Zimbabwe, but in a very intimate and personal way.

We believe our audience for this film is sophisticated, and able to read images and characters. There is no commentary; we allow our 'characters' to speak for themselves to build up a compelling narrative. The film hinges on emotional moments in image and sound, so its impact on the memory will last long after the facts have been forgotten. This has been our trademark, particularly in our work for Comic Relief. The camera dwells on details - we like shots that are lavish and lingering and show a trust in the relationship with our subjects. This story is both epic and at the same time intimate, and the shooting style reflects this. We let the unfolding action dictate the pace, but the feel will be cinematic and in the moment.

We have done everything we can to tell this extraordinary story; one that would no doubt otherwise forever remain as a 'newspaper snippet.' We want this film to take the viewer to the heart of a historical moment, one that could be pivotal in Africa's future. The film responds to what unfolds, but at the end of the day we want the viewers to be able to make up their own minds.

**LUCY BAILEY & ANDREW THOMPSON, 2009**

## DIRECTOR'S Q & A'S

**With Directors Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson**

**Q: Why Mugabe and the White African?**

We felt that the white farmers' story was one that was repeatedly overlooked, but really needed telling. The film serves as a window into what is happening in Africa right now. The SADC court case represents a watershed moment in Southern Africa, where Africa really has an opportunity to stand up and be counted. At its core it is a story of good versus evil, of justice, bravery and faith - things all of us can relate to and question from anywhere in the world.

**Q: What did you want to achieve with Mugabe and the White African?**

We wanted to tell a great emotional story. We wanted to make an engaging and compelling film that would attract the widest possible audience so as to get the message to people about what is really happening inside Zimbabwe.

**Q: Is the white farmers' story particularly close to your heart?**

It is now! It was always a story that we thought was interesting and had been undersold by the press. The deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe and what Robert Mugabe was doing there made us both furious, so it was something we talked about, but with no obvious 'in' to tell the story it could well have been another of those program 'ideas' that we talked about but which never materialized.

**Q: How did you find out about the Campbell case?**

We both travel extensively in Africa with work and on holiday. We heard about the case whilst in South Africa and we both looked at each other and thought, "What a wonderful story." When we got calls and eventually got an email address for Ben.

**Q: What were some of the biggest challenges?**

Filming in Zimbabwe 'illegally,' particularly covering such a contentious subject, would almost certainly have led to imprisonment. We had to take risks but managed those risks as carefully as we could. The logistics of filming illegally meant our forward planning had to be watertight and for each trip. We always wanted to make a film that was well shot and crafted. A film with this level of high production values, filmed in a dangerous country with restrictions on what we could film, can't just be shot from the hip. The team, producers David Pearson and Elizabeth Morgan Hemlock and ourselves, had many discussions about how to best cover the story and deal with the issues. We were also limited in what we could film while we were in Zimbabwe, as we were not supposed to be there! In an ideal world we could have included more Black Zimbabweans in the film, and to show just how much the farm invasions damage them too, but we had to limit filming to those who were comfortable to be included- as for many it was too dangerous for them to be associated with the film. In the end we think we did well to get as much coverage as we did.

**Q: Aesthetically, what did you seek to bring to the story?**

The cinematography and sound had to be stylish and evocative, the visual look of the film is very important. Pictures and sound are what give a film its layers. So many TV productions today are shot with awful sound, so part of the challenge was to make an observational documentary film 'the old fashioned way' with craft technicians; camera, sound, editors. Many people in television today wouldn't think it possible to still make film this way. We hope we've demonstrated otherwise.

**Q: The production incorporates a range of diverse locations around the world. Was this a challenge?**

We have, over the years, worked on many films that have taken us overseas, so filming in lots of different locations was never really an issue. However getting in and out of Zimbabwe safely - and with kit - was a bit lively at times! It wasn't so much the number of locations as the number of times we had to fly back and forth to the same locations! The court case kept being postponed so we ended up going out to Windhoek five times and Zimbabwe four times over the course of the year. It was a nightmare for our producers and ourselves to juggle the budget and financing for that around other work dates and life in general!

**Q: Given the media restrictions in place in Zimbabwe, how did you get in and out with your equipment?**

A lot of it is down to careful logistics - we were very careful with security at all times- but inevitably there were a few moments when things got a little hairy.

**Q: Music plays a big role in the film. How did it come together?**

Music can make or break a film, so a lot of time was spent trying to find the right composer to write the score. That person eventually turned out to be Jonny Pilcher. He liked the project and he seemed to immediately sense the mood that we were trying to capture. Initially he wrote generic music beds, which Tim could cut to and later as the structure of the film came together and the fine cutting process began, wrote specific pieces for specific sequences in the film.

## CREDITS

**Directors:**

Andrew Thompson  
Lucy Bailey

**Producers:**

David Pearson  
Elizabeth Morgan Hemlock

**Executive Producers:**

Steve Milne  
Pauline Burt

**Film Editor:**

Tim Lovell

**Director of Photography:**

Andrew Thompson

**Sound Recordists:**

Sebastian Dunn  
James Snowden

**Composer:**

Jonny Pilcher

**Film Archive Researcher:**

Daphne Mather

**Re-Recording Mixer:**

George Foulgham

**DI Colourist:**

Tim Waller

**On Line Editor:**

Justin Eely

**Assistant re-Recording Mixer:**

James Cullen

**Senior DI Technician:**

Andy Richards

**Dialogue Editor:**

Claire Ellis

**Sound Effects Editor:**

Lisa-Marie McStay

**Post Production Manager:**

Alan Pritt

**Post Productions:**

Molinare, London

**With thanks:**

Mike Campbell, Ben Freeth and their families and friends, the Workers and their families on Mount Carmel Farm, Elize Angula, Jeffrey Jowell, Jeremy Gauntlett, Saima Nambinga, Chris Jarrett, Jamie Whear, Jaselle Williams, Antony and Bridget Bailey, Malcolm and Margaret Thompson, Kenny MacDonald, Rania Yahia

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MOVIES

# MovingPictures

July 2010

## Mugabe and the White African (documentary)

Amy Handler

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's infamous 'Hitler Speech' of March 2003 caused such an onslaught of violence against domestic opponents that an outraged George W. Bush froze all assets of Mugabe and many of his supporters. Mugabe's words, quoted by reporter, Peta Thornycroft in the March 26, 2003, Daily Telegraph, are in direct response to accusations by the British press that Mugabe's political actions are comparable to those of Adolf Hitler.

Mugabe's reply reads as follows:

"This Hitler has only one objective: justice for his people, sovereignty for his people, recognition of the independence of his people and their rights over their resources. If that is Hitler, then let me be a Hitler tenfold."

This speech, reverberating in Mugabe's own voice, forms a backdrop for the brilliantly disturbing new documentary "Mugabe and the White African" by newcomers Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson. It is no surprise that the film is shortlisted for an Oscar and should, no doubt, receive several.

Unquestionably, Bailey and Thompson's film is historically, politically, ethically and morally imperative for the world to see. After all, it is the first of its kind to offer an insider's view of Mugabe's brutality against the remaining white farmers in Zimbabwe. The filmmakers capture constant farm invasions coupled with often fatal beatings of white farmers, their families and black workers and families who reside on these white-owned farms. We are told that this was the norm for the past 10 years. Zimbabwe — a place where land deeds are cancelled and chaos reigns supreme.

Mugabe's justification is that it is necessary to reallocate land to the poor black majority he believes wronged under colonial rule. To date, Mugabe has driven out 4,000 white farmers, with no end in sight. And, as the filmmakers show, land seems to be diverted to high-court judges, ministerial girlfriends, vice-presidential secretaries and pretty much everyone other than impoverished black farmers. This highly personal film is distinguishable among contemporary documentaries in that it has the flair of a suspenseful, action/horror flick, the cinematic beauty of a Bergman saga and the feel of wartime news footage in the making. Indeed, as we ride in the truck with now-75-year-old farmer Mike Campbell, Campbell's son-in-law Ben Freeth and the filmmakers as they maneuver at night between bullets and mines, we live their immediate danger. Campbell and Freeth are notoriously brave — daring to take on one of the most formidable dictators of all time in the highest court — but so, too, are the filmmakers who risk imprisonment or worse.

It is December 2007 when the film begins. Andrew Thompson's cinematic portrait of Zimbabwe's heaven and earth set the first scene. These recurrent images are always in harmonious constancy, even when the sky becomes ominous, presaging dangers to come. The Campbell farm on Mount Carmel is lush, wild and gorgeous — belying the violence that lurks within. In fact, nothing and no one are what they seem. Freeth, as narrator, says as much when he talks about Mike as we watch him through a mirror as he prepares for his first court hearing before the new tribunal of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Windhoek, Namibia. Says Freeth in gentle, hypnotic tones, "This is Mike Campbell, my father-in-law. There is a lot more to him than perhaps first meets the

eye ... It's quite surreal that someone who, at heart, is as gentle as Mike is about to take on a man who has brought death to thousands — a dictator — in an international court.”

Outside the court, we meet now-86-year-old President Robert Gabriel Mugabe for the first time. Sporting the tiny moustache of Adolf Hitler (certainly the irony of ironies, considering Hitler's disgust with anyone not of Aryan blood) and a beautifully tailored suit, the charming and articulate career politician seems every bit the gentleman. That is, until he greets Campbell with, “Our present state of mind is that you are our enemies.”

Once inside the courtroom, we learn that the tribunal will adjourn for three months while the case awaits acceptance. Campbell and Freeth have filed suit against Mugabe and the Republic of Zimbabwe because they can no longer bear Mugabe's so called “evictions” and violent land invasions and have decided to fight back to save land and pride, as longtime citizens of Zimbabwe. They believe that if they acquire a landmark judgment against Mugabe, not only will they and other white farmers benefit but so, too, those worldwide who believe in the fundamentals of democracy.

Even more so, Freeth claims that he and Campbell are willing martyrs, here for the primary purpose of standing against evil for the public good. Their faith in God and law is truly tested as the case is postponed time and time again, and they suffer beatings that very nearly cost them their lives.

Finally, on November 28, 2008, the SADC tribunal rules in favor of Campbell and Freeth, citing racial discrimination and allowing compensation and protection under the law. Seated in a wheelchair, with the blackened eyes and bandaged head of his most recent torture, Freeth is ecstatically happy with the tribunal's judgment. Present in spirit, but unable to be with Freeth, Campbell lies flat on his back in a Zimbabwean hospital. In the background, we eerily hear Mugabe's voice, “I will never surrender. Zimbabwe is mine!”

It is well known that truth is stranger than fiction. The ending of “Mugabe and the White African” attests to this — something you can see for yourselves when the film opens at American theaters on July 23rd.



October 19, 2009

## Mugabe and the White African

Ronnie Scheib

**"Mugabe and the White African" compellingly documents the struggles of Mike Campbell and his brood to hang on to their Zimbabwe farm in the face of President Mugabe's "land reform," which apparently consists of kicking out whites and redistributing their property to his ministers, cronies and relatives. Braving intimidation and beatings, Campbell and his son-in-law, Ben Freeth, take their case to the international African court, charging racism and violation of human rights. Potent mix of suspense, pathos and indignation spells a theatrical future, though some might question the filmmakers' elevation of stubborn property defense to the stature of heroic crusade.**

At the pic's opening, most of Zimbabwe's white farmers have been driven off their homesteads, and the film observes several more families, friends of the Campbells, being forced to leave under increasingly hostile circumstances. British filmmakers Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson follow 74-year-old Campbell and his wife, daughter and son-in-law as they patrol their land to repel invaders and make the treacherous journey to Namibia for the trial.

Presidential elections loom, heralded by the brutal suppression of all opposition (much to the outrage of governments, media and human rights groups). Even as the country's economy slides into chaos, the court yields to requests for postponements from Mugabe's legal team. The Campbells' position grows steadily more precarious, as gangs of ravaging youths and pompous ministers' sons circle their land and threaten their safety. When violence erupts, the camera captures its aftermath, visiting Campbell, his wife and Freeth in the hospital after they've been badly beaten.

The docu sometimes bears an eerie resemblance to Claire Denis' brilliant "White Material" in its tense evocation of menace stalking the periphery of the frame. But while Denis' African fiction centers on whites in denial, caught up in a larger historical drama to which they are largely irrelevant, "Mugabe" places its white subjects centerstage, stressing their legal entitlement in a country that, until relatively recently, denied blacks all legal redress against systemic discrimination.

Indeed with the introduction of Campbell's English in-laws, whose strong religious beliefs reverberate with positively missionary zeal, the docu almost manages to turn Freeth, wheelchair-bound after his attack, into a martyr to the church of world brotherhood rather than to the cause of private ownership.

Nerve-jangling score and intense editing contribute to the ongoing sense of dread.

Read more: <http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117941412.html?categoryid=31&cs=1#ixzz0vBWVBUha>  
Visit [Variety.com](http://www.variety.com) to become a Variety subscriber.



July 28, 2010

## **MORE THAN JUST A REVIEW: ‘MUGABE AND THE WHITE AFRICAN’**

Ailsa Windsor

Sitting at Blue Zoo, a restaurant in Durban’s Mitchell Park, basking in the warm winter sun awaiting the arrival of Ben Freeth one couldn’t help reflecting on the peace and tranquillity belying the anguish suffered by the Zimbabwean farming community. In fact, Ben was slightly delayed due to yet another murder – that of a close family friend.

‘Mugabe and the White African’ is the first film to come out of Zimbabwe in a decade and even this was shot covertly. If the cameramen had been caught there would most certainly have been retribution – a fate which Ben, Mike and his wife suffered at the hands of the militants.

*“I remember my father-in-law signing the papers (as the plaintiff) formally challenging Robert Mugabe, Head of State (as the accused). (This was a historic moment) No-one had ever done this before. My eyes still water and I get quite emotional. There was no turning back – once the SADC Tribunal had decided to take the case we were already in deep water.*

*“Mike knew what he was signing could have been his death warrant.”* In his mind there was no choice and this comes across very clearly in this gritty documentary which shows life in Zimbabwe as it is – without any Hollywood glitz or glamour. This is a movie which follows the lead up to the elections and the corresponding journey with the Tribunal.

*“The film is an absolute Godsend,”* says Ben, who maintains that this has been a journey of faith all the way – his family as well as the 500 people living on his farm. *“We didn’t know what the outcome was going to be, but knew that ‘If good men do nothing, evil triumphs’ and there would be no future for anyone.”*

*“I am an African,”* states Mike in the film, *“a White African. I have nowhere else to go – Zimbabwe is my home!”* And this, predominantly is what the action is all about as the current regime wants to remove all whites from the country. There are no human rights for any of the members of the populace – it’s a reign of terror... and if anyone stands up to be heard they will be beaten down.

*“We had to make a stand,”* says Ben, *“and take the consequences. This is what God would have expected of us. Man can do things to people (there is the inclusion of shocking pictures of their beatings in the documentary), but not strip them of their faith. We have been stripped of our health (Mike hasn’t recovered well and is now*

predominantly bed-ridden), *home* (which was burnt to the ground despite a SADC order of protection), but not who we are... and my faith is even stronger.”

*“There is a gradual awakening (however) to the injustices and the Zim Government has been held in contempt by SADC for acting outside the treaty. We have the court judgement in black and white – the court papers and judgments talk for themselves.”*

It wasn't an easy journey, as you will discover when you view 'Mugabe and the White African' – it took four journeys to Namibia while Mugabe's lawyers prevaricated. Ultimately they were held in contempt of court.

*“Although it's been frustratingly slow no one can argue with the process – which Mike won in all counts. However, Mugabe is still regarded as the father of a lot of independent movements in Africa and still receives standing ovations from some members of SADC. They don't realise how the people have suffered – not just the white farmers, that is just a small part, but the Shona (a peace-loving nation) and the Matabele. Great injustice has been done.*

*Over 700 000 people have had their homes bulldozed – it's so very sad. We can't capitulate ... we have to believe there is a future.”*

I'm not going to expound any further – the documentary has one more screening during the Durban Film Festival, namely, Saturday afternoon (31 July) at 4pm, but plans are underway to make the DVD available for screenings.

## **THE STRANGER**

### ***Mugabe and the White African***

Jen Graves

*Mugabe and the White African* is in essence a thriller: A documentary about white farmers facing mortal threat from the Mugabe government—Mugabe’s thugs beat old white people within inches of their lives, and sometimes kill them, in the name of avenging colonialism and taking land back. The filming took place in secret (so as not to expose the white Campbell family to further violence), and the shaky scenes follow them as they’re hunted in their own home. There’s also an explosive, rare-in-its-candidness discussion between a Mugabean enforcer and the 75-year-old elder Campbell about Europe, Africa, history, and power. It’s an extraordinary and weirdly entertaining movie, and leaves you bothered in part because of its own omissions: *Mugabe* focuses on the few white farmers rather than their many black, completely impoverished farm workers.



July 19, 2010

## **Mugabe and the White African**

Joseph Jon Lanthier

\*\*\* stars

Much like last year's crowd-pleasing, muck-aimed Swiffer mop [The Cove](#), *Mugabe and the White African* is cinema-as-journalism at its most aesthetically confident and humanely satisfying—and it's all the more profound for being so without a cute, shamelessly anthropomorphized creature to melt its audience into involuntary pots of sympathy fondue. A politically minded documentary that maintains the look and feel of an impromptu chamber case study, *Mugabe* follows a little over a year in the lives of Zimbabwe farmer Mike Campbell and his son-in-law Ben as they defend their land against government agents attempting to seize and redistribute property across the nation.

As with the muddily dramatized civil unrest of Claire Denis's [White Material](#), the aggression is coiled around a ruthless and spookily illogical racial misconception demagogically deployed to empower the starving proletariat—namely, that self-made whites like Campbell have been raping Africa for decades (never mind the myriad blacks that he and countless other land owners employ, innocent workers that we see later punished for their perfidious affiliations). But directors Lucy Bailey and Andrew Thompson sagaciously keep the film's haves-versus-have-nots think-speak from miring the action, instead converting the conflict into that of an old-fashioned siege film. Campbell bears the mark of Cane, a higher power wants him removed, and the result resembles a viscerally gentler but more ideologically potent *Straw Dogs* with vestiges of courtroom melodrama providing "mature" justice.

At times, the movie's focus might be too constricting: There's no newsreel exordium explicating Africa's ethnic tug of war through apartheid or other Zimbabwe-specific uprisings, and we're only offered a passing description of the titular president's pseudo-democratic rise to power. But the absence of this potentially controversial and inaccessible history sharpens Campbell's story into a wry, blistering shiv of ineffable self-preservation; when you're shooting warning bullets into the dead, sweaty night to signal the goons hiding in the bushes, you're probably not considering the social subtexts that dragged you there. Bailey and Thompson agilely alternate these dreadful adrenaline-fueled pockets with personal testimonies from the 75-year-old Campbell and his friends and family, persuasively arguing that the bitter, tooth-and-nail struggle protects fragile but deep reaching and hard-won roots. This fierce sensitivity engineers one postmodern masterpiece of a sequence wherein the documentarians record a dialectic between Ben and an irate black; the man, who's been given a false deed to the farm by the new regime, interestingly has a small, low-res camcorder, and also captures the entire exchange. As the debate over entitlement spirals into spewed vitriol, we feel the crosshair of futile cameras threatening the scene more tensely than the hot rhetoric; Zimbabwe's tangled crown is too thorny to be smoothed by words or perfunctory video.

And unlike [The Cove](#), which was more concerned with the nuts-and-bolts difficulty of evidence collection (as well as how the significance of the exposed atrocities vacillated wildly when divorced from their social contexts), *Mugabe* un-condescendingly fetishizes the urgency of capturing actual evidence on tape. After a climactic, off-screen beating takes place, we can feel the lens attempting to corroborate and defend as it caresses purple gashes and flowery bruises; the movie even opens with a title card describing how the directors risked incarceration to snag the footage, a lofty claim paid off in full by the surfeit of poetically calculated shots and edits. Miraculously, the documentary has both the perilous, buzz-worthy backstory of a [Burma VJ](#) and the patient, landscape-aware mise-en-scène of a Maysles film. The score's piddly piano score may add unneeded sprinkles of treacle, and the medias in res structure imposes an ending that feels out of touch with the film's thoughtful, unflinching tone. But as an essayatic exploration of an uncommonly brutal socio-political micro-climate, *Mugabe* is as eerily compelling and narratively competent as *New Yorker*-style fiction.