

## Anti-Imperialism and Schizophrenic revolutionaries in Zimbabwe

**Tamuka Chirimambowa**

We shall be doing this (negotiating) as Zimbabweans, entirely as Zimbabweans, with the help of South Africa. There will be no European hand here.  
—Robert Mugabe, 21 July 2008)

The above statement at the signing ceremony of the Thabo Mbeki-birthered Memorandum of Understanding hints at the deep and intense struggles that underlie the Zimbabwe crisis. Robert Mugabe claims that the ghosts of colonialism have come to haunt Zimbabwe and caused unforetold suffering to Zimbabweans through western imposed sanctions, and with the MDC the west is the major culprit for calling for sanctions. This attempt to reinvent the political and economic history of Zimbabwe has been discussed in academic circles; thus, Professor David Moore notes the emergence of Agrarian nationalists or what Terence Ranger terms patriotic history. This illusion has informed many policy and position debates on Zimbabwe at regional and international fora as various interested stakeholders seek to unlock the Zimbabwe logjam. However this elisionistic interpretation of the Zimbabwe crisis has been allowed at the expense of Zimbabweans' quest for change. Exhausted nationalism and anti-imperialism rhetoric has been used by the geriatric regime to gloss over the horrendous atrocities and human rights abuses it has been committing. The maiming, torture, rape, deprivation, murder and arson committed by ZANU PF becomes sanitized as a revolution brewing in Harare or what Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros terms a radicalized state seeking to undo the vestiges of colonialism. In all this blind sheepish intellectualism Mugabe emerges a hero of Black Africa.

The inaction from African institutions despite the flagrant violations of charters and declarations that they have authored reinforces the notion of a dark continent. The Banjul Charter stressing that:

The Member States of the Organization of African Unity parties to the present Charter shall recognize the rights, duties and freedoms enshrined in this Chapter and shall undertake to adopt legislative or other measures to give effect to them (Article 1).

Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, color, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status (Article 2).

Therefore, given the centuries of slavery and colonialism in Africa, observance of these noble articles ranging from 1-62 is seen as an unnecessary luxury by Most African heads of states. The end justified the means and democracy and human rights had to be sacrificed to defend the revolution. What remains unanswered is which and whose revolution: when was it threatened and by whom? It is in attempting to answer this question that one can appreciate the emasculation of a people's quest for a decent meal that they end up with anti-imperialism for dinner on the table. Therefore despite all the hardships the general populace is expected to "Rambai Mkashinga [keep on persevering]" --- as Jonathan Moyo's infamous jingle would implore people every 15 minutes on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Television and Radio.<sup>1</sup>

A closer introspection of Zimbabwe's economic history reveals Mugabe was the blue-eyed boy of the West in Africa. At the height of the 1980s' madness Mugabe was knighted by the queen and showered with many awards and honorary degrees by universities in the West. Therefore his recent tantrums about imperialism and anti-western diatribes are just grapes that have gone sour. In

1. "Rambai Makashinga" is the name of one of Jonathan Moyo's propaganda jingles meant to drum up support for Robert Mugabe.

essence Mugabe has to be grateful to imperialism and the west for having allowed him to ascend to the position where he is now. Heidi Holland, author of the book "Dinner with Mugabe" remarks that:

...whites because they were grateful to be out of range of fire; the British government because it had to stand by its man up north while trying to bring majority rule to apartheid South Africa; the international media because it backed Mugabe to the hilt could not contemplate its flawed judgment (in Mawowa 2007)

Definitely Mugabe's misadventures with the west are just chickens coming back home to roost. In addition, there has been a tendency to confuse nationalism with anti-imperialism within the third world analysis albeit the two concepts being not synonymous. For example, the 'Vashandi' [workers']<sup>2</sup> movement that attempted to unite the Zimbabwe African Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) into the Zimbabwe Integrated People's Army (ZIPA). However Mugabe and his cohorts quashed this movement, which points out one of several contradictions that undermine his self-acclaimed anti-imperialist credentials. Kriger observes that the elimination of Vashandi was an ideological coup marking the beginning of a political culture of leftist rhetoric that has characterised post independence Zimbabwe (in Mawowa 2007). Claims from the supra-Africanists and pseudo-communists that Mugabe is a fighter of imperialism cannot be vindicated by the evidence of history. The regime's leftist rhetoric is meant to appeal to the ordinary and poor since it captures their aspirations. The self-proclaimed super patriots also claim that Africa has been a communist or socialist society. However, Mugabe's strong taste for an opulent western lifestyle is no secret as seen in his love for fine suits and shopping at Harrods. Heidi Holland records Dennis Norman alluding to Mugabe's love for bourgeoisie paraphernalia, insisting ministers put on

suits (in Mawowa 2007). Furthermore, Mawowa in his review of Holland's book observes that:

The man in most respects seems to still subscribe to his western learning even now at the height of his populist authoritarian rule that includes attacks in the west. He still retains his knighthood and one needs to see his entourage during the opening of parliament to observe that the man has lost none of his love for the western representations (2007:5).

Mugabe's life history and action do not at all point to a person who has always detested western values in spite of how he has re-branded himself.

The emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change has led to ZANU PF reviving the liberation war rhetoric and 'we freed you syndrome' and led to what Bond (2003) calls exhausted nationalism. By reviving liberation rhetoric, the ZANU PF regime is reminding the people to be grateful that they were freed from colonialism and cannot therefore make demands to the state. However, such a fallacy is a misconstruction of Zimbabwe's history for the liberation war was never a monopoly of one party. A closer inspection of ZANLA's strategies will show that even ordinary people played a crucial role in the liberation war, thus realising Mao's strategy '*the people are the sea and the freedom fighters are the fish*'. Moreover, there were some liberation songs such as '*Gandanga haridye derere mukoma rinorutsa*' which paint a different picture of the liberation struggle. Loosely translated this chorus means "a freedom fighter does not eat okra or vegetables; he or she will vomit my brother." Thus the goats, chickens and cows which the ordinary people slaughtered and other food and material support they provided were never paid for.

In the 2000 film 'Never The Same Again' Emerson Mnangagwa, when interviewed about the use of the Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA), a relic of colonial piece of legislation, retorted, "I do not like the Law and Order Maintenance Act, but sometimes it is handy". As the Minister of Home Affairs Mnangagwa had invoked state of emergency

2. This was a movement established by the young radicals in ZANU who sought to establish a Marxist/Socialist state in Zimbabwe and it was led by the likes of Wilfred Mhanda, aka Dzinashe Machingura.

powers provided under LOMA that saw the army resorting to heavy handedness such as the use of tankers and armoured vehicles on civilians, during the 1998 food riots in Chitungwiza, Harare, Bulawayo and other cities in Zimbabwe. Interestingly Mnangagwa had been detained and incarcerated under the same law by the Colonial Ian Smith regime during the days of the nationalist struggles and war of liberation. Therefore taking Mnangagwa's assertion it can be safely concluded that ZANU PF's claims of being inimical to imperialism is a farce.

In spite of Harare's puffing of anti-colonial rhetoric Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka commented on the irony of the laws used to implement Murambatsvina, in which:

the Regional, and Town Planning Act, and attendant municipal bylaws emanating from the colonial era meant to keep Africans out of the cities [set] very high housing and development standards beyond the reach of the majority of the people.<sup>3</sup>

Resorting to colonial pieces of legislation that does not account for the people's historical material conditions raises fundamental questions of the Zimbabwean government's nationalist and historicist rhetoric. ZANU PF as a ruling party has lacked a coherent ideological underpinning, reducing it to its current condition as a schizophrenic citadel in terms of both members and policies. Towards the preparations for the hosting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1991 in Harare, *The Herald* reported that the Harare City Council through Town Clerk Edward Kanengoni made submissions to Justice Robinson to the effect that the demolition of squatters' houses was to avoid embarrassing the

queen.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly in his judgment Justice Robinson observed:

In any case, perhaps the applicant (the City of Harare) and other who are so anxious to sweep the respondents (the squatters) under the red carpet to be rolled out for her Majesty's visit to Mbare need to be reminded that the liberation war in Zimbabwe was fought over the issue of land primarily combined with the goal of justice for all.<sup>5</sup>

This obsession with pleasing the queen unmasks the deception that Mugabe has managed to lull the African continent and the developing world with.

In the early 1980s, in a swoop at the destitute and homeless through 'Operation Chinyavada', *MOTO* observes the government's use of the infamous Vagrancy Act of 1960, a remnant colonial piece of legislation designed to segregate black people from cities and white areas (December/January, 1984: 5). In carrying out the operations, government evoked nationalism, justifying its actions as being in the interest of the country and at the same trying to rehabilitate economic and political saboteurs. In spite of its jaundiced nationalist rhetoric it has never dawned on the ZANU PF-led government that all along they have failed to define the nature, form, content and genesis of the 'so-called' saboteurs. It is poverty, stupid! Therefore the anti-colonial and imperialism lectures that Mugabe has been delivering at the United Nations summit are a red herring. The real issues in Zimbabwe are about a liberation movement that has turned into a vampire regime. Interestingly Mugabe has become popular for lashing out World Bank and IMF policies, as undermining the sovereignty of third world governments --- yet its Reserve Bank governor, Gideon Gono's made strenuous efforts in 2005 not to be kicked out of the IMF and World Bank system. Mugabe's anti-imperialist outbursts are not informed by any revolution as most people in Africa have been made to believe but rather by anger and the history of having tasted the sweets of

3. Report of the Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe, to assess the Scope and the Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements issues in Zimbabwe: 56, [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/zimbabwe\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/zimbabwe_rpt.pdf). Accessed on 02 September 2006.

4. *The Herald* September 1991: 1.

5. *The Herald* September 13 1991:1

imperialism. In reviewing the Economic Structural Adjustment Policy, in 1995, the IMF and World Bank gave Zimbabwe the 'highly satisfactory' rating. As Patrick Bond noted in 2000 "Indeed, just five years ago, Zimbabwe was Washington's newest African 'success story,' as Harare adopted economic policies promoted by Bank and IMF lenders, and even conducted joint military exercises with the Pentagon."<sup>6</sup> All these points raise questions about Mugabe's commitment to the anti-imperialist cause.

Understanding the Zimbabwe crisis needs a careful revisiting of Zimbabwe's economic history and juxtaposing of ZANU PF's rhetoric against its actions and policies in government. Evidence at hand undermines the regime's claims of fighting imperialism. The Zimbabwe case is a good example of a government that seeks to divert attention from its failure by regurgitating anti-imperialist rhetoric. However, the schizophrenic nature of the ZANU PF regime has neared its endgame as its true colours are laid bare with every second that ticks.

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6. Patrick Bond, "Zimbabwe's Crisis Showcases Reasons for Bank/IMF Protest", <http://www.africaaction.org/docs00/zim0005b.htm>