

## Zimbabwe: Where is the Outrage? Mamdani, Mugabe and the African Scholarly Community\*

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Concerned scholars should revitalise their opposition to Zimbabwe's Mugabe regime, writes Horace Campbell. While being against any form of opportunistic, external intervention in the country, Campbell argues that scholars must come to offer an effective challenge to ZANU-PF's persistent retreat into spurious anti-imperialist discourse. Heavily critical of writers like Mahmood Mamdani for echoing ZANU-PF's claims around the effects of economic sanctions levied against Zimbabwe, Campbell argues that blocking international payments would prove a far more efficacious means of tackling Mugabe's misappropriation of funds.

It was most apt that on the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights a group of 200 scholars at the 12th congress of CODESRIA expressed their concern over the threats of military intervention in Zimbabwe. The scholars pointed to the detrimental effects of military intervention, noting that:

'Military interventions exacerbate political and socio-economic crises and internal differences with profoundly detrimental and destructive regional implications. We recognize that threats of military intervention come from imperialist powers, and also through their African proxies.'

These scholars were signaling their opposition to the vocal calls for the removal of Robert Mugabe by

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the Secretary of State of the United States and by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa and the Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, had earlier raised the call for the removal of Robert Mugabe by the force of arms.

This scholar joins with African people everywhere who welcome the alertness of our colleagues against foreign military intervention. I also welcome their concern for the appalling situation in Zimbabwe.

It is important that the Mugabe government and the spokespersons for ZANU-PF do not consider the statement by scholars as an endorsement for the appalling tragedy that has befallen the Zimbabwean poor and exploited. After all, these CODESRIA scholars termed what is happening in Zimbabwe 'a nightmare'.

This was in the same week that President Mugabe argued that the imperialists were planning a military invasion and that the cholera outbreak had been based on biological warfare against Zimbabwe. The Minister of Information went further and in a statement in the Herald newspaper the minister claimed:

'The cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe is a serious biological chemical war force, a genocidal onslaught on the people of Zimbabwe by the British. Cholera is a calculated racist terrorist attack on Zimbabwe by the unrepentant former colonial power which has enlisted support from its American and Western allies so that they invade the country.'

This claim by Dr Sikhanyiso Ndlovu was an insult to the intelligence of humans everywhere in so far as cholera is an acute intestinal infection caused by unsanitary conditions. The key to prevention of the disease is simple: clean water.

It is because of the simple nature of the cure that the response of the Zimbabwe government to the death of more than 1,000 persons is one more callous

response to the exploitation and brutal oppression of the Zimbabwean working peoples. Biological warfare is a serious matter not to be used for games of crying 'wolf'. One world figure is already leaving the stage with the record of this kind of crying wolf in Iraq.

While this writer will oppose any form of external military intervention by imperialists, it is important that concerned and progressive scholars oppose the crude anti-imperialism of the Zimbabwean political leadership under Mugabe. This writer awaits equal concern from my colleagues over the gender violence, repression of trade union leaders, wanton destruction of lives by the Mugabe government and the brutal repression of ordinary citizens.

At the same time that the statement of concern was being signed human rights activists were calling on the Zimbabwean government to account for the whereabouts of Jestina Mukoko, director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP). Mukoko is only one of the more than 20 known human rights activists who have disappeared in the past six weeks. Mukoko's 15 year-old child saw his mother being abducted from their home.

We must raise our collective voices against such kidnapping and abduction while opposing any imperialist plans for a military invasion of Zimbabwe. One question that immediately came to mind after reading the CODESRIA statement was whether our colleagues have become blind to the suffering of ordinary people in their struggle against the latest and more complex phase of imperialism in Africa.

### **Mugabe and the exploitation of anti-racist and anti-imperialist sentiments**

The Zimbabwe government is very aware of the anti-imperialist and anti-racist sentiments among oppressed peoples and thus has deployed a range of propagandists inside and outside of the country in a bid to link every problem in Zimbabwe to international sanctions by the EU and USA. Anti-

imperialists in the USA cite the Zimbabwe Reconstruction and Development Act – passed by the US Congress in 2001 – as being a source of economic woe for poor Zimbabweans. While the scholars at the congress of CODESRIA hardly resorted to the same kind of praise for Mugabe as their counterparts writing in the special issue of *Black Scholar*, there is not enough evidence that there was sufficient attention paid to the gross violation of basic rights. If this debate did occur at the CODESRIA congress it was not reflected in the statement.

One of the key entrepreneurs of the Zimbabwe regime, John Bredenkamp, commands considerable experience in manipulating the question of sanctions for the enrichment of those in power, both in the time of Rhodesia and now Zimbabwe. Bredenkamp started on his way to fortune by breaking sanctions for Ian Smith. Bredenkamp has been involved in the politics and economics of looting southern Africa and is one of the key props of the ZANU-PF regime. His plundering activities also tie him to the political and financial leaders in South Africa who are being probed by the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) in relation to the £100 million in bribes to ensure the sale of weapons to the South African government. This author is calling on members of the CODESRIA network to reveal their research findings on John Bredenkamp, Muller Conrad Rautenbach (a.k.a. Billy Rautenbach) and to recommend the arrest and charge of those involved in looting Zimbabwe and southern Africa. Both Bredenkamp and Billy Rautenbach (of the white settler forces) featured in the orgy of looting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and established long term business relationships with ZANU-PF's leaders. John Bredenkamp had matured in the art of manipulation while aligned with Ian Smith. He exulted in this dual service to imperialism and to African nationalists with the leadership of ZANU-PF, and his expertise has been placed at the service of the crude accumulators within the South Africa's ANC.

Instead of oversimplifying imperialist threats in Zimbabwe, those who want to see the demilitarisation of Africa must aggressively support the exposure of the arms deals that have linked Bredenkamp and Fana Hlongwane across the politics of repression in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The British arms manufacturer British Aerospace (BAe) has been involved with Bredenkamp and Hlongwane in Africa, along with corrupt elements in the Middle East. There have been calls for BAe to be prosecuted under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) of the USA. Such an investigation would have potentially seismic consequences for military contractors and arms manufacturers and would provide another means of opposing Western militarism in Africa.

### **Blaming Zimbabwe's problem on Zidera**

The convergence of fraud, corruption and cover-ups in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Britain render simplistic conceptions of imperialism less than useful for those who want to see peaceful change in Zimbabwe. The Mugabe government blames all of its problems on the economic war launched by the USA and Britain. For the Mugabe regime, at the core of this economic war are the targeted sanctions against Mugabe's top lieutenants under its Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA), passed by the Bush administration in 2001.

What has been clear from the hundreds of millions of dollars of investments by British, Chinese, Malaysian, South African and other capitalists in the Zimbabwe economy since 2003 is that the problems in Zimbabwe have not been caused by an economic war against the country. Even when facing pressure from the British government, Anglo-American indicated its willingness in 2008 to invest an additional US\$400 million to continue its control of platinum mines in Zimbabwe. What has been most remarkable has been the ways in which the dictatorship in Zimbabwe has destroyed the rights of workers in the mining sector in order to facilitate and welcome foreign capitalists in the

diamond and mining sectors. Whole villages are being laid to waste in order to support and welcome external diamond mining interests.

If human rights activists and committed scholars were to expose the linkages between ZANU-PF arms dealers John Bredenkamp and Fana Hlongwane along with the wider linkages to international capital, then it would be clear that it is quite an oversimplification to argue that ZIDERA is at the centre of Zimbabwe's problems. Bredenkamp had been schooled from the Smith era to blame everything on sanctions while beating the sanctions with the help of apartheid South Africa. In the present period Bredenkamp is an ally of the ANC, ZANU-PF and British imperialist arms manufacturers like BAe all at the same time. It is also important for African scholars to join the call to the South African President Kgalema Motlanthe for an arms deal judicial commission, in order to bring to the attention of the wider public the dealings of individuals such as Fana Hlongwane.

Scholars, while alerting the world against foreign military invasion, must examine the conduct of the Zimbabwe military and especially those ordering Mugabe to remain in supreme control.

It is in the interest of concerned scholars everywhere to understand the conditions of farm labourers and mine workers in Zimbabwe. What was not expected was for Professor Mahmood Mamdani to use his scholarly knowledge to repeat ZANU-PF's sham argument that economic sanctions have aggravated the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. While the nationalists have been crude in their fawning over the 'revolutionary' credentials of Robert Mugabe, Mahmood Mamdani used his considerable international reputation to line up support for the Mugabe regime in a lengthy review published in the *London Review of Books*.

## Is there a democratic revolution going on in Zimbabwe?

From the outset Mamdani located himself as a victim of forced expulsion, identifying the forced expulsion of the Asians in Uganda with the expropriation of the white settler farmers in Zimbabwe. In the process, Mamdani compared Robert Mugabe to Idi Amin of Uganda. Mamdani went on to explain the popularity of Amin's economic war against Asians and used the word 'popularity' in his characterisation of the current ZANU-PF leadership. Very few would doubt the 'popularity' of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa in the period of the anti-colonial struggles, but in the past fifteen years Mugabe has turned the victories of the people into a never ending nightmare of murders, killings, forced removal and brutal oppression. Idi Amin remains popular in West Africa, just as Mugabe is popular in West Africa and other parts of the world where there is not a full understanding of the real tragedy of what is going on in Zimbabwe. Idi Amin, like Robert Mugabe, is popular outside of his own country for the wrong reasons.

Mahmood Mamdani as a Ugandan is very aware of the extent to which the British government supported elements within the Amin dictatorship while using the British media to revile Africans in general, and Idi Amin in particular. Amin (who was promoted by the British and the Israelis in the military coup of January 1971) was useful as a propaganda tool for imperialism. As a scholar who has written extensively on Uganda and on the politics of fascism, Mahmood Mamdani is very aware of the role that Bob Astles played as an agent of US and British imperialism in eastern Africa. Bob Astles (ally and confidant of Idi Amin from 1966 to 1979) had been implicated in the scandals involving looted gold from the Congo in the 1960s and survived with Amin as a key confidant, until he left for Britain when it became clear that the Tanzanian military invasion of Uganda would succeed. Mahmood Mamdani had returned to Uganda in 1979 in the military train of the

Tanzanian military and political forces. This was a case where Mamdani recognised that it required regional African intervention to rid Africa of the manipulation of the British and the brutal genocidal politics of Idi Amin.

Contrary to his research on the Ugandan dictatorship, Mamdani's research skills seem underused while elaborating on the 'Lessons of Zimbabwe'. Professor Mamdani has maintained that, 'In social and economic – if not political – terms, this was a democratic revolution. But there was a heavy price to pay.'

This line of the 'democratic revolution' emanated from the Newtonian concepts of hierarchy that had been internalised by some who have called themselves Marxists. During the period of the Soviet Union, this discourse was used to support so-called revolutionaries such as Mengistu, the butcher of Ethiopia. Is it by chance that Mengistu has found his refuge in Zimbabwe?

Under this 'democratic revolutionary stage', African capitalists had to accumulate so that there would be a maturation of capitalism in Africa. Walter Rodney refuted this 'stages' theory in his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. In that study Rodney established the reality that there was a link between the development of capitalism in Europe and the forms of plunder, looting and genocide in Africa. Capitalism in Africa had been implanted in a very different form, and all over the continent those who supported capitalism have used the formulation of the 'democratic revolution' to support black capitalists. This is nowhere more evident than in South Africa, where the communist party, as one component of the tripartite alliance, has used this formulation to silence itself in the face of the crudest and fastest rate of accumulation by a fledgling capitalist class in recent history.

In his elaboration of 'the heavy price to pay' for this democratic revolution in Zimbabwe, Mamdani noted the impact on: (a) 'the rule of law'; (b) Farm

labourers; (c) The urban poor; and d) Food production.

What was most contradictory about Mamdani's line of argument is that while he recognises the impact of the policies of the Mugabe government on the urban poor and farm workers, he expends a great deal of his analysis on a critique of the absence of donor support for the people of Zimbabwe. Before the era of neoliberalism and the pseudo-humanitarianism of the so-called international non-governmental structure, these donors would have been called imperialists and there would have been a call for the government of Zimbabwe to use its resources to provide clean water, sanitation and healthcare for its people. Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF have selectively implemented a home grown neoliberal agenda to enrich one of the crudest of the capitalist classes in Africa while depending on international imperialist agencies to provide social services for the people. Mamdani overlooks the fact that the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange has been posting the most profitable gains under the Mugabe regime.

Mamdani is wrong.

While the discussion about whether Zimbabwe is going through a 'democratic' revolution can be debated, Mamdani is wrong on numerous grounds. As a scholar who has written on genocide, it is curious why he left out the close relationship between the leaders of the Interahamwe and the Zimbabwean military in the DRC. Mugabe's military trained those had committed genocide in Rwanda to fight for Laurent Kabila. He is simply wrong to use tribal formulations to describe the sharp class divide in Zimbabwe. It is here that the consistency of the donor language corresponds to the language of ethnic divisions in Zimbabwe. In describing the manipulation of Mugabe, Mamdani noted:

'Very early on, the colonial bureaucracy had translated the ethnic mosaic of the country into an administrative map in such a way as to allow

minimum co-operation and maximum competition between different ethnic groups and areas, ensuring among other things that labour for mining, manufacture and service was not recruited from areas where peasants were needed on large farms or plantations. These areas, as it happened, were mainly Shona and so, unsurprisingly, when the trade-union movement developed in Rhodesia, its leaders were mostly Ndebele, and had few links with the Shona leadership of the peasant-based liberation movement (Mugabe belongs to the Shona majority).'

What is this language of Shona majority? Is this not the old tribal discourse of the colonial anthropologists?

Mahmood Mamdani's benign criticisms cannot disguise the reality that his submission has been represented as one component of the anti-imperialist intellectual support for the Mugabe regime. Despite the atrocities, killings and abductions of grassroots activists, Mamdani has managed to use the term 'popularity' in the same sentence while describing the current Zimbabwe leadership. Nowhere did this writer take note of the fact that this 'popular' government withheld the election results in March 2008 for over a month. Mamdani says there is a democratic revolution at a high price. Indeed at the price of democracy itself and in its most simple expression: the right to vote.

Writing this backhanded support for Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF as a review of a number of books on Zimbabwe, Mamdani was inordinately dependent on the scholarship of those from the Agrarian Institute for African Studies in Zimbabwe. The papers from this institute have been fulsome in their praise of the 'land reform' process in Zimbabwe. The authors of these papers supporting Mugabe were the very same ones claiming that the horrors of 'Operation Murambatsvina' (the operation to round up hundreds of thousands of citizens) were exaggerated by the Western media.

Neither Mamdani nor the scholars from CODESRIA have expressed their outrage in relation to the repression and forced removal of 750,000 people from Zimbabwe's urban areas in 2005. If a white government had done this there would have been outrage. Current scholarly work on the displacement of Zimbabwean farm workers by Amanda Hammar will assist future scholarship focused on the reintegration of individuals scattered across Southern Africa. These citizens suffered from the xenophobic attacks against poor migrants in South Africa.

While merely recycling the scholarship of this agrarian institute, Mahmood Mamdani was careful to hedge his bets in noting that: 'What land reform has meant or may come to mean for Zimbabwe's economy is still hotly disputed.'

What is not in dispute is that the policies of the Mugabe government have destroyed the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe. In our examination of the fast track land seizures in the book, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation*, we exposed the reality that an examination of land reform cannot be separated from water, seeds, fertilizers and most importantly, the labour that has worked on a piece of land. It is on the question of workers and labour where one would have expected Mamdani to have drawn on the scholarship of Brian Raftopoulos and Lloyd Sachikonye. It is not too late to recommend to Mahmood Mamdani two books that will shed light on the relationship between land and labour: *Striking Back: The Labour Movement and the Post-Colonial State in Zimbabwe, 1980–2000*, edited by Brian Raftopoulos and Lloyd Sachikonye; and Lloyd Sachikonye, *The Situation of Commercial Farm Workers after Land Reform in Zimbabwe*.

### **Idi Amin and Bob Astles; Robert Mugabe and John Berdenkamp**

Qualifications on the disputed outcome of the 'land reform' by Mahmood Mamdani should not derail committed scholarship on what a democratic land

reform process could yield in the new southern Africa when there is serious decolonisation instead of the Africanisation of exploitation. Mamdani's analysis could not hide the reality that there is a capitalist class that is profiting from the misery and exploitation of the peoples of Zimbabwe. The present divide in Zimbabwe that is manipulated under ethnic terms cannot hide the opulence and disparity between those with power and the exploitation of millions, with hundreds dying of cholera. The billions of dollars being exported by those in the regime, along with the leadership of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, will only come to light when scholars, in general, and African scholars, in particular, support the UN Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative. African dictators from the Sudan to Equatorial Guinea and looters from Nigeria and Angola to Kenya want African scholars to be silent on the repatriation of stolen wealth. This writer opposes all sanctions against Zimbabwe (including ZIDERA) because sanctions do not work when there are experienced entrepreneurs such as John Bredenkamp and Billy Rautenbach in the service of ZANU-PF. What is far more important is a full analysis of Gideon Gono's exportation of money at the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. As a scholars in universities with the space and resources to do research, it is our collective duty in the context of an Obama administration to call on the US Justice Department to prosecute those of the British firm BAe who have been involved in corruption and fraud in southern Africa.

Additionally, African scholars and progressives must pressure the Obama administration to use the resources of the Treasury Department of the Office of Foreign Assets Control to democratise the information on the billions of dollars being stolen from Africa, and in this case, southern Africa.

As in the case of Idi Amin, imperialism can be very selective in releasing the information of the theft and export of capital by the Mugabe leadership. In the past month the Treasury Department of the United States Office of Foreign Assets Control slapped further sanctions on John Bredenkamp.

There is need for concerted research and exposure of the continued role of elements such as Bredenkamp and the alliance with those in the South African government who are profiting from the misery and exploitation of the Zimbabwean people. Is it by accident that the same forces aligned with Bredenkamp also supported the 'quiet diplomacy' of Thabo Mbeki? The countries of the European Union are also complicit in the looting of Zimbabwe. Decent individuals in Europe and concerned African scholars must pressure the democratic forces in Belgium to call on the Belgian Central Bank to expose the amounts of money being exported by Gideon Gono on behalf of Robert Mugabe and the dictatorship. The international banking system now relies on a network administered by Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) based at La Hulpe outside Brussels. SWIFT links 7,800 financial institutions in 205 countries, including Zimbabwe's banks, and processes about US\$6 trillions' worth of transactions each day. Although owned by banks, SWIFT specifically falls under the control of central banks and, in particular, the control of the Belgian Central Bank. Instead of speculating on whether the Mugabe regime is exporting US\$9 or US\$15 billion every year, the exposure of the head of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe is far more important than talks of removing Mugabe by force. Blocking international payments is far quicker and more effective than trade or other sanctions. This strategy can also be reversed as soon as its objectives are reached, without permanent damage to the economy or its infrastructure.

### **Committed scholars should be outraged at what is happening in Zimbabwe**

People are being killed and brutalised. Homophobia and virginity tests reflect the most extreme forms of patriarchy and deformed masculinity in Zimbabwe. The women who bear the brunt of this oppression have called for international solidarity. Under the leadership of the group, Women of Zimbabwe Arise

(WOZA), these brave fighters have exposed those who mobilise sophisticated post-modernists and anti-imperialist discourse to support Robert Mugabe. Zimbabwean workers are being assaulted every day and it is the task of concerned African scholars to defend the rights of organised and unorganised Zimbabwean workers alike.

Unfortunately for Mamdani this article defending Mugabe came out at a time when there was news of the health emergency and the more than 1,000 who have died from cholera. Already, spokespersons for the Mugabe dictatorship have begun to use the writing of Mahmood Mamdani to give legitimacy to their anti-imperialist rhetoric. Mahmood Mamdani opposed the expulsion of the Asians from Uganda. This author opposed the expulsion of the Asians from Uganda on the grounds that it was racist. Mahmood Mamdani has recognised that after the removal of Idi Amin the top Asian capitalists returned to Uganda. In order to ensure that imperialism and the white settlers are not the beneficiaries of the quagmire and nightmare in Zimbabwe, there is a need to explore new agricultural techniques rooted in the experiences of farm workers to develop cooperatives as a means of breaking the domination of the new black capitalists. It was the democratic right of the Zimbabwean people to reclaim the lands seized by British colonialists, but progressive scholars must oppose all forms of exploitation, whether black or white.

At this time, this author supports the Zimbabwean farm labourers and opposes both the settler capitalist classes in Zimbabwe and their African allies seeking to continue the exploitation of the country's workers, poor peasants and traders.

Western imperialism understands the delicacy of the balance of forces in Zimbabwe. It is for this reason that the West is pressuring neoliberal elements in the MDC to join a government of national unity with the same group that has killed over 20,000 Zimbabweans and expelled over 750,000 urban dwellers from their places of shelter. The recent

scholarship on Zimbabwe offers one avenue for those who want to interrogate the links between ZANU-PF and the immense suffering of the country's (as reflected in the Special Bulletin of the Association of Concerned African Scholars)[1]. Mamdani is correct to draw attention to the influence of neoliberal forces such as Eddie Cross within the MDC, but neoliberalism is dead and the governments of western Europe and the USA are busy nationalising banks without democratic control and accountability. Zimbabweans who want transformation must oppose the neoliberal forces within the MDC to ensure that the suffering of working people does not continue after the ultimate departure of Robert Mugabe.

There is nothing democratic or revolutionary about what is going on in Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF. African scholars and progressive forces must use all of their resources to support producers as they seek new forms of emancipatory politics in the face of the global capitalist crisis. Africans, like decent humans in all parts of the planet, want to live in dignity and with basic rights.

## Notes

[1] Timothy Scarnecchia and Wendy Urban-Mead, eds., 'Special Issue on Zimbabwe', ACAS Bulletin 80 (Winter 2008):

<http://concernedafricascholars.org/?p=123>

## About the Author

Horace Campbell is a member of the African Studies Association and the National Conference of Black Political Scientists.