

## Some Observations on Mamdani's 'Lessons of Zimbabwe'

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By way of introduction, I would suggest that whatever Mamdani writes he is always brilliant and provocative. But he also tends to indulge in false generalizations and analogies, particularly when he compares his native Uganda with another African country which is not comparable.

- Here is an example of a generalization which is obviously not true. Replying to critics of Mugabe's land distribution programme, he writes that they sound "as if these lands were doomed by black ownership". No sources are given for this allegation at all, which would properly belong to a racist minority.
- Mugabe's policies have "helped lay waste the country's economy, though sanctions have played no small part". But the sanctions were targeted against the ZANU elites, who are on a list observed by the EU and the US, not against the people of Zimbabwe. The loss of international donor aid (such as the IMF's) was caused not by sanctions but by the Mugabe government failing to comply with the terms of various structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) adopted after 1990, which the government refuses to admit.
- The people of Zimbabwe are not likely to remember 2000-2003 as "the end of settler colonial rule", as Mamdani claims, but as the end of the rule of law, human rights and democratic electoral practices.
- "The inadequacy of land distribution did not ensure that it remained the focus of politics in independent Zimbabwe", he writes. But in fact Mugabe devoted few resources to it until he was threatened by the revolt of the war vets, the collapse of the economy and the loss of power.
- Britain's contribution to land redistribution had "dwindled to a trickle" by 1987, when the Labour Party took office. But Britain convened an international donor conference on land redistribution, which provided for transparency and accountability, but which the Mugabe government refused even to consider.
- Allegedly Mugabe responded with the 1999 constitution legalizing land seizures because the Aid Minister Clare Short had denied British responsibility, citing her Irish ancestry and opposition to British colonial rule. This joking irrelevancy was seized upon by Mugabe's government as an abdication of Britain's responsibility.
- "The ferocious repression of Ndebele in 1986" began long before then. Mugabe sent his all-Shona 5th brigade to suppress his ZAPU rivals in 1983, killing some 20,000 of them, until peace was made with the 'unity pact' in December 1987.
- The reason for Mugabe's electoral victory in 2002 was not that his support was "greater" than before the land redistributions but because there was massive fraud (at least 450,000 stuffed ballots), along with widespread violence and intimidation of the opposition MDC, leaving more than a hundred dead and thousands injured. The same tactics ensured a ZANU PF victory in the Parliamentary election in 2000. While these elections may have been endorsed by South Africa and Namibia, they were not acceptable to the overwhelmingly non-British and non-white Commonwealth, which suspended Zimbabwe's membership because of this fraud and violence.

### About the Author

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