

From popular power to political power and back again?

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What has Mugabe taught us?

A quick glance at Zimbabwe today presents a huge dilemma in the head of anyone of reasonable political intrigue. What went wrong in Zimbabwe? Who is to blame? History will have us believe that the challenges faced by Zimbabwe date back to the days of colonization and its invasive ways, land redistribution and a broken promise. International media, notorious for sensational coverage, has readily portrayed the situation as a dire one resulting from a regime on the brink of self destruction as it struggles to cling onto its waning hold on power. This writer finds a reasonable measure of truth in both perspectives. Mugabe is widely blamed for Zimbabwe's political and economic downturn, marked by an increasingly violent crackdown on opposition activists and journalists; a world-record 6 000 percent inflation and 80 percent unemployment. Colonial powers, none-the-less, have notoriously left a legacy that has scarred Africa forever and Zimbabwe is no exception. There are clear discrepancies in the social fabric that makes up Zimbabwe that can be easily linked to the effects of colonization.

Mugabe is very well known for being a teacher turn revolutionary freedom-fighter; turn Statesman who has endured the test of time. The recent developments in his country have left many slightly bewildered by his actions. Supported by the adage and very legitimate motive of a liberation struggle prompted by a common foe, Mugabe's actions have, arguably, been a source of more controversy than tangible results. The question that this writer is

prompted to pose as a result is whether we could have actually expected more to begin with? Politics, like history, is determined by the survivor and what seems right on one day in 'one fell swoop' could be utterly wrong on another. So the answer to this question may depend on whether Mugabe survives the current turbulence or not...

African leaders and leaders across the globe in general, have 'capitalized' (for the lack of a more politically correct word) from oppressive systems such as the one that ushered in Mugabe. These systems provide a bedding ground for revolutionary slogans to drive an agenda that promises liberation of the poor, oppressed and so on and so forth. This situation results into power earned through popularity, or in other words – popular power. Popular power is the influence that leaders/ politicians garner from the popular majority. In many cases the leader may become so popular that he deems himself as the sole custodian of the liberation of his people.

Most politicians go through extremes to gain this type of popularity so as to enable them to topple the 'oppressive' system that is in power only to end up oppressing others so as to keep this power. That is to say, people struggle to gain power and spend the rest of their lives fighting to remain in power; often, at the expense of even those who put them in power to begin with. The influence that people have as a result of their political roles is by definition political power. Hence, prompting me to share Senior Juan Pero's view, in no definitive terms – 'politics is the art of deceit' – say what it takes to get power and then use that same power to stay in power even if it means denying the popular majority who voted you in their power.

What has Globalization taught us?

Globalization follows on the heels of colonization and imperialism before it, in quenching the human thirst for endeavor and conquest prompted by scarcity of natural and manmade resources. In as much as the world chose to frown upon it when it initially surfaced; often linking it with the many evils of our time, Globalization has matured from being just a mere catchphrase explaining a concept to being the reality that depicts the state of the world as we know it today. Globalization has taught us, though, that we are, in effect, compelled to be united if we truly want to survive. What happens in America has an effect on the people living in the most remote villages in Tanzania and the reverse may also be true.

Oppressive systems that set barriers for progression based on race, creed and geographical boundaries have not and will not survive as a result. This is a bold assertion indeed, but if you have any doubts on its validity just look at the progressive development of nation states into unions and examine the just fate of Nazism, Apartheid and Slavery. Africa over the last couple of centuries, if not more, has been colored by most of these realities; we have seen the best and worst of humanity and have lived to tell the story. Martin Luther King, the iconic civil rights activist, wrapped it up best by saying that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

What has Mandela taught us?

Nelson Mandela is Africa's most revered freedom fighter and living ex-Statesman; he is indeed a living legend. Upon securing the most powerful

position in his country, Mandela had every reason to use his new found and justly earned power to return the favor and oppress his historical oppressors (the white minority), but he did not. Had he chosen to capitalize on the heat of the moment (the cry for black empowerment and white disempowerment); he could have easily taken from the rich and given to it all to the poor, but he did not.

Some argue that Mandela could have done more, but I side with those who believe that he did just what was necessary at the time. It all boils down to what Mandela's motives were; did Mandela fight for freedom so that he could deny others of their freedom? To have done so would have meant that Mandela had not understood the very meaning of freedom itself. In as much as he sought freedom for the oppressed majority, he sought freedom for the oppressive minority from their oppressive mentality by promoting a culture of non-oppression and reconciliation. Remember injustice anywhere (of any kind) is a threat to justice everywhere (of any kind). Freedom cannot be the exclusive domain of any social group, in order to be effective it has to be enjoyed by all! Mandela represents a rare breed of leaders who have the ability see beyond the obvious and act in accordance.

What have we learned?

What have we learned? Maybe nothing... It is worth, though, stressing that it is one thing to be taught [how things happen] and another thing to have learned [why these things happen]. The Mugabe – Mandela contrast presents us with two different perspectives that we can learn from and apply almost in any context of our lives. But the following stands firm in my mind: if justice is not an absolute truth then it is a relative truth and can change depending on the

situation at hand. Mandela sought justice as an absolute and Mugabe may be seeking it in relativity, hence creating the potential for inculcating a culture of injustice. In as much as there is a need to address matters of the past, more compelling is creating a foundation for addressing matters of the future, where all men and women will stand equal and not be judged by virtue of their creed, race or beliefs.

To safeguard ourselves against the potential of inculcating a culture of injustice, we must appreciate the following facts:

Fact one: No one is immune from the prongs of power and its many evils. Do we abhor those who corrupt power just because we do not have power to corrupt ourselves or simply because we abhor corruption for corruptions sake?

Fact two: Good governance is entrusted in checks and balances [supported by fool proof systems] and not just having good people in positions of power, as good people are potentially also very bad.

Fact three: Anyone keen on bringing about sustainable change must use their political power to promote popular power, even if it works in someone else's favor.