

# BEEN THERE, BEEN CHEATED LIKE THAT

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(By way of a Goodbye to Robert Mugabe)

Hama Tuma

I knew some Zimbabweans during the time of their liberation war in Algiers and other places. Some of them are dead now, members of ZAPU, ZANU PF, Frolizi. They were not bad guys but I never imagined Zimbabweans are as whole to be so polite and kind so much so for them to treat the man they called a dictator with such consideration and sympathy all the time calling for his downfall.

Even the generals who arrested him handled Mugabe politely as far as refusing to call their coup a coup. Somehow or perhaps, they felt sacrilegious if they admitted they were staging a coup against the old man. It was not called corrective or an accidental coup, no name but the president was put under house arrest and then forced to resign. Peculiar indeed in a continent accustomed to bloody and violent overthrows over decades. And there were even photos of the coup makers laughing with their victims. Actually, since the system continues and the VP was named the successor one can hardly talk of change or a real African coup. What made me write been there and been cheated like that is the euphoria and support to the VP is surely going to be a disappointment. In Ethiopia we sent away Mengistu (he lives in Harare now) and brought in other brutes who have proved to be very disastrous to our country. Hailing the military or similar goons as saviors has hardly ever worked for any African country, except perhaps in the Sudanese case when General Sawar al Dahab and his friends got rid of Nimeri and then relinquished power.

Who is now the president of Zimbabwe? Emerson Mnangagwa trained in China as a Zanu guerrilla has been on the side of Mugabe for years and before eleven years he became his trusted VP. As chief of security this VO nicknamed the Crocodile was accused of brutal repression including the killing of thousands in Matabile land. In other words, the only difference between Mugabe and Mnangagwa is an ambitious

young woman called Grace. The old man, obviously besotted by her, agreed and sent the VO packing into exile and unfurled the whole problem on himself. (Madam Mugabe) who wanted him out for her to be her husband's heir. If age is a factor Mugabe is 93 and his replacement 75 and one of the richest men in Zimbabwe, go figure. Both men have very spoiled boys who bask in scandals. So, are Zimbabweans fools of hope for expecting change from almost identical people? Time will tell and the new president is making the right noises. We in Ethiopia are not to be blamed if we remain skeptical after suffering more than 40 years of demagoguery and unfulfilled promises. In Africa, the only sure thing is that the leaders will fleece the people and the country blind and will not be hesitant when it comes to repressing dissent.

The West made a devil out of Mugabe when he turned against the white landowners who being 6% owned more than 70% of the land. Had seen the same with Saddam and Gaddafi and even with their own Bin Laden whom they liked to call a Mujahedeen against the Soviets. Mugabe's violent repression of the opposition was glossed over only to be highlighted when the interests of whites were touched upon. Mugabe became a dictator to denounce with venom and vigor only when the interests of the West and the whites were affected contrary to their greed and supremacy. If Mugabe had imitated Namibia's Sam Nujoma and kept white supremacy intact and untouched he would have been for sure the darling of Britain and the West. And yet, Mugabe shortened his own leash, became repressive and corrupt too and overtaxed the patience of the good people of Zimbabwe. 37 years of rule is imperial (Haile Selassie stayed for 44 years) but times have changed and ended feudal obscurantism a long time ago. Popular as he was he lost it by staying in power too long and by turning ZANU PF into the usual apparatus of control and enrichment. His wife was one of a kind and Ethiopians were not to be blamed if she was competing with the Empress (Itege) of corruption, the wife of the late Meles Zenawi, whose inevitable end will be worse than that of Grace Mugabe.

Much as Mugabe today is a caricature of the disciplined and ascetic fighter of the past ZANU PF also turned into a sad copy of itself with leaders making statements that denigrated the people's wisdom and capacity. If we tell them to elect a donkey

they will do so said one party leader. The liberation and existence of Zimbabwe owed itself, first and foremost, to the sacrifice of the people and not only to the tenacity of Mugabe and his comrades. But the party and Mugabe seemed to have forgotten that and paid a high price which has now led to the ignominy that faced Mugabe and the precarious situation that is facing the whole country and the people. We had also another axe to grind with Mugabe and his party who, working with America, gave asylum to the butcher called Mengistu. He is still there enjoying his lavish stay, sending his children to school after killing thousands of students and youngsters, ruining our country, and wiping out a militant generation. Time and again we did ask justice from Mugabe and his party but it fell on deaf ears as it would now also since we do not expect Mnangagwa to act any different from his old boss. The West is elated because Mugabe is sidelined and they hope the new president will fall under their feet. Talks of Mugabe continuing as an advisor and the fact that the old system continues and no transitional democratic arrangement was sought do not augur well. Once bitten twice shy being the case we do feel apprehensive and hope that the brave people of Zimbabwe will not let their struggle for democracy be short changed thwarted. The continuation of the same is no change at all, demagoguery to the contrary notwithstanding.

Good bye Robert Mugabe.

Good luck the people of Zimbabwe .

down with dictators in Africa !!