

South Africa takes a fateful step

[Johnathan Pearce \(London\)](#) · [African affairs](#) · [Economics, Business & Globalization](#)

Well, I can not say this **bad story** came as a total surprise, given the near-total lack of respect for property rights and the rule of law in Africa:

South Africa says it will for the first time force a white farmer to sell his land under a redistribution plan.

The story goes on to say that the seizure is part of a drive to “redistribute” land to people who lost what was rightfully theirs as a result of the 20th Century apartheid regime. Hmm. It seems to me that on an abstract level relating to rectification of previous injustices, there is some credibility to this idea. However, the big problem is that the people who will get chunks of this land are unlikely to have much to do with the people who were allegedly robbed of said land in the first place, assuming that such a claim can be validated. (Of course if there are people who could claim that they or their ancestors were robbed of what was rightly theirs, then I have no objection in principle to some restitution).

In practice, as we have seen all too clearly in nearby Zimbabwe, the spoils of any assault on white-owned farmland will go to the political hacks and cronies of the governing regime, and likely bring about a serious, possibly catastrophic loss of economic wealth and food in a part of the world, that is not, to put it mildly, greatly endowed with such things.

Perhaps the president of South Africa should put **this book** on his reading list. Or perhaps he should remember to heed his **own words**.

More than anything else, Africa needs stable, enforceable property rights, period, if it is clamber out of its current state. Sir Bob Geldolf and friends, please note.

September 23rd, 2005 |



66 comments to South Africa takes a fateful step



Wild Pegasus
[September 23, 2005 at 7:43 pm](#)

Let's say someone robbed your grandfather of everything he ever owned. Don't you think you would be entitled to have it returned to your family?

I think it's fair to be wary of redistribution and cronyism (especially in Africa), but blacks deserve to have their land returned to them.

– Josh



Adam
[September 23, 2005 at 7:56 pm](#)

Well, if it was there initially. The land could have been in a certain family for generations before the British came.

david_will
[Hookahshisha.com](#)

David
[September 23, 2005 at 8:09 pm](#)



It's been a while since I studied African History, but I seem to remember that Hottentots and Pygmies had a small population in Southern Africa when the Europeans arrived. What we consider to be Black Africans (Bantu) had not yet moved that far south. In fact the Bantu and Boers first met when the Boers began pushing further north.

I also remember reading that the Bantus enslaved the Hottentots and hunted Pygmies for sport. Just something to consider when speaking about historical rights and retributions.

I'd check on this, but I only have a few minutes to respond at the moment.



Anonymous Coward
September 23, 2005 at 8:30 pm

In my opinion, land is not simple personal private property in the sense that a watch or even a owner-occupied house is. Ownership of large tracts of land requires title and title requires the force of the state. Large land owners are subsidised by the state in that they potentially require more state protection than does a normal individual. This protection comes at the expense of all taxpayers, including those without any land. I'm not sure how this directly applies to this issue, but it's an opinion worth noting.



Julian Morrison
September 23, 2005 at 8:31 pm

Was it individually owned or tribal collective property? I don't see a right to restitution for something that was nobody-in-particulars when it was taken.



anonymous coward
September 23, 2005 at 9:10 pm

Anonymous Coward:
 I'm not sure either.



Owen Barder
September 23, 2005 at 9:19 pm

"given the near-total lack of respect for property rights and the rule of law in Africa" ... "More than anything else, Africa needs stable, enforceable property rights, period, if it is clamber out of its current state."

One thing that would help the people of Africa would be if people would stop making grotesque generalisations of this sort. Africa is a huge and varied continent and this sort of caricature is neither accurate nor useful.

I don't know anything about this particular case (and I doubt if you do either) but in general, land restitution in South Africa has been limited to those who can show that they lost land as a result of the apartheid laws (or are descended from those who did). Sensibly, the Government has not guaranteed to restore the particular property that was taken, but in some cases to provide property of equal value instead. Given that Samizdata on the whole believes in property rights, you should welcome the program of restoration of land, not deplore it. Or do you only believe in property rights for white folks?



j0nesing_around
September 23, 2005 at 9:30 pm

Yeah the argument could be made that the Africaaners were a white tribe, because when the Dutch first arrived on the Cape there wasn't too much happening south of the Zambezi. A lot of the land was deserted.

But when you set up house and start to institute a system that dehumanizes indigenous africans – then yeah – I'm not weeping for the disparities and injustices they face today. Ditto the white farmers in Zimbabwe, although I do think Mugabe is piece of decomposing goat shit.

Apartheid was a really a type of racial fascism and if when you decide to go there, you better damn well be able to sustain it, cos there will be a lot of people waiting to even scores.

BB
September 23, 2005 at 9:57 pm



QUESTION: What if a black man owns land that once belonged to a white man that supposedly before him may have belonged to a tribe.

Does the black man get his land taken from him too?

Well, Ill be he doesnt.

People, get over what happened to your ancestors. Get some land of your own for godsake.

Ya dont see the Americans whose ancestors had all kinds of property appropriated by the dammed Fascists and Commies demanding reparations, do ya?. Its a new world. Live accordingly.



Dave

September 23, 2005 at 9:57 pm

UK: Area: 242,514 sq km (93,638 sq miles), Population: 59.6 million

Zimbabwe: Area: 390,759 sq km (150,873 sq miles),

Population: 12.9 million

South Africa: Area: 1.22 million sq km (470,693 sq miles), Population: 45.3 million.

UK population density = 640 per sq mile.

Zimbabwe pop density = 86 per sq mile.

South Africa pop density = 95 per sq mile.

With such low population densities compared to Britain why exactly do they need land redistribution? there should be enough land for everyone??

Yes I know not all land is good farm land etc, but even so they have plenty of land.



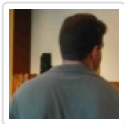
John East

September 23, 2005 at 10:33 pm

A couple of posters on this thread take the unbelievable stance that because poor blacks were unfairly deprived of their land several generations ago they should now be given it back.

And this is after whitensing the debacle in Zimbabwe.

I am in no doubt that redistributing land along these lines will propel South Africa back into the stone age alongside Zimbabwe. Starvation, disease, and civil war would all be back on the agenda. But lets not worry about these minor drawbacks, the whites will have been taught a lesson, that's the important thing.



ElamBend

September 23, 2005 at 10:38 pm

I would think that if anyone had a claim on the land, it would be the Zulu. However, I'd be willing to bet the land will go to Xhosa, ANC supporters.

Dave: It is not land that matters but productive land. What good would it do to give away land that is not even useful, check out Tanzania in the 70s.

Owen: Check out any economic freedom index, note that property rights are important to economic freedom, note how African countries IN GENERAL rate on said index.



veryretired

September 23, 2005 at 11:07 pm

I would assume that most people who frequent this site are aware of the "campaign" against the kulaks that Stalin instituted, supposedly out of egalitarian and redistributive principles, but actually as a method of destroying the small property owning class, as in middle class, that might oppose further marxist ideas about property and agriculture.

If you are not familiar with this historical precedent, read up on it. Suffice it to say, millions died from the ensuing violence and famine.

The government of SA is the former marxist opposition party. The government of Zimbabwe is a one party socialist dictatorship, whose close ally, and model, is North Korea.

If anyone is actually surprized by any of this lunacy, then they haven't been paying very much attention to the way marxist/socialist states operate once the rhetoric is stripped away.

If some are too intimidated by the fact that the actors in these cases are aggrieved blacks, and therefore any criticism has to be hedged and qualified, then don't try to pretend later that it was all so unexpected. They are just as capable of evil as their caucasian predecessors.

The collectivist stupidities being acted out in Zim and SA are every bit as misguided, the motives every bit as venal, and the consequences will be every bit as disastrous as the previous idiocies perpetrated by white collectivists in Europe, yellow collectivists in Asia, and hispanic collectivists in Central and South America.

There is no color, no tribe, no race when it comes to the bankrupt and unworkable nonsense that is collectivist ideology.

If there is anything that is truly impartial in this world, it is the inhumanity of the collectivist ideology and the mindset that enacts it upon its hapless victime. It simply kills everything it touches, without regard to race, creed, or color.



Dave

September 24, 2005 at 12:16 am

ElamBend: yes I know its productive land that matters but they have a lot of that.



j0nesing_around

September 24, 2005 at 12:33 am

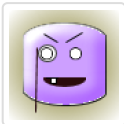
See what this type of convo reveals are the racists. Forget the pros and cons of the SA situation and read the posts.

Racism is dated, regressive and a waste of time.

If you're stuck on colour – you're stuck on stupid. We all have to get through that hurdle and falling back on the old black/white stereotypes doesn't help. That is more appropriate if you are Victorian.

Whites who are racists these days are masochist by definition, because those categories don't fit anymore and if you insist on seeing the world that way ... you will SUFFER.

Enjoy!!



Wild Pegasus

September 24, 2005 at 1:00 am

Dave,

Someone hacks into your bank and digitally wires your life savings. I don't see why you should be upset or why anyone should bother to return it to you. After all, there are trillions more dollars out there.

– Josh



j0nesing_around

September 24, 2005 at 1:09 am

Okay you damn English give back all you ripped off from Ireland and Scotland.

Fairs fair!



Peter

September 24, 2005 at 1:44 am

Yes quite right,we want Calais and Normandy back immediately.

Later Christendom can reclaim the lands of the middle east,excepting the Arabian Peninsular.



none

September 24, 2005 at 1:49 am

Once in awhile something happens to make essences of my curmudgeonly, cynical, selfish core percolate to the surface. Reading this story was such an event.

Hell with 'em. Let them take over the land, run it into the ground (run land into the ground?), and starve themselves right out of the gene pool.

Hell with 'em.



Mike James
 September 24, 2005 at 4:59 am

They'll barbecue the dairy cows, and then come to the West holding out the begging bowl. This is either a racist statement, or else a pretty conservative prediction what will happen during the next ten years.



none
 September 24, 2005 at 5:42 am

They'll barbecue the dairy cows, and then come to the West holding out the begging bowl.

And we'll have beggared them because of our exploitive colonialist ways.

It's not racist to make such comments. It's culturalist. There are people who know how to coax riches from land, and people who don't. Among the latter is a shockingly high proportion who evince no interest in learning. And Gaza will become an orange grove.



Jacob
 September 24, 2005 at 9:08 am

"The collectivist stupidities being acted out in Zim and SA are every bit as misguided, the motives every bit as venal, and the consequences will be every bit as disastrous as the previous idiocies perpetrated by white collectivists in Europe, yellow collectivists in Asia, and hispanic collectivists in Central and South America."

As usual, absolutely and deeply correct.

"Land reform" – meaning land confiscation and nominal "redistribution" is a pet idea of the lefties, and has been practiced all over the world – in the name of "social justice". (In most places race was not a factor).

The results have always been a steep drop in agricultural output and a steep decline in living standards, if not outright famine.

Contrary to their claims, collectivists are not interested in the "welfare of the poor". They are interested in power – in the implementation of their ideas (of social justice) by force, they being the ones who apply the force. Force is part of their ideology, claiming it is needed, because the oligarchs, in their quest to protect their property use force to oppress the poor.

Individual cases of injustice, which Josh seems to be worried about, should be resolved by courts on the merit of each case. They don't justify a general Government policy of redistribution.



Julian Taylor
 September 24, 2005 at 9:22 am

There are some awful comments on this post. Never thought I'd read on SAMIZDATA someone almost justifying Mugabe's tactics as "*Well, if it was theres initially. The land could have been in a certain family for generations before the british came.*". Well, the land was settled by the Dutch originally, and incidentally one hell of a long time before America had started to be colonised, the British didn't come on the scene for some time to come.

One point that people miss is that South Africa, through its prodigious agricultural production, is quite capable of feeding a large chunk of Southern Africa – all those countries like Mozambique, Malawi, Angola and Zimbabwe (as an example) rely on South Africa to provide for them when the OAU steps in to try and curb the excesses of their dictators. Take South African bulk grain farming out the equation and we are left with Bob Geldorf and BBC News crews filming sobbing children with bloated bellies while doing what the BBC does best – wringing hands and saying 'something must be done'.

But why stop at the farms? Surely someone in the ~~Transvaal~~ Gauteng Province can come forward with a claim that in the 1886 Johannes Meyer and Johannes Rissik purloined their farmland for gold digging on the Witwatersrand? How about someone saying that the De Kalk farm, near what became Kimberley, was theirs and thus all of De Beers output since 1866 belongs to them?

Oh, and the last point, which I am sure is dear to the average Hampstead Starbucks Socialist, is this ... no more South Africa chardonnay.



monk
 September 24, 2005 at 9:39 am

Um. hang on. "pay back for land theft etc." Sorry, I don't quite get this. Many, many properties in SA and Zim have changed hands — post full representative democratic government — on the open market.

People of any color are free to buy them. Loans, extended by the government-funded land bank are biased in favor of new black land owners. Fair enough. So... explain why taking a the land of legitimate purchaser (who say bought the property after the end of apartheid or white minority rule) for anything other than its market value on the basis of the owner's skin color is anything other than racism? Land expropriation — in Zim, and by advocacy in SA is to be based on the skin color of the owner. No other factor. That's racism all right. Black on white racism is no more acceptable than any other kind.



John East

September 24, 2005 at 11:34 am

I was confident that we would get at least one liberal using the racist chant designed to stop all debate on this subject. Congratulations, JOnesing_around, you are that man (or woman). I don't think playing the racist card works well on Samizdata. Most of the posters here have their own minds, and prefer debating the points raised.

Julian, you mentioned the future of gold and diamond mining properties. I think it's worth pointing out the fact, of which I'm sure you are aware, that the SA government has no plans to appropriate these, or other businesses, because they know it would cause a flight of capital and business investment out of the country. Instead, the government is using "black empowerment" legislation for the placement of blacks in ownership and senior management positions. I would like to think that this will produce a gradual transfer of power and influence to the indigenous population, whilst not harming the interests of white South Africans too much, but this outcome is as likely as the establishment of a successful Marxist government. The end result will be the same as land grabs, it will just take a bit longer.



Ted

September 24, 2005 at 1:03 pm

Oh I get it ...it's OK for a black political party to take land from citizens, but not for a white political party to do so. The logic is : they're black, man...so...um...they can take away people's property. Some of you lot are amazingly hypocritical.

If anything the awful example of apartheid should have inspired South Africa's current leaders not to do the same thing. This is just apartheid under a different name and it's equally disgraceful.

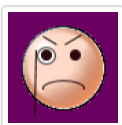


Julian Taylor

September 24, 2005 at 1:23 pm

Maybe because they've seen Mugabe get away with the landgrab they now know that the rest of the world will either support them against the evil white imperialists, or sit on both hands and do nothing.

John East, you should be aware that South African agriculture is a massive industry there and certainly not like anything we have in Europe, more akin (like so many other things in South Africa) to Texas than anywhere else. When you say that they have "*no plans to appropriate these, or other businesses, because they know it would cause a flight of capital and business investment out of the country.*" I should think that there is nothing more likely to cause an instant brain and wealth emigration than a superficial racially motivated land grab



Aidan Maconachy

September 24, 2005 at 3:06 pm

Look – in addressing the disparities and injustices that have come about in the wake of the changes in Africa you don't have to fall back on the old black/white distinctions again. Just because a decrepit old arse pirate like Mugabe chooses to act in a racial fashion, doesn't mean we smooth and enlightened samizeestas have to descend to the same level of primeval ignorance.

There are AFRICANS period. Black ones, beige ones, yellowish ones, pinkish ones, off-white ones, brown ones, coco-coloured ones ... fuck there are even ALBINOS ... and they're whiter than Tony Blair's arse!!!

Just cos some black nincumpoop in SA mouths racial lingo, doesn't mean we all have to get hysterical and descend to that tribalistic retard view of life.

And anyway, racists are boring. Ever been in a pub when one starts up? Silence. Everyone glazed over. Jokes stop. It's like ... here we go ...

Give us a break in here in the name of Kate Moss!

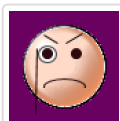


Johnathan Pearce

September 24, 2005 at 3:30 pm

I am a bit disappointed to see one or two posters – whose names I have not seen before – hurling the racist charge around. If they bothered to read my post properly, they would not see a single racist implication in this post. Race has nothing to do with it. I also conceded that in principle it was legitimate to return property to its rightful owners, if such title can be proven and an injustice verified. But as I said, in practice this is very hard to do and the consequences in terms of economic damage would be enormous, as Julian Taylor pointed out.

Our inability to think straight about Africa without the usual cant is one of the reasons that continent is so royally fucked up.



Aidan Maconachy
[September 24, 2005 at 3:45 pm](#)

I agree Africa is f'd up and I think corruption is endemic. The problems are horrendous.

I have no problem talking about the idiocy, as I see it, of some black attitudes without allowing my contempt to be fuelled by racism. I mean when I slang Tabo Mbeki for saying for example – out loud even – that the HIV virus isn't connected with Aids, and making other ignorant comments along a similar vein, I'm not thinking skin colour.

I think it's important to engage these issues, without reverting to the racial labels because that is reductionist and simplistic, and it prevents an understanding of the real issues.



Johnathan Pearce
[September 24, 2005 at 4:20 pm](#)

Aidan, I would disagree with a single word of your last comment. I was not aware that my original article did involve "racial labels" in the first place. Rgds.



John East
[September 24, 2005 at 4:37 pm](#)

Aiden Machonachy,

Your first post said little of any substance, if it had I would have happily address any point you made, but it included the comment, "... in Africa you don't have to fall back on the old black/white distinctions again."

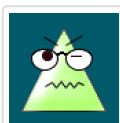
Your second post said, "I think it's important to engage these issues, without reverting to the racial labels because that is reductionist and simplistic, and it prevents an understanding of the real issues."

I've not seen any comments on this thread to the effect that black = bad, white = good. Most comments have been concerning the plight of South African blacks and the possible consequences of land seizure.

Do you have anything to say for or against the original proposition:

"South Africa says it will for the first time force a white farmer to sell his land under a redistribution plan."

or do you just wish to rail against your undefined concept of racism?



Aidan Maconachy
[September 24, 2005 at 5:09 pm](#)

Okay, I'll address the issue raised by John then.

I don't actually know the details of this case. However, if in fact this farmer is being forced to sell his land because he has been made an object of discriminatory practices, then of course I think it is wrong.

This type of BS runs completely counter to the post-apartheid objectives of the ANC as laid out by Mandela, with emphasis being placed on "reconciliation".

Any forced acts of land redistribution derived from policies that reflect ancillary grievances dating back to the apartheid era are wrong and not in the spirit of the new South Africa as enunciated by its founders.

I think Mbeki actually is a little prick, and full of closeted prejudices ... so it wouldn't surprise me if this type of discrimination is allowed to fly beneath the radar.

In which case, yes ... I would oppose this.



Kim du Toit
[September 24, 2005 at 5:23 pm](#)

Perhaps we need to look at a little actual history of African settlement.

In the first place, “property rights” is a Western construct. Prior to the arrival of the eeeevil colonialists in Africa, property belonged to the warlord with the best warriors. Period.

There was no such thing as “property”, as such, other than that was gained through conquest.

When the British settled in southern Africa, one of the first things they did was to survey and map the areas they controlled — and then establish property boundaries. Property rights, for both Blacks and Whites, were therefore enshrined into ownership deeds.

Enter the Afrikaner Apartheid Society.

What these turds did was to “remove” Blacks living in “White” areas and “relocated” them into areas which the Govt. had decreed as “historically Black” areas. The legislation which empowered these actions was called the “Group Areas Act”, and was one of the most disgusting laws ever passed, anywhere.

The manner in which this was done was brutal beyond description. I witnessed it for myself.

The vacated land was snapped up at market prices by White farmers and agribusiness. Proceeds went into the Govt. operating fund, NOT to the Blacks thus dispossessed.

As most people will know, I look on Africa (especially sub-Sahara) with a very jaundiced eye. Mostly, the entire continent is going to fall into the pit.

The actions of the current ANC Govt. may hasten this process — actually, it probably will. Farming done in the African manner (eg. Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique) does not have a sterling track record, especially when compared with Western-style farming methods.

But I have little sympathy for the White farmers thus dispossessed, either. It was always a haunting prospect that the sins of apartheid were going to be revisited on the descendants of its supporters — it’s one of the reasons I left the place — and what only amazes me is that the process has taken so long to be implemented.

To the victors go the spoils: it’s the African way.

Everyone hated apartheid (other than its practitioners), and everyone said that Africans were perfectly capable of self-government.

Well, let’s see, shall we?

I predict that in twenty years’ time, South Africa will be a basket case like Zimbabwe is today, or close to it.

I will welcome any intelligent refutation thereof.



John K

September 24, 2005 at 7:58 pm

Kim:

Nice to see you stick your head above the parapet. Hope things are going well for you wherever you are now.



Wild Pegasus

September 24, 2005 at 8:37 pm

I wonder if South Africa can govern itself as a UK-style national parliament. The nation-state model has been relatively successful in Europe and some parts of the East but not very successful in Africa. African cultures haven’t adopted the idea of national identity. This is understandable, considering the length of time it took for that adoption to take place in Europe.

South Africa would likely be better governed if it were heavily decentralised, maybe even broken into 12-15 countries.

ObTopic: If someone has stolen from my grandfather, my family has a right to get it back. I don’t understand the liberals/libertarians on Samizdata who recoil in horror at the thought of giving back family possessions.

– Josh



Joshua

September 25, 2005 at 2:57 am

Wild Pegasus-

I don’t think any regular visitor to Samizdata would deny your right to reclaim your grandfather’s stolen property. We would, however, deny you the “right” to have a grab at property stolen from someone else’s grandfather who happened to be of the same race as your grandfather. The point of the original post was merely to point out that stealing is stealing regardless of who does it or why. If you’re laying claim to property that was never yours, it’s stealing, regardless of what sort of racial greivances you may be invoking in making your claim. Just as membership

in the white race did not give anyone justification to seize property from blacks under Apartheid, so now membership in any black race does not justify taking property from whites. That's all. We object to this seizure because we suspect it is racially motivated.

Have a look at the linked article and see for yourself. It details how the government has a goal of redistributing one-third of all white-owned land by 2014. There is nothing in the article to indicate that any particular individual seeks to buy the farm in question, or that anyone has staked a claim based on past ownership. Icing on the cake is a quotation from an official on the redistribution commission stressing the need for South Africa to learn from Zimbabwe's model. (!!!) I don't know how much clearer it could be: this is the beginning of a racist policy that will almost certainly spell economic disaster for South Africa if implemented.



Owen Barder

September 26, 2005 at 1:14 am

Joshua and others: that is absolute rubbish. The Molamu family, from whom this farm was stolen, want it back; and the Government of South Africa proposes to buy it back using a power of compulsory purchase.

The discussion above has wilfully confused the policy of land restitution and land redistribution – two distinct policies of the South African government. The restitution program, which is the one that allows compulsory purchases, is a program that supports rather than undermines property rights. For those of you who have an interest in finding out what is actually happening, as opposed to relying on your prejudices, I've **explained the context of this decision in more detail here**.

The discussion here at Samizdata is, in my view, shamefully racist.



Joshua

September 26, 2005 at 2:42 am

My response to this is posted in the comments on **his blog**.



John East

September 26, 2005 at 9:52 am

Owen,
I find your comments shamefully optimistic and naive.

No matter how a society is organised, to function successfully it must have systems and institutions which direct control of industry and agriculture to those members of that society best able to manage these roles. South Africa is the bread basket of Africa because their system, however repellent, fulfilled this objective successfully and continued to do so after apartheid.

Do you really think that transfer of agriculture to someone who happened to have a great great great grandfather who was a hunter gatherer or a subsistence farmer is the way forwards?

I hope South Africa proves to be the exception of poor black government in Africa, but the land reforms and black empowerment do not bode well for the future. I say this not because the new ruling elite is black, but because they are human. If the racial roles were reversed, and in the absence of clear, enforceable property right laws, I would expect whites to behave as badly as I fear the blacks will.

Instead of throwing the racist accusation around, why don't you have the honesty to debate any comment which you consider to be racist?

I assume you believe the left wing definition of racism:

"A racist is anyone who discusses race."

Is this the case? Is one allowed to point to the fact that African governments have a poor track record? Can a factual statement be racist?



John East

September 26, 2005 at 10:24 am

Johnathan (& Perry),
I've just taken a look at Owens' blog. I find his blanket condemnation of Samizdata quite alarming.

I suspect that his attitude results from a definition of racism which is far wider than anyone prior to the PC era would have subscribed to. Owen appears to consider the discussion of any subject which has a racial component to be racist. Erecting these taboos to shut down all debate is lamentable.

Congratulations for standing up for free speech, it's becoming a rare commodity these days.



pommygranate
September 26, 2005 at 11:07 am

Perry

I too have just taken a look at Owen's blog, where i find Samizdata accused of being used as a "platform for racists".

One of the reasons i find Samizdata such interesting reading is the diversity of opinion and knowledge of the majority of commentators, and their willingness to make factually but politically incorrect points.

Indeed far from "providing an environment which nurtures racism", i have always found that whenever a genuinely bigoted or racist remark is made, it is quickly ridiculed by other commentators.

Hence i am surprised you find it necessary to confer respectability on Owen's barking blog by making three statements defending Samizdata.

I thought the house policy was to ignore idiots.



Aidan Maconachy
September 26, 2005 at 4:15 pm

I felt that some of the conversation on this issue earlier in the thread could have been interpreted as having a racist undertone by someone taking a casual read, but I certainly don't think Samizdata is a racist site Owen and frankly find such a characterization ridiculous. There is a level of insight and a perspective on political events that is extremely original and most posters aren't afraid to state their opinions without fear of censure – so to lambaste the entire site along these lines goes beyond the pale.

I spent a large part of my youth in Africa so this conversation has a special interest. As I said earlier, I am unfamiliar with the facts of this particular case, however I have followed the overall debate about land politics in both Zimbabwe and South Africa very closely over the past couple of years, so I thought it might be useful to take a look at the overall scenario.

John East's remark ...

"Do you really think that transfer of agriculture to someone who happened to have a great great great grandfather who was a hunter gatherer or a subsistence farmer is the way forwards?"

is very well taken. In many of these cases ideology and plain criminality has taken the place of economic sense.

The following statement by Thabo Mbeki really signals where he is coming from and is ominous with regard to future intent

"Because of colonialism of a special type our victory in the national liberation struggle did not result in the departure of the foreign ruling class."

The South African system is open to abuse and manipulation. Unlike the States which has a Bureau of Land Management , land matters are handled by a bureaucratic jumble of entities that roughly forms a troika made up I believe (don't quote me on this) of ... agriculture, land affairs and public works. The process is open to exploitation ESPECIALLY if the ANC invokes the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act which was passed in 2003 and is an axe that can be sharpened at will.

Mbeki see's "the struggle" as ongoing if you want to know the truth. I mean struggle in the sense of the race struggle, and I believe he is prepared to use state apparatus to achieve his vision of parity. Some of his thinking isn't that far removed from the fascist agenda of the ZANU (PF) despite all of his posturing on this issue.

I fully agree with posters who have pointed out the economic idiocy inherent in these "reforms". Moreover Mugabe is the worst kind of unilateralist and uses the system in Zimbabwe as though it's his own back parlor business (I mention this because it may be a hint of what is to come in SA). Since independence in 1980 he has altered the Constitution 17 times. Following his seizure of white land he actually set about blocking white farmers from appealing in the courts. He is indeed a mafia figure, and the fact that Mbeki has been soft peddling on his criticisms of Mugabe says it all.

This thing is still in the early going.



John East
September 26, 2005 at 5:11 pm

I think I owe Owen a small thank you for spurring me on to look into the topic of African land reform a little more than I otherwise would have done. Here's a report from what one must assume is a white supremacist organisation, The UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs

WINDHOEK, 23 Sep 2005 (IRIN) – Namibia's land reform programme is flawed because poor and landless people are not being empowered to become successful farmers once they have been resettled, claims a new report.

'An Analysis of the Namibian Commercial Agricultural Land Reform Process', released this week by the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), a local NGO, stressed that land reform involved more than just "buying or expropriating land from one group in order to give more land to another group".

Most resettled persons had little or no knowledge of rotational grazing, livestock breeding systems or financial planning and management skills, the report pointed out: they simply continued subsistence farming on the piece of land they had been allocated.

"Although the government resettlement policy states that its support for beneficiaries would be restricted after five years, our research team did not find a single resettlement project to be sustainable after five years," the authors commented.



Shannon Love

September 26, 2005 at 5:35 pm

I have come to the conclusion that what most people mean by calling somebody else "racist" is: "I'm shutting my brain off now."



Luniversal

September 27, 2005 at 9:31 am

It's hilarious to see you lot all calling each other 'racist' as if that was a conclusive argument instead of just a vacuous term of abuse. You have become completely possessed by the same taboos and superstitions as your ostensible opponents on the Left. Tongue-tied to death. Don't mention the problem and it will solve itself!

No doubt it is very shocking for South Africa's government to be compulsorily purchasing property, but they all do it when it suits them. How about those families whose houses, in which they had been living for a century, were to be bought up under the doctrine of eminent domain— not for some pressing public purpose such as a new road or fire station, but so that the area could be redeveloped and raise the municipal authority's revenues? it didn't happen in Cape Town, it happened in New England.



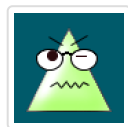
John East

September 27, 2005 at 1:57 pm

Luniversal,

"It's hilarious to see you lot all calling each other 'racist' as if that was a conclusive argument instead of just a vacuous term of abuse."

Read the posts. There's only one person throwing the racist accusation around, and he's not one of "you lot".

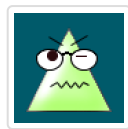


Aidan Maconachy

September 27, 2005 at 3:05 pm

Earlier on in the thread it was open to interpretation. I threw it out to see what responses I would get and John and others clarified their position ... and I clarified mine accordingly.

We have yet to hear from Owen however.



Aidan Maconachy

September 27, 2005 at 3:29 pm

I think the problem arises when a discussion of SA or Zimbabwe comes up and an argument is made forcefully that blacks shouldn't get back any land as it will lead to an economic quagmire. This statement, although in partly true, if made in mixed company will almost certainly draw racist accusations.

Is this fair? Probably not. But there will always be the suspicion on the part of the listeners that what motivates this type of talk is an undeclared racist attitude.

This is why it is very tough to talk about these issues, and why Samizdat is a great site, because posters have the nerve to go there and risk the fine distinctions.

My position is that political biases directed at white farmers are misguided, but I do nonetheless believe that a great injustice was done to the indigenous peoples of both SA and Zimbabwe and that restitution does need to be made. In SA a lot of land is owned by the SA government, why don't they start by releasing state owned land.

As for Mugabe and his forced uprooting of the urban power in order to "sanitize" the cities – it's clear where his priorities lie.



Aidan Maconachy
September 27, 2005 at 3:48 pm

I'm from Ireland originally and we had a lot of English plundering throughout the centuries. However we never came close to a situation where outsiders who comprised less than 1% of the population owned over 70% of the arable land. By any standards this has to be regarded as a severe disparity.

My argument though in favor of the current generations of white farmers is not based on racial disparities however. I think both SA and Zim authorities make a mistake by operating with that mindset. White Zimbabweans and Africaaners of many generations, are in fact Africans, and need to be treated as such – not as interlopers.

It seems unfair to brutalize a man and deprive him of justice because of acts carried out by his forebears.



Owen Barder
September 27, 2005 at 4:50 pm

Hi. I don't want to be accused of trolling, and I've already had my (fairly long) say over at [my blog](#), so apologies if this is one post too many from me. However, Aidan did say that "we've yet to hear from Owen".

On the substance, it is pretty clear that the BBC article on which Jonathan's post was based was comprehensively misleading. Compulsory purchase in South Africa is limited to restitution claims, of which there are about 5-7,000 outstanding, and the SA Government has recently reiterated that it has no intention of allowing any more claims to be lodged. The *redistribution* policy to which many commenters here refer is a separate policy, and there is no power to expropriate.

The BBC, and subsequently Jonathan, have confused their description of what it going on, and so misled this discussion (for example, one commenter here noted that there appeared to be no specific claim on the farm that was being bought, when of course there is, from the descendants of the family who owned that land.) Given how misleading it was, it seems extraordinary to me that Jonathan says (in the comments on my blog) that he "stands by every word" of his post. (I would have understood if he had simply apologised and said that he had been misled by the mainstream media.)

Aidan: in respect of your last post, what the SA Government is doing is neither brutalizing anyone, nor depriving them of justice. There have been acts of violence against white farmers, which I deplore. The land restitution process is carried out with full and fair legal process. Rapid, fair and just settlement of the outstanding land restitution claims buttressed by effective willing-seller land redistribution will, I hope, reduce the sense of grievance: let us hope that it brings and end to the completely unjustified violence against white landowners.

More controversially, I continue to find the discussion here racist. My reason for saying this is that I consider that there are a set of shared attitudes that have been articulated through the discussion, some of them unconsciously, which are based on a set of assumptions about black people:

- the assumption that black people will be less effective farmers than white people; (for example, the claim that allowing black people to farm will "propel South Africa back to the stone age")
- the assumption that land restitution – restoring property rights to those people who had them taken away by the Native Land Act of 1913 and subsequent apartheid laws – is an exercise of racial power rather than simple justice;
- the assumption that Mbeki is "like" Mugabe (who is a monster); and that the South African legal system is as corrupt as Zimbabwe's has, sadly, become;
- the gross caricaturing of black people with phrases such as "hunter gatherers", "pygmies", "war lords", "to the victors the spoils", "lack of respect for rule of law", "begging bowls" etc ... nothing but a list of derogatory images which reinforce stereotypes.

It is striking to me that not one of you has had a good word to say in this conversation about any black African. For example, there has been no recognition of the remarkable dignity with which a peaceful transition to majority rule has been accomplished in South Africa, with no attempts to wreak revenge on those who voted, election after election, for a brutal racist government.

You may all think I am just being politically correct. I did not come here looking for racism, but I was genuinely appalled by the attitudes I found here. I hope some of you, at least, will reflect on whether the views you are forming and expressing are, at least in part, based on a set of assumptions that you consciously or unconsciously hold about people based on their race.

And with that, I shall withdraw gracefully. I'll be over at <http://www.owen.org/blog> if anybody wants to discuss this further with me.

Aidan Maconachy
September 27, 2005 at 5:23 pm



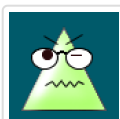
Owen – appreciate your clarification and your points are well taken, even though I might take minor issue with a few points. I'm heading over to your blog to take a read.



John East
September 27, 2005 at 6:37 pm

I just took a look at Owen's blog, but I refrained from posting as there is no meaningful discussion going on. Samizdata, by definition is a racist blog, and any and every comment expressing negative opinions of African governance, or African agricultural practices is, again by definition, racist. No discussion, no doubts, it's racist.

This makes me wonder, if one were to take exception to, and be critical of, the governance of Blair (a Scot) or the agricultural practices of the French (compared to the UK, many smaller inefficient farms), this must also be racism. If not, why?



Aidan Maconachy
September 27, 2005 at 6:50 pm

Final word on this then I have to earn a living lol!

People on the right, of varying camps, are regarded by many on the left as closet racists. Witness the descent into race baiting following the New Orleans flooding. There is no proof positive that the Bush administration is racist – but supposition and prejudice is apparently enough to start the name calling.

I think it is crucially important to rise above racial distinctions in the context of the larger arguments. Some of the most interesting ideas in the states are coming from African Americans such as Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams and others. Bill Cosby's recent "crusade" was kind of marred by his personal problems, but I think the African American community can move the debate forward into the US and into a different terrain.

And Mugabe, who is mainly loved by Stateside, well ... um ... Farrakhan mainly.



John East
September 27, 2005 at 7:17 pm

Aidan,
Owen was only too happy to interpret criticism of Africans as racial prejudice when there is no way he can know what is in our hearts.

One might say such criticism is racist because Africans are a different race, but most people who wear anti-racism on their sleeves would be the first to say that there is no such thing as race. Do they mean its "racist" because Africans are black. Well this doesn't work either because as far as I am concerned skin colour is irrelevant. They would be the ones introducing skin colour into the discussion, so I would suggest that they are the ones being racist.

I'm still very confused. I think this demonstrates the power of the modern taboo concerning all things racial. It appears very easy to shut down all discussion just by playing the race card. To the extent that this prevents future debate, it can only be detrimental to the development of Africa. After all, if all discussion is forbidden, how can we learn from each other.



Johnathan Pearce
September 27, 2005 at 8:35 pm

Owen, thanks for your gracious response. I think you have cleared up a lot of unnecessary stuff from your original rather heated post.

One point I would take issue with is when you refer to the "unconscious" racism of some of the comments. It is a bit like saying that the people who take a view about X are not in control of their own thoughts. That is a sort of mental totalitarianism on your part.

I may not have singled out an example of praiseworthy native Africans, but that hardly makes me a bigot. There are several countries in Africa which are moving in a sensible direction, like Botswana and possibly Ghana. This blog has also referred to the work of groups in Africa doing good things and will continue to do so.



Johnathan Pearce
September 27, 2005 at 9:28 pm

One final bite at the cherry and then I will leave it: Owen claims that the comments, or some of them, seem to imply that blacks are less competent farmers than whites. I won't speak for other commenters but I don't hold such a view, which would indeed be racist. The late Peter Bauer, the development economist, often cited

examples of where, given properly defined and protected property rights, blacks, like any other racial group, were able to be highly entrepreneurial and I am sure that all races can thrive, given the right conditions.



Owen Barder

September 27, 2005 at 10:26 pm

Jonathan

Thanks. One postscript to your postscript.

You write: *“Owen claims that the comments, or some of them, seem to imply that blacks are less competent farmers than whites ... I don't hold such a view, which would indeed be racist.”*

I'm glad that you agree this would be racist. But you have tactfully avoided saying whether or not you agree that some of the comments in this thread imply just that. You have thereby avoided taking a view on my observation that some (not all) of the contributors to this discussion are racist.

So I'd like to press you a bit on this point. Given that we agree that it would be racist to imply that blacks make worse farmers than whites, let's look and see if anyone said anything that would reasonably be read as implying that.

Here is a sample:

None: “It's culturalist. There are people who know how to coax riches from land, and people who don't.”

John East: “redistributing land along these lines will propel South Africa back into the stone age alongside Zimbabwe.”

None: “Let them take over the land, run it into the ground”

Kim du Toit “Farming done in the African manner (eg. Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique) does not have a sterling track record, especially when compared with Western-style farming methods.”

Mike James: “They'll barbecue the dairy cows, and then come to the West holding out the begging bowl.”

To my eyes, the only reasonable interpretation of those remarks is that blacks are less good farmers than whites.

Since you agree that it would be racist for someone to imply that blacks are less effective farmers than whites, and since there are some comments on this thread that imply just that, I hope that you will acknowledge that I am not out of order in observing that some (not all) of the comments in this discussion are racist?

Owen

(PS: Note that this was only one example – albeit perhaps the most egregious – of the kind of position taken by some commenters in this thread which I said I considered to be racist.)

(PPS: Now I really am going to go away and leave you all in peace.)



Perry de Havilland

September 28, 2005 at 12:56 am

From Owen's list asking if the following are indisputably racist:

None: “It's culturalist. There are people who know how to coax riches from land, and people who don't.”

Nope. 'Black' is not a culture, it is a race (whatever that means). I am happy to describe myself as a cultural chauvinist as I have no problem describing some cultures as superior to others. It has nothing to do with race, however.

John East: “redistributing land along these lines will propel South Africa back into the stone age alongside Zimbabwe.”

Nope. It is a claim that Zimbabwe style land theft will beggar the economy. As Zimbabwe is indeed more or less collapsing economically, it is a reasonable claim... but what does that have to do with race? The same policy in Britain would do the same thing.

None: “Let them take over the land, run it into the ground”

See Zimbabwe. I took 'they' to mean the political class who would control the appropriations and again, the result would be the same anywhere so how is the point racist? You could say the same about communist policies in eastern Europe after World War II.

Kim du Toit “Farming done in the African manner (eg. Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique) does not have a sterling track record, especially when compared with Western-style farming methods.”

Nope. It is manifestly true. Capital and technology intensive Western farming methods are vastly superior and have more than a little to do with secure land rights. How is race an issue here?

Mike James: "They'll barbecue the dairy cows, and then come to the West holding out the begging bowl."

Not directly racist but yes, it is hard to avoid the implication that this remark may be racially motivated.



Joshua

September 28, 2005 at 1:23 am

There's a distinction to be made here. It would indeed be racist to imply that blacks would be worse farmers than whites by virtue of being black. But it is not racist to say that "farming done in the African manner does not have a sterling track record." On your blog you note that there are several examples of successful African farming. For that reason, it might be ignorant to say that African-style farming is not as good as farming done with western methods — but it hardly qualifies as racist. To cite a familiar example from here in the States — it is generally asserted that the Canadian logging industry is better managed than our own (leading, I might add, to some misguided protectionist measures from the US side). I don't know much about it — but let's say it's true. Don't you think it would be wrong of me to accuse any Canadian who asserted this of being anti-American on that basis?

It is impossible to deny that there is a serious income differential between Africa and the West. Famines are not uncommon in Africa, but they haven't happened in the West in some time. I don't think it's "racist" to say that African farming methods lag behind western methods any more than it's "nationalist" to say that Canadians have a better logging industry than Americans. It might be a simple statement of fact, just as it might, indeed, be the case that black South Africans haven't received the training they need to cultivate the land efficiently.

And that is my general objection to your throwing about the "racist" label. It is impossible to deny, for example, that Mugabe is a racist of the worst kind and that the South African government regularly makes apologies for him. You are correct to point out that the South African government has so far done an outstanding job and shown incredible restraint in handling the transition to a shared-power society. For this they are to be commended, and it does seem you're right that a lot of people here (myself especially) are not as informed about South African politics as they might be. But just because South Africa has handled the transition well SO FAR does not by a long shot imply that there are not ugly elements in the South African government who might begin to abuse their power in the manner described here. So far, the South African government as a whole does not endorse Mugabe or his policies, but there are plenty of officials in that same government who do. In short, there are reasons entirely independent of race to fear that South Africa could indeed someday take a "fateful step" toward becoming more like Zimbabwe. Clearly, that isn't happening now, and as I've already indicated in my comments on your blog, I have no problem with the policy as you describe it.

Save one...which I noticed you have yet to comment on. One of the articles you linked on your blog says that the restitution authorities can press these claims without court supervision. I asked whether that didn't bother you, and you have not yet given an answer.

The reason I bring this up again is because you say

The land restitution process is carried out with full and fair legal process.

in your earlier post.



John East

September 28, 2005 at 2:02 am

Owen made much of this point made by Johnathan:

"Owen claims that the comments, or some of them seem to imply that blacks are less competent farmers than whites. I won't speak for other commenters, but I don't hold such a view, which would indeed be racist."

Nobody said that blacks are less competent than whites.

The problem is not that the people being given farm land in Southern Africa are blacks (this is Owens' racist point), it is that the people being given farm land are not necessarily trained or experienced modern farmers, i.e. skilled in farm management, and mechanised farming, and as such are less likely to be as productive as the current landowners.

There is no racism here. We are just comparing competent, experienced, modern farmers with individuals whose sole qualification is that they had a relative who once owned the land.

I certainly take exception that Owen quotes a part of one of my posts, but ignores my replies, and apparently lacks the balls (am I allowed to say this?) to speak to me directly.

Owen accuses me of being a racist for saying "redistributing land along these lines will propel South Africa back into the stone age alongside Zimbabwe." My point here was that prior to the appearance of Europeans, Southern Africa was involved in subsistence farming. If I had used a politically correct euphemism like pre-industrial, or emerging market maybe Owen would have been satisfied, but I doubt it, and anyway, I don't do PC.

I think I understand, but I take great exception to, those who use the racist accusations so freely. To me a racist is someone who hates members of another race purely for that reason, because they are members of that race. I believe that a more modern definition of racism, which we have seen deployed in this thread, is that a racist is a person who makes a comment which someone else perceives to be racist. I find this modern interpretation repellent because it panders to those seeking to be offended, a very modern PC attribute, and forms a defence for anyone unable to put forwards a coherent argument based on facts, observations and experience.

One final point, I apologise to Owen for referring to him in the third person throughout this post, but what option do I have when someone accuses me of being a racist, but doesn't have the balls to debate with me.



Aidan Maconachy
[September 28, 2005 at 9:10 pm](#)

Been a while since I checked this thread and seems comments have slowed down. Very interesting chat. I got a lot of info on this topic I didn't have prior.

Just a few thoughts on the racial business. I mostly come into samizdata to read because it has some of the most original stuff around. In all the time I've been reading in here I have never once encountered any comment that could remotely be described as explicitly racist – if I had I would have stopped coming in here.

Owen argued that some of the earlier remarks could be construed as racist and Perry answered this point-by-point in a pretty convincing fashion. I would say some of these remarks are open to interpretation and could be taken either way. However it became clear as I read clarifications that the posters were primarily focused on engaging in an argument – not on slurring any group in particular.

I'd love to see another lead post on the S. African situation – or Zim for that matter – it's a topic that interests me a great deal. Here's hoping!



Aidan Maconachy
[September 28, 2005 at 9:12 pm](#)

Been a while since I checked this thread and seems comments have slowed down. Very interesting chat. I got a lot of info on this topic I didn't have prior.

Just a few thoughts on the racial business. I mostly come into samizdata to read because it has some of the most original stuff around. In all the time I've been reading in here I have never once encountered any comment that could remotely be described as explicitly racist – if I had I would have stopped coming in here.

Owen argued that some of the earlier remarks could be construed as racist and Perry answered this point-by-point in a pretty convincing fashion. I would say some of these remarks are open to interpretation and could be taken either way. However it became clear as I read clarifications that the posters were primarily focused on engaging in an argument – not on slurring any group in particular.

I'd love to see another lead post on the S. African situation – or Zim for that matter – it's a topic that interests me a great deal. Here's hoping!



Aidan Maconachy
[September 28, 2005 at 9:18 pm](#)

By the way – if anyone has any good links to the topic under discussion – especially anything connected with land reform in S.A. that provides information on what is going on behind the scenes – rather than the official version – I would be love to get a hold of this – or any other links that deal with similar S.A. affairs.

Cheers!



Brian Barder
[October 1, 2005 at 12:00 am](#)

I declare an interest: I am Owen's father. I have lived and worked in African countries for a good number of years and spent even more years dealing with the enormously diverse affairs and circumstances, problems, disasters and successes of countries in East, West and Southern Africa. I have not previously visited Samizdata more than a couple of times but I have read this particular thread pretty thoroughly and with mounting incredulity.

I strongly agree with those who have written in their comments here that the anti-racism industry has a lot to answer for in seeking to muzzle legitimate discussion of inconvenient issues by accusing its participants of racism, sometimes recklessly, and that the accusation is often far too loosely and unjustifiably made. But I am bound to say that the smell of racism in several of the comments in this thread is absolutely unmistakable. I am not just talking about the airy generalisations about matters so diverse that generalisation from them is literally meaningless, nor about pronouncements displaying obvious ignorance, nor about unthinking acceptance of cheap media clichés, but about

remarks which betray manifest contempt for black people as a group. I'm astonished, not only that anyone could think and write like that in this day and age, but also that anyone should regard remarks like these as suitable to be left in place on a self-respecting blog. Of course this doesn't apply to all of the comments here by any means; but it does apply to enough of them to make reading through them a deeply discouraging experience. No, I'm not going to get into detail or respond to challenges to specify what or whom I'm referring to, partly because I think that kind of argument is distasteful, partly because Owen has already done it and I would only be repeating what he has said. But I do think it right to register a certain dismay — and to make it clear, whether you believe me or not, that I am not writing this out of family loyalty: I just don't like to see a whole human group, one with so many talents and such huge potential (as well as its normal share of crooks and incompetents) traduced and written off like this, without putting down my small marker of protest.

And that, dear reader, is all I have to say on this subject.

Brian B.



Perry de Havilland

October 1, 2005 at 2:03 am

Well you may be incredulous Brian, but I too have spent considerable time in Africa (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa) and I am incredulous that anyone who has spent time there finds *racism* as the most likely explanation for why many people think large chunks of Africa are hellish and African political culture is largely poisonous. It is not hard to find Africans who would say much the same thing.

Your dismay that people here are simply treating the accusation of 'fostering racism' with the bemused shrug it deserves should induce you to question *your* views. No rational commentator can look at Africa and see much to give them hope for the future and the notion that it is only racism could lead a person to think that, rather than rational analysis backed by decades of evidence, leaves me finding it hard to take either you or your son's views very seriously.

I simply do not share your obvious obsession with race or feel much need to pussy foot around just incase someone thinks a view is racist (my indifference to your sensibilities is probably due to all those years of not reading the Guardian). As it happens, I have banned people for **endless racist drive!**, so I know the **real thing** when I see it. I also know that what motivates my views is not racism but I really don't much care if some people choose to believe otherwise. Quite why you think people should be stung deeply by such accusations I am unsure.

I have also earlier addressed Owen's laundry list of "racist remarks" by commenters and found his examples weak to say the least. If he cannot tell the difference between a culture and a race, might I suggest he not consider a future in anthropology.

« **Euro-Euro**

Nothing succeeds like excess? »