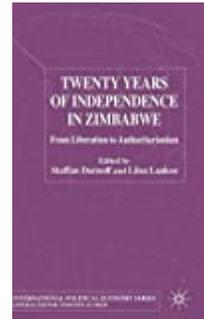




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Continuities and Contradictions in Zimbabwe's Political Economy

This book, which will be of interest to Zimbabweanists and Africanists more generally, traces the post-independence shift towards authoritarianism across different realms of Zimbabwean society. Written mostly by Scandinavia-based and Zimbabwean scholars, the chapters cover a range of topics, including the media, Zimbabwe's economy and constructions of gender. The contributions are well researched and written; and some are particularly incisive and insightful.

Rather than attempting a synthetic review, in order to do justice to the contributions, and given the varied nature of the topics covered in the book, each of the chapters will be individually assessed and then an overall commentary on the book will be provided at the end of the review. Given the reviewer's background in economic geography and political economy, some chapters receive more extensive and critical attention than others, but this should not be taken as a comment on their quality.

Chapter 1 ("Research Debates in Zimbabwe: From Analysis to Practice"), by L. Laakso, periodizes research in the country into the transition of government power

and the prospects of an independent Zimbabwe, the pressure of democratisation, and authoritarianism in the country—each corresponding roughly to different politico-economic periods. It provides a good overview of research debates and implicitly raises questions about the political economy of research. Perhaps given the optimism surrounding independence, the author notes that "the very repressive government reactions to opposition or criticism were not important to research during the first decade" (p. 4). She also quotes Welshman Ncube, a prominent academic and leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, who wrote presciently in 1991 that "the challenge of democratic government requires the total dismantling of Rhodesia's 'trademarks of tyranny'" (p. 7). She traces the increasingly repressive nature of ZANU (PF) from independence, and the consequent "unification of civil society." However, this dichotomy appears too stark given that the "war veterans" are an element of civil society and are imbricated with the state. The continuity of authoritarian governance from the Rhodesian Front to ZANU (PF), detailed here, is an emerging theme in Zimbabwean historiography and political economy.[1]

Chapter 2 (“Indigenization, the State Bourgeoisie and Neo-Authoritarian Politics”), by B. Raftopoulos and D. Compagnon, traces the history of indigenization in Zimbabwe, noting that in the 1980s many former civil servants and ZANU’s political clients were recruited as middlemen for white-owned corporations. It talks of the way in which foreign companies were squeezed to enable nationalization and patronage opportunities (going against the globalization trend, or possibly as a precursor to it), and how rhetorical socialism was used to condemn the emergent indigenous African entrepreneurial class. It shows the divisions between the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC), which wanted to grow black businesses, versus the Affirmative Action Group which was politically connected and wanted to confiscate white businesses. This prompted the same agenda to be adopted by the IBDC, suiting Robert Mugabe. However, there was subsequently an outcry from the indigenisation lobby over a preferential deal which a Malaysian company received for power generation, rather than opening it up to them. (Does this bespeak continuing economic rationality on the part of the government, given limited technical capabilities amongst the indigenous business class?)[2]

“In the post-ESAP era business opportunities largely play as rewards for political loyalty” (p. 25), and this was one of the factors in the emergence of “political businessmen.” The chapter compares the Roger Boka (the ultimate political businessman) scandal to the harassment of Strive Masiyiwa (a successful mobile phone entrepreneur, who has since moved to South Africa). “As long as Mugabe can keep ZANU (PF) united—not as a political organization but as a clientele and a kind of crime syndicate—so he believes, nobody will kick him out of office or force him to accept major reforms to curb his extensive powers” (p. 28).

This is an interesting chapter, but it neglects the extensive literature on the political impacts of neoliberal economic reform. The authors see continuity with neopatrimonial tendencies at work in the 1980s, but argue that now there are just different methods in the neoliberal era. However, this does not consider how neoliberal economic reforms may have contributed to a crisis in state hegemony, thereby encouraging the shift towards authoritarianism. The authors are undoubtedly correct that the shift to land invasions was a tactic, after the political capital to be drawn from indigenisation had been largely exhausted.

In chapter 3 (“Performance of Zimbabwean Economy,

1980-2000”), G. Kanyenze notes that the colonial legacy meant that “the narrow base whereby a small elite owns the bulk of resources delivers a skewed distribution of income resulting in jobless, ruthless, voiceless, rootless and futureless growth” (p. 39). In the 1980s in Zimbabwe, shockingly, it was estimated that 3 percent of the population controlled two-thirds of gross national income. The distribution of income worsened in the 1990s.[3]

This chapter is a good overview piece. It presents an interesting discussion of the work of the Riddell Commission on wages, prices and conditions of service in the early 1980s. It discusses the performance of the economy under the Transitional National Development Plan (1982-85), noting that during this period the main causes of macro-economic imbalances were exogenous shock and policies of liberalization (raising the question of why the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme [ESAP] was subsequently adopted).

Employment creation was slow during the 1980s, but workers’ wages were on average marginally higher at the end of the decade, as compared to the beginning. The economy picked up during the period of the First Five Year National Development Plan (1986-90), with economic growth averaging 4 percent and employment growing at 2.7 percent (as against 3 percent growth in the labor force, although as only a fifth of people were in the formal employment sector, unemployment rose inexorably). During this period debt was a major problem, although it was managed. The author also shows the mismatch between radical rhetoric and conservative reality (although this changed somewhat in the 1990s).

The author talks of the lack of fiscal discipline under ESAP; however this is not supported by statistics. In fact the evidence shows that the government expenditure (excluding interest payments) fell dramatically from 38 to 28 percent of gross domestic product between 1991 and 1995. Thus the problem was more in the design of the program.[4] Kanyenze shows the hand wringing of the World Bank over the impacts of ESAP, such as the loss of teachers and health workers. Exports grew at only 1 percent a year (1991-99) versus imports at 4.9 percent. The country failed to meet its external obligations for the first time in 1999 and the economy decelerated from 4 percent growth to a 0.9 percent average during ESAP, and only recovered to 2.9 percent in 1997-99. However this was unsustainable as it was accompanied by an investment collapse.

The chapter does not deal with the micro-economic impacts of ESAP, so there is little concrete sense of why

the program failed. It states that excessive government borrowing to fund largely recurrent expenditure, along with poor sequencing, were to blame and argues that “getting prices right” (i.e. letting the market set them), was a “necessary but insufficient” condition for development. The author cites Alice Amsden to support his position, but her analysis of South Korea shows that the government there deliberately got “prices wrong.”[5]

Kanyenze argues provocatively that the “liberation credentials assumed an unassailable position in Zimbabwe’s governance. This governance structure made the ‘chefs’ powerful, unaccountable and self-serving. Ultimately, no costs were imposed on failure. In this context, political expediency has overshadowed economic rationale, with telling effects” (p. 75). This is perhaps an overly internal explanation for the failure of ESAP. He notes the need for a “new generation of development strategies that are developed through a stakeholder participatory approach” (p. 75). However, the argument for this is not developed, while others have written of “participation” as a new form of tyranny. The World Bank withdrew from the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative, in which the author was involved, when it became overly participatory. Criticisms notwithstanding, this chapter provides a useful overview and narrative of the performance of the Zimbabwean economy.

While land invasions of commercial farms have received by far the most attention in the global media, chapter 4 (“Natural Resource Management in the Communal Areas: From Centralization to Decentralization and Back Again”), by M. Spierenburg, makes the argument that land reforms in the Communal Areas (CAs) themselves are at least as significant for ordinary farmers as the better publicised land reform of commercial farms (although it is not clear against which metric this comparison is made). The author shows how the idea of “communal” tenure was a colonial construction. The chapter provides a good description of the evolution of administrative structures in the CAs and the dialectic between “traditional” and “modern” governance structures. A case study of Dande, the Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project is then presented. This turned from a transmigration to a villagization project, and brought land insecurity and deforestation to local residents. The conflicts surrounding the project led to the invocation of a spirit medium, who denounced the project. The project was derailed, thereby showing the dangers of centralization and inattention to locally adapted livelihood systems. Nonetheless, the author is pessimistic, under cur-

rent conditions, about prospects for greater local control of resources.

The War Veterans did not receive much attention as a social force in Zimbabwe before 1997; however, in chapter 5 (“Zimbabwe’s War Veterans and the Ruling Party: Continuities in Political Dynamics”), N. Kriger argues that veterans’ power is not new and that there is continuity in the way in which (ZANLA) veterans were used against both ZAPU, in the 1980s, and the Movement for Democratic Change, in the 1990s. She highlights the nature of the conflict and collaboration that existed between party and veterans during this period, presenting fascinating case studies based on interviews. She also presents an original argument, stating that “whereas previously veterans had turned to state resources, these were so low in 2000 that it was necessary to expropriate private land to distribute as state patronage” (p. 119). However, more detail on the politics surrounding the land invasions, and whether they really were inspired from the “bottom up” could have been provided. She concludes intriguingly by suggesting that veterans may become increasingly autonomous and build up their own arms supplies.

In a very interesting and original chapter (“Regional Voting and Cabinet Formation”), L. Laakso shows how President Mugabe balanced regional commitments and rewards and sanctions through cabinet appointments and demotions. It presents the government of Zimbabwe as a personalized system of rule, although there are also elements of “accountability” of regions to the government as they were rewarded or punished based on election results. It tabulates and traces these themes through appointments by region after different elections. After the 1995 election the cabinet was enlarged to buy the loyalty of regional elites, as the economy deteriorated. After the 2000 election the new cabinet was characterised as technocratic, with eleven cabinet members holding Ph.D.s, but regionality remained important.

Chapter 7 (“Education in Zimbabwe: A Matter of Success?”), by A. Narman, shows that the first decade of independence witnessed substantial educational expansion, particularly at the primary level, but without transcending the colonial legacy of “bad schools for the poor majority and good ones for the rich”. The introduction of user fees under ESAP (which decreased enrollments), increased student/teacher ratios (as a result of cut-backs) and reduced real wages for teachers (from inflation) had damaging effects. During the period under consideration there was an “economisation of education,” although the

World Bank argued against vocationalization. The author suggests that education has an important transformative role to play in achieving a more equitable society, but does not talk about what such an educational system would look like.

This chapter could, perhaps, also have discussed changes in the programs of international financial institutions and lessons from Zimbabwe. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers now prioritize primary education (as Zimbabwe did in its first decade of independence). Will it now be a case of “back to the future” in educational policy in Zimbabwe? This will, of course, depend on whether Zimbabwe has a rapprochement with the IMF/World Bank (it has started to pay off its arrears to the IMF as of 2004). The educational policy of the World Bank is now central to its economic reform programs; however, it represents a misapplied version of Say’s Law, whereby supply creates its own demand. The experience of Zimbabwe in the 1980s shows that the supply of educated primary school leavers did not automatically create demand in the labor market for their skills. In fact, with economic liberalization in Zimbabwe in the 1990s there were significantly “declining returns to human and physical assets.”[6]

Chapter 8 (“Vacillations Around Women: The Overlapping Meanings of ‘Women’ in the Zimbabwean Context”), by C. Sylvester, examines different “regimes of truth” in the construction of “women” in Zimbabwe. The chapter traces the reforms of the 1980s, which granted more rights to women, but not in the area of land-pointing to the co-existence of different gender regimes and contradictions between these. Some progressive regulations were introduced in the 1980s, such as entitling women factory workers to one hour of child-feeding time per day with pay. However, this was problematic to enforce as on-site childcare was not provided. Some women though took the time to do their own work during that hour, such as private garment making. This regulation was ended with the industrial code of conduct introduced under ESAP. Nonetheless, there have been some female beneficiaries of ZANU(PF)’s authoritarian power, such as wives and female relatives of leaders. The author talks of a “regime of strength” based on insider indispensability in ZANU(PF) versus a “regime of eligibility for development.”

Chapter 9 (“Foreign and Security Policy of Zimbabwe: From Independence to the DRC”), by D. Chimanikire, shows the extensive involvement of the President in foreign policy. In contrast to the other chapters, it high-

lights the importance of principles in Zimbabwe’s approach to the region. It details the extensive military commitment to Mozambique in the 1980s: eliminating RENAMO bases and providing 7,000-10,000 troops by 1988. These troops were only withdrawn after the peace process in 1993. Whereas many assessments of Zimbabwe’s involvement in the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo highlight economic motives, the author suggests these were secondary. He argues that the intervention in the DRC was partly pre-emptive, namely to ward off the future threat of invasion of Zimbabwe (from where is not stated), and was legitimate under the rules of the UN Charter and supported by the Southern African Development Community. He hopes that it succeeds in preventing future adventures by other states (but not by Zimbabwe). As scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani and Micheal Mann have argued, political actions, and military interventions in particular, often result from a mix of motives. Zimbabwe undoubtedly had economic motives for its involvement in Mozambique, i.e. protecting its trade routes. Thus, how do we disentangle this mix and judge the shifting balance of motives?

It is now easily forgotten that Zimbabwe was held in international esteem for the leading role it played in the regional initiative to isolate apartheid South Africa, chairing the OAU and Non-Aligned Movement, for example. This regard was also reflected in President Mugabe’s appointment to chair the World Solar Commission. Given internal turmoil, the author concludes overly optimistically that “Zimbabwe has capacity and experiences on which to build a foreign policy tradition that is able to respond to the changing international and domestic circumstances” (p. 194). More analysis of Zimbabwe’s relations with South Africa would have been interesting, particularly given its pivotal role in providing loans and electricity to the current government.

H.R. Ånning’s hypothesis in chapter 10 (“The Media in Zimbabwe: The Struggle between State and Civil Society”) is that “media policies and media situation in Zimbabwe reveal the contradictions between the authoritarian and democratic impulses in the political development of the country.” The chapter traces the story of media in Zimbabwe, particularly the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust. Initial post-independence, Pan-African solidarity is illustrated by the fact that the Nigerian government put up money to buy out South African interests in the country’s newspapers after independence. However, even before the present troubles, there was a history of editors being removed from Zimpapers if they did not toe the government line. This created a market niche for a more inde-

pendent press and the introduction of competition in the form of the *Daily News* meant the *Herald* tried to move away from being uncritically supportive of the government in 2000. Several new newspapers were launched in the late 1990s, again partly in response to excessive government control of the media. The challenge presented by the independent media to the government resulted in the introduction of repressive media laws and the detention and torture of journalists. The author rightly sees an independent and critical media as central to democratisation in Zimbabwe, although it may be asked whether a profit-driven media is truly an element of civil society.

This is a valuable, well-written and at times highly insightful and provocative book. It is also timely given the global interest in Zimbabwe. However, some of the chapters were written four or five years ago and consequently do not reflect the dramatic changes that have taken place in Zimbabwe since that time. Perhaps this is inevitable given the long lead times associated with the publication of academic books.

One of the themes which runs throughout the book is the centrality of Robert Mugabe to Zimbabwe's evolution, and in particular the personalised system of rule which has developed around him. While avoiding the excessive personalisation of some authors, given Mugabe's centrality to the governance of Zimbabwe a chapter on him might have been warranted.[7] There are also many other potential topics which might now be covered: for example migration, given that by some estimates three million people (out of a population of fourteen million) have now left the country. There might also now be a case for inclusion of chapters on youth and land invasions. The book would certainly have benefited from a synthesis chapter to bring out commonalities, themes and areas for future research.

There are some small inaccuracies in the book; however, these do not detract from its overall quality. For example, it is claimed that "structural adjustment from 1991 onwards did not manage to bring investments to the country" (p. xv). This is not in fact the case. Foreign investment in Zimbabwe peaked in 1999, after the maxi-devaluation of 1997 which made labor very, very cheap. It was the competitive displacement of domestic business which largely accounted for economic decline, initially, with disastrous political consequences. Perhaps this speaks to an excessive emphasis on an autonomous political sphere in this book, rather than examining the interactions between politics and economics. Is the Zimbabwean party-state simply a "crime syndicate" or is it

more complex than that?

There also appear to be some contradictory interpretations between the chapters. At times the "War Veteran's" land invasions are presented as inspired by the government, other times as autonomous. This raises the question of how different social forces (state and white capital, state and international capital, state and war veterans) come to have temporarily shared or compatible objectives, and what accounts for these shifting alliances.

To what extent was "path dependence" an element in the transformation in Zimbabwe's political economy? While some continuities with Rhodesian Front methods are too obvious to be denied, was the decline into overt authoritarianism inevitable? Were there other paths which could have been chosen and how did the global political economy condition Zimbabwe's trajectory? Recent indications are that the Zimbabwean economy is recovering somewhat, given better rains and, consequently, harvests. Was the "fast-track land reform" the unmitigated disaster it is commonly presented to be? Do we risk rewriting history through the lens of the (pessimistic) present, thereby falling into the same trap as in the (overly optimistic) early 1980s? Doubtless some of the leading scholars of Zimbabwean studies brought together in this volume will shed light on these questions in the future. In raising questions for future research as well as providing answers this book is doubly useful for students of Zimbabwe.

Notes

[1]. See also Horace Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation* (Claremont, South Africa: David Phillip, 2003).

[2]. Although privatization in the energy sector failed. See S. E. Mangwengwende, "Tariffs and Subsidies in Zimbabwe's Reforming Electricity Industry: Steering a Utility through Turbulent Times," *Energy Policy* (2002), available at <http://www.afrepren.org/SI/pdfs/spmm.pdf>.

[3]. Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice* (Scottsville, South Africa, and London: University of Natal Press and Merlin Press, 2002).

[4]. Pádraig Carmody, *Tearing the Social Fabric: Neoliberalism, Deindustrialisation and the Crisis of Governance in Zimbabwe* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 2001).

[5]. Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[6]. Jeffrey Alwang, et al. *Why Has Poverty Increased in Zimbabwe?* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2002), p.

[7]. See for example, Martin Meredith, *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* (New York: Perseus Books, 2002).

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