

## Review Essay

### **Business as Usual? Politics, Hegemony, and Elite Maneuverings in Zimbabwe since the Signing of the Global Political Agreement**

The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.

— Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*

***Zimbabwe Since the Unity Government.*** Edited by Stephen Chan and Ranka Primorac. London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 130. £85 cloth.

***Zimbabwe: Mired in Transition.*** Edited by E.V. Masunungure and J.M. Shumba. Harare: Weaver Press, 2012. Pp. 312. \$25 (USD) paper.

***The Hard Road to Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement.*** Edited by Brian Raftopoulos. Harare: Weaver Press, 2012. Pp. 255. £20.95 paper.

Zimbabwe's July 2013 elections have come and gone. Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU-PF) have claimed another emphatic victory, with 61.09 percent of the vote, winning a two-thirds majority in the House of Assembly. Morgan Tsvangirai as leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), and prime minister during the Unity Government, has claimed that "it's a sham election that does not reflect the will of the people,"<sup>1</sup> while western governments have largely expressed nothing more than "concern."<sup>2</sup> Within the region, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have endorsed the election with Tanzanian foreign affairs minister Bernard Membe congratulating Zimbabwe on elections that "were generally credible" although adding that "it is difficult to say it was fair."<sup>3</sup> It is thus difficult not to cleave to the suggestion that in the period following the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in September 2008, Mugabe has done nothing more than manipulate and outmaneuver Tsvangirai at every turn. Yet, while there is certainly more than a grain of truth in such assessments, the reality is far more

---

<sup>1</sup> "Zimbabwe election was huge farce—Morgan Tsvangirai," BBC, 1 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23530095> (accessed 14 October 2013).

<sup>2</sup> "UK and US concern over Mugabe's Zimbabwe election win," *The Guardian*, 3 August 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/03/zimbabwe-morgan-tsvangirai> (accessed 12 October 2013).

<sup>3</sup> "SADC accused of lowering electoral standards to suit Mugabe," SW Radio Africa, 4 September 2013, <http://www.swradioafrica.com/2013/09/04/sadc-accused-of-lowering-electoral-standards-to-suit-mugab-2013-/mugabe/> (accessed 14 October 2013).

complex. The three books under review in this essay all engage with the nature of the Unity Government, attempting to nuance understandings of Zimbabwe's recent power sharing government, while also speaking to the decades of mismanagement the country has experienced under ZANU-PF (mis-) rule.

*Zimbabwe Since the Unity Government*, originally published in *The Round Table* in 2010, is a loosely related but nonetheless accessible collection that aims to "refine and problematise" (p. 1 Introduction) the dichotomies of strong ZANU-PF/weak MDC that pervades much of the existing literature. For the sake of brevity this review will focus on four out of the eight substantive chapters. In "Zimbabwe's 'Inclusive Government': Some Observations on its First 100 Days," Martin Welz argues that the inauguration of inclusive government did little to alter the country's "precarious socio-economic situation" (p. 6), as most people were still relying on a subsistence economy. For Welz, two particular incidents prove who is "in charge" in Zimbabwe; the fact that Mugabe insisted on being sworn in before Tsvangirai, and that he (Mugabe) refers to the Unity Government (UG) as the Inclusive Government (IG). Yet as Welz cautions, it is important to note the various interest groups that operate within ZANU-PF, as the party has a "mutual dependency between the ruling clique and President Mugabe" (p. 9). According to Welz, the MDC has also been unable "to transform its overwhelming popularity into political power" (p. 12) as Tsvangirai has displayed indecisive behavior, and because he has issued many ultimatums (the detention of Roy Bennett being a case in point) that Mugabe has summarily ignored. In conclusion, Welz believes that the nature of political conduct in these first 100 days demonstrates that a "deep transition has not yet taken place [as] the problems are too deep rooted and complex" (p. 18).

"Emergence of a New Political Movement" by Fay Chung, a one-time party ideologue argues that the recent authoritarian behavior of ZANU-PF can be traced back to the liberation struggle in which "you were either 'for liberation' or you were a 'rebel' or a 'sell-out.'<sup>4</sup> These over simplified and ethnically orientated analyses remain institutionalized in modern day political expression" (p. 55). Furthermore as Chung persuasively argues, "there is little room for rational analysis... both sides appeal to strong emotions... both sides are weak on detailed analysis of the realities" (p. 55). Chung also notes the ideological flip-flopping of both ZANU-PF and the MDC, arguing that the former has moved from paying lip service to Marxist-Leninism to adopting structural adjustment (ESAP) in the 1990s, while the MDC, once vehemently anti-ESAP, have now adopted the neo-liberal economic logic that characterized much of Thabo Mbeki's South African presidency. Like many other scholars, Chung also argues that violence has always been a defining feature of the election process in Zimbabwe, with the 2008 election being viewed as one of the most violent because ZANU-PF had its hegemony challenged. While noting that Tsvangirai exhibited "immense courage in the face of violent persecution, torture and political assassination" (p. 64), Chung concludes by arguing that a third party, such as Simba Makoni's

---

<sup>4</sup> For other writing that challenges these simplistic distinctions, see Jane Parpart, "Silenced Visions of Citizenship, Democracy and Nation: African MPs in Rhodesian Parliaments, 1963–1978," in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and James Muzondidya, eds., *Redemptive or Grotesque Nationalism? Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe* (Oxford, 2010), 187–216.

Mavambo Kusile Dawn Movement (MKD) may be able to provide Zimbabwe with the “good governance” it needs.

Continuing with the theme of political violence, Jocelyn Alexander and Kudakwashe Chitofiri analyse the town of Norton, an MDC stronghold, in their chapter, “The Consequences of Violent Politics in Norton, Zimbabwe.” For Alexander and Chitofiri, the violent nature of Zimbabwean politics differs from other violence on the continent as it is “convincingly portrayed as centrally orchestrated, focused on political opponents, and ideologically framed. It is thus not the ethnic, decentralised and patronage driven [violence] stereotypically associated with much of Africa” (p. 73). The writers’ thesis is as follows; violence in Norton produced a “rupture in social norms,” was shaped by the prevailing socioeconomic climate and often depended on networks of patronage (p. 74). Following the announcement of the 2008 election results, Alexander and Chitofiri argue that there was “initial euphoria” in Norton as the MDC had won the area. Shortly afterwards however, ZANU-PF organized a “new onslaught of violence” that led to many people fleeing Norton or going into hiding (p. 75). As the writers argue, ZANU-PF forged a link between “coercive politics and access to resources in other spheres”; as such belonging to, or feigning support for ZANU-PF became a “matter of survival for many ordinary people” (p. 78).

The final chapter reviewed in this essay moves away from a micro to macro framework as Brian Raftopoulos examines the inner workings of the GPA and the SADC mediation that led to its introduction in his chapter “The GPA as a ‘Passive Revolution’: Notes on Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe.” Using Antonio Gramsci’s framework of “Passive Revolution,” Raftopoulos argues that while the signing of the GPA ushered in a modified political framework, this period has been characterized by “the continued recalcitrance of a former liberation movement determined to defy a plebiscite rejecting its continued rule” (p. 105). Specifically focusing on South Africa’s role in the SADC mediation, for Raftopoulos Mbeki’s government was wary about being seen as a “regional bully,” and had reservations about the MDC’s ability to form a government, due to their inexperience and because of the perception that Tsvangirai was too close to the West. It is in this context that Raftopoulos reminds us that “the lack of internal leverage by both MDCs against Mugabe’s authoritarian project... gave them little room to negotiate the compromises of the GPA” (p. 113). Once the GPA was implemented, as Raftopoulos observes, the international community failed to lift sanctions, hampering the prospects of a swift economic “bounce back.” Thus, as Raftopoulos notes in his conclusion, “finding a way through the problem remains a complex challenge that involves not just an electoral strategy but a broader development” (p. 116).

*Zimbabwe Since the Unity Government* ends with a rather bizarre postscript, “Making Do in Hybrid House” from Chan and Primorac, which is essentially a book review of Tendai Huchu’s novel, *The Hairdresser of Harare*. It is doubtful that this collection will be afforded the status of a classic, as like so much other literature on Zimbabwe’s recent past, this collection is sometimes light on empirical matter. These issues aside, as Chan and Primorac write in their introduction, the collection does at least point to the “multiplicity of voices” since the commencement of the Unity Government.

The second collection under review, *Zimbabwe Mired in Transition*, is “about the possibilities and challenges of Zimbabwe’s transformation from an unstable, non-

democratic regime towards a stable, democratic political order... Zimbabwe is in transition, but a difficult, tortuous and protracted one” (p. xi, Introduction). This is an accomplished collection made up of eleven chapters, which examines the ways in which various interest groups are trying to entrench or limit democratic norms within the country. In “The Public Mood on Zimbabwe’s Political Transition,” Eldred V. Masunungure and Anyway Ndapwadza-Chingwete argue that while the GPA made “great strides [in] resurrecting the near-comatose economy... the political side of the equation remained problematic and resistant to change” (p. 1). In addition, while the dollarization of the economy improved Zimbabwe’s fortunes in the first eighteen months of the UG, “the period since then has registered evidence of a slow-motion relapse” (p. 6). As Masunungure and Ndapwadza-Chingwete put it: “of the country’s 12 million people, only 480,000 had formal jobs at this time, a staggering drop from the 3.6 million of 2003” (p. 7). The chapter also discusses the provisions within the GPA for a constitutional reform process, with the first public survey being conducted in September 2009. While it was certainly a positive step to engage the general public in the process, the authors note that ZANU-PF still manipulated this process as they regulated who attended public meetings, once again mobilizing the controversial “war veterans.” The final section of the chapter analyses the power of elections as mechanisms for social change, suggesting that “despite the deep fear of violence and intimidation, the paradox is that Zimbabweans in 2010 repeatedly expressed their desire or at least willingness to exercise their sovereign right to vote” (p. 18). Thus as this chapter demonstrates, Zimbabwe is at best a pseudo-democracy that is hopefully on its way to a more participatory democratic model.

Turning to examine an area that many hoped the UG would particularly address, Annie Barbara Chikwanha in “Transnational Justice & Security Sector Governance: Combating Sexual & Gender-Based Violence,” convincingly argues that the precarious position of women in Zimbabwe predates the commencement of the Third *Chimurenga*. For Chikwanha the need to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is especially pressing in Zimbabwe as “generally survivors of SGBV in post-conflict areas face many inter-locking barriers to justice” (p. 99). The chapter explores three key areas; the opportunities the UG has for educating or minimizing SGBV, the ways in which Zimbabwe has attempted to tackle a “general environment of discrimination” and finally why Zimbabwe has remained “gender blind” in both theory and practice to discrimination against women (pp. 99–100). As Chikwanha argues, the aim is not to portray women as victims, but rather to refract onto broader issues about the enduring nature of patriarchal prerogatives within the country. Situating her argument within a wider framework of Transnational Justice, she argues that “reparations and compensation ought to be paid, the wrongs acknowledged, documenting the atrocities so that they become an official and public part of the nation’s history; and prosecuting some of the “mass” rapists/killers who are a danger to society” (p. 106). Chikwanha also notes the disconcerting parallels between the issue of women’s liberation once Zimbabwe gained independence, and recently during the GNU. Juxtaposing the two periods, she suggests that women’s liberation in 1980 was incorporated under the umbrella of national liberation while also pointing out “that women’s needs and issues were subsumed under sweeping statements in the preamble of the GPA” (p. 115). Thus it is clear that Zimbabwe still has a long way to go to address gender inequality with the “bottom line [being] that the transitional government

must make significant security sector reforms in order to provide SGBV survivors greater access to justice” (p. 120).

Despite the hopes that the GNU ushered in in Zimbabwe, as Myo Naing cogently observes in “Upgrading Zimbabwe’s Bureaucratic Quality,” none of the mooted changes will be successful unless the country’s bureaucracy is re-structured “so that it becomes effective, efficient, responsible and accountable” (p. 205). Adopting Weber’s “Ideal Type” analytical framework, the chapter identifies the existing structural problems within the country’s bureaucratic structures as well as providing several recommendations for its improvement. For Naing, there are five key problems concerning unaccountability, inefficiency, corruption, a lack of discretion and poor co-ordination” (p. 208). Naing provides a useful historical overview of the different types of public sector reform that Zimbabwe has undergone, broadly dividing his argument into the period immediately after independence when the structures of colonialism were dismantled and the period after the adoption of ESAP in 1991. It was in this ESAP climate, as Naing argues, that the government launched a five-year public service reform program (PSRP), which attempted to both rationalize bureaucratic structures and enhance service delivery by “putting citizens first and promoting good governance” (p. 211). Yet, as Naing observes, this reorganization terminally weakened the country’s bureaucracy with the effect being that “without a committed, competent and efficient bureaucracy, policies, projects and strategies will not prove successful” (p. 213). In his closing remarks, Naing recognizes that “the first thing Zimbabwe needs most is not a sound economy but a committed and well meaning leadership” (p. 222), it is only in this climate that his policy recommendations (institutional change, good communication with the public, continuous training for public servants, anti-corruption campaigns, fostering meritocracy and competitive remuneration packages) could take positive effect.

Continuing to examine bureaucratic structures, Norbert Musekiwa’s fascinating essay, “The Role of Local Authorities in Democratic Transition,” demonstrates the ways in which local government officials may either be promoting or inhibiting the nation’s transition to a liberal democracy. As Musekiwa expounds, in Zimbabwe there are elected, appointed and traditional leadership structures; the country’s ten provinces are split into sixty districts, the districts are divided by local authorities which are then divided into administrative wards, with each ward being represented by an elected councilor. There are four types of local authority comprised of urban councils, rural district councils, provincial councils and traditional leaders, yet as Musekiwa notes, “except for the traditional leaders and provincial governors, the legitimacy of these local institutions is not enshrined in the constitution” (p. 235). Despite ZANU-PF intransigence, Musekiwa stresses the importance of local governance as it has been “facilitating democratic transition... despite the best efforts of ZANU-PF to frustrate it” (p. 237). Musekiwa also notes that since the beginning of the GNU and the appointment of Ignatius Chombo as Minister of Local Government (MOLG), “ZANU-PF’s partisan interests have been promoted” (p. 240), rather than supporting local authorities. Thus while “local authorities are the vehicle for delivering democracy” (p. 243), it is clear that ZANU-PF has been able to mobilize local governments to peddle their own agenda. Thus as the author concludes, local government needs to be enshrined within Zimbabwe’s new constitution while scaling back the portfolio of the MOLG. In summation, *Zimbabwe Mired in Transition* is a thought provoking collection that will have an appeal to multiple academic fields. It is a testament to the

Zimbabwean academic publishing market, namely Weaver Press, that books of this quality are continuing to be produced.

The final book under review, also published by Weaver Press, *The Hard Road To Reform: The Politics of Zimbabwe's Global Political Agreement*, is edited by leading Zimbabwean scholar and activist Brian Raftopoulos. The collection “seeks to understand the conditions which gave rise to the GPA, the factors influencing the mediation and the politics that has unfolded under the agreement” (Introduction, p. xii). As many other writers have observed, central to the contestations of the signing of the GPA “has been the struggle over the meaning of sovereignty... ZANU-PF has woven dense layers of political discourse combined with its continued monopolization of state violence and coercion” (p. xi). This foregrounding of national sovereignty, it could be argued, is yet another outcome of Mugabe’s inflammatory Third *Chimurenga* rhetoric, encapsulated through “Patriotic History,” which ordained ZANU-PF as the only “authentic” and true leaders of the country.<sup>5</sup> Every chapter in this strong collection warrants mention. This review, however, will focus on the nature of the GPA, how both ZANU-PF and the MDC have operated within it and life in Zimbabwe, post-GPA.

“An Overview of the GPA: National Conflict, Regional Agony and the International Dilemma” by Raftopoulos “contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the combination of national, regional and international factors that shaped the decisions... and set the limits for the on-going politics of the coalition government” (p. 3). As Raftopoulos eloquently describes, the SADC community were forced into a position whereby they had to “develop a mediation framework that would seek to protect regional sovereignty, respect the legacies of the liberation struggle... confront international pressures and provide a framework for democratic transition” (p. 2). These competing visions were thus at the heart of the GPA; while the MDC based their legitimacy on the 2008 electoral process, ZANU-PF validated their claims by harking back to the liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s. The GPA was therefore “an uneasy compromise” that sought to “normalize” the political situation (pp. 13–15). Unfortunately, as Raftopoulos observes, ZANU-PF remained the senior “partners” in this new dispensation, something that has severely limited the successes of the GPA.

Recognizing ZANU-PF’s obduracy, however, is not to overlook the MDC’s chronic inability to translate their electoral majority into political capital, an area which James Muzondidya explores in “The Opposition Dilemma in Zimbabwe: A Critical Review of the Politics of the Movement for Democratic Change.” Many commentators were seemingly confounded when the MDC joined the UG, but as Muzondidya argues, they did so because it would give them time to gain experience of forming government. However, as the author argues, this “power-sharing” agreement has actually had the effect of buying ZANU-PF time, allowing the party to regroup and extend its patronage networks while remaining the senior partner in the uneasy union. For Muzondidya, three factors in particular have hampered the MDC’s ability to provide good governance; the skewed nature of the GPA itself, ZANU-PF’s resistance to suggested changes; and the MDC split itself (p. 49). It is interesting to note that the two MDC factions “have often worked to undermine each other, even in instances when it would be more strategic for them to co-operate” (pp. 52–53). Thus by failing to see the

---

<sup>5</sup> The complexities and evolution of “Patriotic History” are deftly captured by Blessing-Miles Tendai, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe* (Oxford, 2010).

“bigger picture” the MDC have once again fallen prey to the ZANU-PF political machine.

In “ZANU-PF and the Government of National Unity,” Gerald Mazarire further examines the party’s interactions with the MDC in the new political dispensation, with the chapter “attempting to document the mechanisms ZANU-PF has deployed in order to maintain unbridled power within the GNU despite going into the arrangement in its weakest state” (p. 75). Mazarire notes the various competing interests within ZANU-PF, particularly the controversial war veterans, who have been mobilized at strategic times as a quasi-paramilitary wing of the party. Examining Mugabe’s conduct during the meetings to broker the GPA, for Mazarire, “ZANU-PF went into the negotiations with the entrenched, non-negotiable position” (p. 88). This display of hard power continued well into the UG, as the author persuasively argues that Mugabe has administered “significant amounts of shock therapy... both as a public display of its power and as a series of pre-emptive strikes in the perceived threat to the status quo” (p. 90). In this analysis then, Mugabe is foregrounded as still very much at the helm of ZANU-PF, playing various successors off against each other, and mobilizing other key players when it suits him.<sup>6</sup> In his concluding remarks, Mazarire cautions us against reading too much into ZANU-PF’s participation in the GNU, reminding us “that with ZANU-PF, literally anything is possible” (p. 112).

The final chapter under review, “Repairing a Fractured Nation: Challenges and Opportunities in the Post-GPA” by Shari Eppel, uses a Transnational Justice (TJ) framework to review the GNU’s attempts to meaningfully respond to decades of state driven violence. As Eppel observes, even from Rhodesia’s inception in 1890, for many Zimbabweans violence has always characterized their interactions with the state. Despite this, as she cogently argues, successive waves of amnesia, most notably in 1979 at the signing of the Lancaster House Constitution and in 1987 at the signing of the Unity Accord, did not demarcate space for a “Truth and Reconciliation” scenario such as South Africa pursued upon its transition to democracy in 1994. While critics of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission argue that it delivered “truth” but failed on “reconciliation” and ultimately “justice,” many have heralded the commission as helping to bring peaceful democracy to South Africa. In the context of the GNU, “The Organ of National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration” (ONHRI) was established to try and address the country’s recent violent past. Yet, as Eppel notes “for the TJ and peace-building mechanisms to gain traction, the country needs to have achieved a moment of real transition, and the GPA has not evolved into this moment” (p. 213). Eppel’s chapter also explores the five countrywide consultations conducted between 2009–2010, noting that in Zimbabwe TJ is defined as being about “healing” and “reconciling” with little regard as to what “healing” actually means. Like the survivors of SGBV that Chikwanha explored in *Zimbabwe Mired in Transition*, victims of political violence in Zimbabwe are currently focused on that attainment of reparations. However as Eppel notes, this itself is a contentious issue as different interest groups argue that reparations should be paid for *Gukurahundi*, the first

---

<sup>6</sup> This is in contrast to the liberal hand wringing and “reappraisal” he has been given by various sections of the British media. See, for instance, David Smith, “Robert Mugabe: From liberation hero to villain to redeemed father of a nation?” *The Guardian* 10 May 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/10/robert-mugabe-liberation-hero-villain-redeem-father> (accessed 10 May 2013).

significant episode of state sponsored violence, while others believe that it should be for atrocities committed since 2000. Consequently it is clear that issues of TJ in Zimbabwe are far from being resolved as a “transitional space in which meaningful reconciliation among all parties can take place, does not currently exist... regardless of the GPA and its half-hearted commitment to ‘healing’” (p. 241). In conclusion, *The Hard Road to Reform* is an accomplished collection that is required reading for anyone trying to understand the various local, regional and international dynamics that shaped the conception and implementation of Zimbabwe’s recent power sharing agreement.

It is difficult to predict what will happen during Mugabe’s current presidency. At the time of writing (October 2013), Zimbabwe was experiencing yet more food shortages. Jonathan Moyo, party ideologue and prominent architect of “Patriotic History” had been enthusiastically welcomed back into the fold, while Mugabe was seemingly trying to persuade the European Union to lift sanctions against him and his inner circle, “so we can export beef to Europe. Let’s get to trade. Let our flowers find home in the Netherlands.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, the MDC appear in total disarray, unable to prove that the July 2013 elections were rigged, with many party members seriously questioning Tsvangirai’s ability to challenge ZANU-PF hegemony. It certainly seems, as much of the writing in this review testifies to, that in the “interregnum” of the UG, ZANU-PF have used this “space” to regroup, now looking stronger than ever; an unfortunate and depressing case of “business as usual” in the Zimbabwean political arena.

KATE LAW

*Centre for Africa Studies*  
*University of the Free State*

---

<sup>7</sup> “Mugabe: I don’t want to visit France, but I do want sanctions lifted,” *The Guardian*, 11 October 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/11/robert-mugabe-will-not-visit-france-wants-sanctions-lifted> (accessed 17 October 2013).



Copyright of International Journal of African Historical Studies is the property of African Studies Center and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.