

Mugabe and the Politics of Security in Zimbabwe by A. ALAO

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In 1980, Zimbabwe was regarded as a beacon of hope in a turbulent region: with transition to internationally recognised independence after multi-party elections, the international hope was that a multi-ethnic, progressive yet capitalist state could offer a model of transition to neighbouring apartheid South Africa. Thirty years on, Zimbabwe has become synonymous with controversial elections, socio-economic collapse and state fragility. Mercifully Abiodun Alao does not buy into the 'inevitable', a simplified narrative of a rapacious authoritarian African leader who changed from being the personification of reconciliation in the early days of independence, to the demon of today's Western media. (In London recently Blessings Miles Tendi too has pointed out the dangers of demonising one's opponent: to do so removes any element of rationality in their behaviour. And Mugabe and his supporters within ZANU PF's behaviour have been supremely rational.) Alao argues this narrative is a weak thesis, emphasising that Mugabe has not altered, either in agenda or outlook; it is the domestic, regional and international climate which has changed.

This is a detailed examination of the policies adopted by the inheritance elites as they confronted the particular challenges of transition from a vicious liberation war to the process of decolonisation and development— as well as the interaction of domestic and international politics. Exploring this thesis of consistency, Alao highlights the antecedents of coalition government, and compares the present-day treatment of MDC to ZAPU's earlier experience in the 1980s and the party's absorption into ZANU-PF under the 1987 Unity pact; similarly, the violence meted out to political opponents since 2000 has powerful echoes of the earlier violence in Mataberland. (Incidentally, the British government was aware of the violence of the Gukuruhundi campaign, but felt constrained in criticising the Mugabe government for fear the Lancaster House settlement would unravel, and apartheid South Africa would further exploit the situation.) The contestation over land is another sustained narrative: unsatisfied land hunger within marginalised sections of society was co-opted by Mugabe and elements within ZANU PF as a means to legitimise the party's continued access to power. Through the paradigm of security of the ZANU PF party *qua* state, Alao elaborates on Mugabe's security relations with Zimbabwe's neighbours (geography is indeed an enduring conditioning factor in a country's foreign policy), as well as in the international community, including SADC, the AU and Commonwealth.

The author could be accused of personalising Zimbabwe's torturous path to the present day, attributing all Zimbabwe's current problems to one man. However, without minimising the contribution of the particular structures and other personalities within ZANU-PF, the author is highly deliberate in placing Mugabe firmly at the vortex of Zimbabwe's complicated interlocking problems. Mugabe's personality, position and tactical political skills have been and still are central to the power structures of Zimbabwe—which incidentally is neither a rogue nor a failed state, and retains remarkable strength. Mugabe's relations with the Zimbabwean security forces, his reliance upon and manipulation

of these structures – with the active connivance of liberation-generation commanders – are at the troubled heart of the crisis of the Zimbabwean state. However, further discussion of the complexities of ZANU (PF) would have been welcome: are these jostling factions ‘working towards Mugabe’? What have been individual cliques’ or groups’ agenda and place in the politics of security?

Underpinning the book’s analysis is the theme of a conflicted Zimbabwe (yet another legacy from the Rhodesian white settler state): the dichotomy between a romanticised – and also profoundly self-serving – version of involvement in the war of liberation as a measurement of entitlement for continued access to power, versus those who call for a demystification of a particular version of ‘patriotic blackness’, and that the generation and ideas of the liberation war have had their day. Inevitably, age and class factors are part of this contestation. This is a thoughtful and well-written book which deserves a wide readership. The author indicates that the likelihood is that even after Mugabe’s eventual demise, the unravelling of politics of security in Zimbabwe will ensure a continued bumpy ride.

SUE ONSLOW

Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London

Out in Africa: LGBT Organizing in Namibia and South Africa by A. CURRIER
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This interesting and important study is particularly welcome because it focuses on the under-researched context of LGBT rights activism in Namibia, as well as the more prominent and long-standing history of activism in South Africa. This book develops our understanding of social movement activism in the global South and the broader interplay of visibility and invisibility in activism around LGBT rights. Currier draws from ethnographic observation, qualitative interview data and an extensive media analysis to survey LGBT activism and rights campaigns in the two countries between 1995 and 2006. As Currier explains, this was a significant moment in both countries’ new democracies and one in which LGBT rights groups had every reason to believe they would achieve full equality. These hopes were delivered in legal and political terms in South Africa, although in practice black LGBT South Africans and particularly black lesbians continue to be subject to homophobic violence. In Namibia, the existence of equality legislation has been undermined by the public and at times, virulent, homophobic statements by high-ranking politicians in the SWAPO-led government. The disregard for legal protection places Namibian LGBT rights activists in considerably more challenging, but not entirely unrelated, circumstances to their South African peers.

Currier devotes considerable attention to the contention deployed by opponents against LGBT rights that homosexuality is un-African, un-Christian and Western. It is a discourse that pervades socio-political discourses across Africa and as this study demonstrates, it is one that LGBT organisations must engage with and contest. Currier argues that although LGBT activists repudiated the notion that ‘homosexuality is un-African’, ‘they did not seem