

O’Gorman’s is a ‘traditional’ rural story. We do not know what happened in the townships, once the site of much parentally imagined violence against women. We do not know what happened to women on the commercial farms. (We do unfortunately know what happened to women in refugee camps in Zambia and Mozambique.) Political rhetoric finds little place and when it is cited – like Mugabe’s famous promises to revolutionary women – it indicates not so much the hypocrisy of politicians as their irrelevance and impotence. This is a grimly realistic book. If you have time to read only one book on women in the Zimbabwean war then this should be it.

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Rethinking African Politics: a history of opposition in Zambia by MILES LARMER
Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xvii + 321, £66.50 (hbk).

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Miles Larmer has emerged as one of the leading authorities on post-colonial Zambian politics and history, and especially on Zambia’s opposition political movements. His latest work, *Rethinking African Politics*, confirms his reputation. In this fascinating study, he traces the evolution of political opposition in Zambia, and convincingly deconstructs the ‘myth of UNIP supremacy’. (UNIP is the United National Independence Party – the nationalist movement that ruled Zambia from 1964 to 1991 under founding president Kenneth Kaunda.)

Larmer skilfully demonstrates the breadth and diversity of opposition to Kaunda and the then ruling party’s authoritarianism, including the valiant efforts mounted by Simon Kapwepwe’s United Progressive Party (UPP), militant trade unions led by the influential Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) under Frederick Chiluba, and business-oriented, class-conscious Zambian elites such as Valentine Musakanya and Edward Shamwana, who rose above the spectre of ethnicity to challenge UNIP and Kaunda’s political hegemony.

Although a large part of the material in *Rethinking African Politics* has appeared elsewhere, it is the compelling manner in which Larmer has fused these previously isolated efforts into a comprehensive monograph that challenges our understanding of African political studies in general. Put in the context of current academic work on opposition parties in Africa, the study is a significant *volte face* on how we understand African political change. In contrast to works mostly by political scientists which have focused narrowly on systemic factors and the individuals and movements in power, *Rethinking African Politics* takes opposition movements seriously. In doing so, it remedies the woeful neglect of this important area within existing studies. Given the several factors that militate against them in post-colonial Africa, Larmer reveals the ability of opposition movements to build useful coalition strategies and working alliances with other autonomous bodies such as civil society, political parties, the church, the independent media and trade unions. He uses a multitude of sources including rare materials (UNIP archives, personal collections, court documents, intelligence reports on Zambia in the South African archives) seldom consulted by most researchers on post-colonial Zambia.

Larmer's goal is 'to shed new light on the political history of post-colonial Zambia by presenting substantial new evidence regarding the realities of late-colonial and post-colonial history which challenges the dominance of UNIP and the leadership of Kaunda in that history' (1). He accomplishes this goal with rare elegance and sophistication, and to be able to achieve it within a space of 321 pages is remarkable.

The book does have some problems, however. The first is the scope suggested by the title. The pressure from publishers to employ overarching book titles to render relatively narrow studies more commercially viable is well illustrated here: the title is *Rethinking African Politics: a history of opposition in Zambia*, but with the exception of the conclusion there is very little space allocated to broader African politics and experiences. Even when it comes to the opposition in Zambia, the core of the book, the focus, is limited to the Bemba-speaking areas: Copperbelt and Northern Provinces, where UPP retained its support. Research was also conducted in North-Western Province for the chapter on the Mushala rebellion. However, no fieldwork was conducted in other parts of the country to supplement the findings from mainly Bemba-speaking areas. As a result, Larmer neglects significant opposition from areas such as the Southern and Western Provinces.

The work would also have been enhanced by an examination of why certain Bemba-speaking constituencies were more prone to Kapwepwe's (and more recently to Michael Sata's) populist rhetoric than others, and why the UPP failed to command political support across the entire 'Bemba nation', in spite of the systematic attempts of its leaders to effect an ethnic mobilisation campaign.

The second problem is that, although this book addresses opposition movements in Zambia from independence to the first decade of the twenty-first century, it does not explain the electoral failures of opposition parties throughout Frederick Chiluba's decade-long tenure (1991–2001). These occurred in spite of the existence of the sort of economic conditions that a few years later enabled the opposition Patriotic Front, led by the charismatic Michael Sata, to wrestle power from the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) and terminate its twenty-year hold on power.

While factors such as the nature of the MMD coalition, the donor-driven liberalisation programme and Chiluba's constitutional manoeuvrings contributed to the absence of a viable opposition in Zambia from 1991 to 2001, opposition leaders also played their hands badly. A closer examination of the nature of leadership during this period would reveal that many of the most prominent opposition actors were elitists who failed to take politics out of the boardroom and onto the streets. They lacked a language with which to connect their political agenda with the demands or concerns of the electorate, the majority of whom lived in abject poverty, and so failed to build grass-roots support networks.

Furthermore, by largely focusing on class-conscious actors like Musakanya and overstating, as in some of his previous writings, the contribution of the Mineworkers Union of Zambia (MUZ), Larmer downplays the crucial role played by the church in both challenging the authority of UNIP and forming the MMD. Although there is a chapter on church, labour and civil society opposition to the state, the bulk of the analysis is devoted to the latter two actors.

Another impressive recent publication on post-colonial opposition movements, *One Zambia Many Histories* (Jan-Bart Gewald *et al.*, 2010), better represents the integral role of religious movements in the history of opposition in Zambia.

Overall, however, *Rethinking African Politics* is a welcome, thought-provoking and useful contribution to our knowledge of African opposition movements, and one that has wide-reaching significance for how we think about African history and political change. In short, Larmer's latest monograph deserves to become required reading throughout African studies.

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Southern Africa: old treacheries and new deceptions by STEPHEN CHAN

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This is an engaging, pacy read, and it convincingly meets its stated aim: the production of 'an intelligent book for the non-specialist reader' about Southern Africa. 'Southern Africa' is a bit of a misnomer, for although the recent histories of Angola, Mozambique and Namibia are lightly sketched, the book is really about Zimbabwe and South Africa. Stephen Chan has been involved in Zimbabwe, in various capacities, for over thirty years; he has written books on Mugabe and Tsvangirai; and his decoding of the murky, fractious and increasingly brutal politics of ZANU-PF and the somewhat lumbering opposition of the MDC is highly informative.

Chan is also excellent on the strength, range and tenacity of the links between the two countries. He uses Cecil Rhodes' great north road as a metaphor for the propinquity, overlapping histories and political similarities that bind their destinies so closely. Zimbabwe is New Zealand to South Africa's Australia according to Chan (who is from New Zealand): 'there are deadly rivalries and separable identities, but the two understand each other with an intimacy that is uncanny' (256). Within his narrative of the complex relations between two states and their societies is a nuanced and convincing sub-plot about the parts played by Thabo Mbeki and Robert Mugabe. Chan's account of their personal and political exchanges is sharply observed and psychologically credible. The two leaders – intellectually confident, politically ruthless and emotionally limited – displayed a mutual understanding and empathy. Mbeki's public deference to the older man was real, but did not prevent him from composing a telling critique delivered in a 29-page letter to Mugabe.

Thabo Mbeki emerges from these pages as a tragically flawed figure, a 'scholarly and aloof philosopher-king who despite all his faults was, with his dreams of Renaissance, one of the last great idealists of Africa' (276). His macro-economic policy, GEAR, was not an error, a capitulation to neo-liberalism in a fit of absence of mind. Rather (Chan proposes) it was Mbeki's master plan for South Africa – and also a technocratic template for the rest of the continent: *this* is how you run a modern state; how you exercise agency in partnership with global capital; how you win respect for Africa. But if Mbeki was a visionary who had blind spots, Mugabe viewed the world through such distorting lenses as to blind him to reality. He was a nationalist leader – but