

Zimbabwe's Crisis – Local and Global Contexts

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This special edition of the *Australasian Review of African Studies* on Zimbabwe comes at a time when we see a new coalition government forging ahead in an attempt to resolve Zimbabwe's ailing economy and failing state, and it will be well into the 100 day plan attempting to re-engage with the west and create renewal for the country. With Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister and Robert Mugabe remaining as President the 'bonding' required to bring government together seems near impossible, let alone bringing the country back from the brink of disaster. They simply cannot fail if they can agree upon the task. This edition of ARAS has brought together a range of authors, perspectives and analyses on the history and politics of Zimbabwe in both local and global contexts.

Geoffrey Hawker in "Zimbabwe: Retrospect and Prospect" begins the task of unfolding the causes of the current crisis in Zimbabwe through a retrospective examination of the early colonial years and the Shona and Ndebele rivalries still evident today. He asks the question – if Mugabe was gone, would we see an end to the crisis? The country, he argues has always been in 'struggle', before, during and after colonisation, therefore, the chances of a reconciliation are few. Hawker notes the extent to which black Zimbabweans reconciled with their former white colonisers, at the same time that the west was largely ignoring the increasing tensions between Shona and Ndebele, culminating in the *Gukurahundi* in the mid-1980s, where up to 20,000 people were killed. Mugabe was once praised as a leader against apartheid, and was an ally of Reagan's USA, but when the 1990s brought the implementation and failure of structural adjustment programs, things began to 'fall apart'. When in 1999 the rise of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) signalled 'electoral rejection' for Mugabe, disastrous land redistribution policies that resulted in the invasion and occupation of white-owned farms around the country, destroyed the remnants of the economy. Hawker brings us up to date with the current crisis as played out during the 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections. He takes us through the historiography of Zimbabwe to look for possible causes of ongoing violence. While he poses the question about a solution without Mugabe in the equation, it becomes clear that popular support for ZANU(PF) remains, despite the MDC encroaching upon their traditional electoral comfort zones. Mugabe remains part of the equation, and has yet to be 'eliminated' from the race. Hawker argues that the major issue in Zimbabwe is still land. He rules out a foreign intervention force to alleviate the crisis – briefly popular rhetoric during the outbreak of cholera in 2008. He also rules out a reconciliation. Hawker instead advocates for a "period of normal politics" unpolled by "patrimony and repression".

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Stephen O'Brien in "From Comrade to His Excellency: Mugabe's Rise to Power," takes us through the nationalist periods in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and examines the reasons and ramifications of these rivalries and tensions, despite the 'common enemy' of a white minority regime. He does this in an analysis of the rise and fall of the lesser known Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) during the Second Chimurenga. O'Brien examines Mugabe's rise to power in the fission created by ZANU's suppression of this group of young radicals in ZIPA. ZIPA's agenda during the nationalist liberation struggle was for "total transformation of the Zimbabwean society." When Mugabe was released from prison in 1974 he took charge of the struggle, and in hindsight was far more conciliatory than these revolutionaries. They were jailed and only released to participate in the 1976 Geneva Conference under pressure from the USA. After that they were repressed again, with some leaders in exile. While ZANU and ZAPU made a temporary alliance in 1979 for the Lancaster House Agreement, they soon split after independence with ZAPU members losing on out government and army posts, while ZANU shored up its support of the army. O'Brien argues that *Gukurahundi*, ensured the completion of Mugabe's rise to power.

Kate Law in "Episodes of Ambiguity: Steps towards Socialism in Zimbabwe, 1980-1985" offers an examination of the early 1980s in post-independent Zimbabwe and argues that this was a period filled with "episodes of ambiguity." The potential for a socialist future while not guaranteed or indeed likely, was nonetheless ambiguous, with the implementation of some policies designed to give this impression, such as in education, health and labour reform. Law argues that Mugabe's leadership of Zimbabwe, while ultimately authoritarian, as Hawker and O'Brien both argue in this edition, did offer an initial hope of a socialist potential in the early days of independence. She argues that it is futile to blame all of Zimbabwe's troubles on the day Mugabe won political office. However, Law also notes that "Zimbabwe's commitment to socialism was tempered by the ... continuation of capitalist production and markets," in part due to the details of the Lancaster agreement, which effectively disabled radical land redistribution for the first decade of independence, hindering Zimbabwe's "socialist credentials". Law argues that the advent of *Gukurahundi* rapidly degenerated the socialist future into an authoritarian nightmare. While "episodes of ambiguity" initially appeared democracy was ultimately surrendered to the rule of authoritarianism.

Virginia Mapedzahama in "Weaving Paid Work, Informal Sector Work and Motherhood in Harare (Zimbabwe): A New Arena For Research?" provides a timely feminist critique of the conditions in Zimbabwe in her research on how women support their households in the climate of an authoritarian and failing state that has little regard for the plight of its people suffering in poverty and violence. Mapedzahama has researched the lives and roles of women as

mothers and workers in the formal and informal economies of Zimbabwe and examines their struggles in terms of “Multiple Economic Activities for Subsistence” (MEAS), which takes into account their shift work as mothers and workers for income. This article forms part of her wider research project which compares women in Zimbabwe with women in Australia. She concludes that the burden for women as the primary care-givers within the household is immense, as they are dependent on the informal sector for income-generation, which significantly adds to their stresses in dealing with day-to-day survival – to alleviate their own poverty in a country where the government is incapable or unwilling to assist.

Kudzai Matereke in “‘Discipline and Punish’: Inscribing the Body and its Metaphors in Zimbabwe’s Postcolonial Crisis,” provides a postmodern analysis of the current crisis in Zimbabwe using metaphors of the body to describe the politics and power shaping the country’s future prospects. In particular he examines the ‘suffering of the body’ as represented through the media, and the violence meted out by the state against its own people, and the resistance to such violence. Matereke analyses the ‘clenched fist’ used as a symbol of the ruling party denoting strength and power in Zimbabwe, but more recently also coming to represent ‘repression and violence by the state’. Drawing upon this interpretation, the Movement for Democratic Change and in particular its leader Morgan Tsvangirai, chose consciously to use the symbol of the open palm, to denote “openness, transparency and fairness”, and in this action, Matereke argues “deploy[ed] the idea of the ‘violent other’”. Matereke acknowledges the recent and tragic death of Susan Tsvangirai. Her last open palm wave to her husband before her death, signalling that the ‘struggle for democracy’ must continue. She is considered to have been the ‘mother of this struggle’, perhaps tragically following in the footsteps of the former First Lady and ‘mother of the liberated nation’ Sally Mugabe who died in 1992. No-one could not have foreseen the subsequent and tragic death of Tsvangirai’s grandson one month after his wife’s death. Perhaps this will be the last and ultimate sacrifice that democracy will require for unity and peace to be achieved in Zimbabwe.

Dianne Schwerdt in “Caught in the Crossfire: Writing Conflict in Two African Novels” shifts the analysis from political history to literature in her comparative essay on two African novels which examine both anti-colonial and post-colonial violence. Schwerdt draws upon Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Kenyan novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, and Yvonne Vera’s Zimbabwean novel, *The Stone Virgins*, with the former examining pre-independence conflict and violence, the latter, post-independence violence. Schwerdt’s analysis provides an opportunity to re-examine the official discourse on history through fictional interpretation. Pertinent to this particular edition of ARAS is Schwerdt’s discussion of Vera’s exploration of *Gukurahundi* in Matebeleland. The violence and horror of the

massacres in the mid-1980s becomes a reality, despite the processes of 'forgetting' that have been attempted in Zimbabwe.

Russell McDougall's in "Things Fall Apart: Culture, Anthropology, Literature" on the anthropological progression of Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*, while not a specific contribution to the current theme on Zimbabwe, does remind us that things have fallen apart in Zimbabwe. Indeed, Achebe's title has been invoked by hundreds of writers on Zimbabwe's recent crises, (including myself above) evidenced merely by a quick Google search. Using examples from Australian high school and university curricula, McDougall demonstrates that Achebe's novel has been re-interpreted into the global context, and is now widely used to denote a certain state of affairs, from the personal to the corporate, and indeed at the state level. However, in that process the novel and its title has been "de-Africanised." For example, the phrase "Things Fall Apart" has been "hijacked" by musicians and authors all over the world. Greg McCarthy for example used this term in the title of his book on the history of the State Bank of South Australia and its financial collapse. McDougall argues that despite the appearance of this African novel in the curricula, there is little focus on African studies, and even less on furthering our understanding of Australia's relationship with Africa. This article reminds us what happens in Africa should not be ignored.

In the article "'Embracing the Aussie Identity': Theoretical Reflections on Challenges and Prospects for African-Australian Youths", Kudzai Matereke's second contribution to this edition brings Zimbabwe back into the picture, but this time within Australia. Matereke provides an analysis of 'Australianness' as it confronts the identities of African migrants. He juxtaposes two images of African migrants in the Australian media in a fascinating exposé of the Australian identity. The portrayal of Sudanese youth in the Australian media, tarnished with violence and fear, is juxtaposed with the troubling portrayal of one Zimbabwean woman, Tarisai Vushe who appeared on the television program *Australian Idol*. In exposing some racist tendencies, Matereke clearly reinforces the need for Australia and Australians to engage in more analysis and understanding of Africa's past, present and future.

Finally in this edition, Graeme Counsel describes his research in Guinea completed just prior to the recent military coup in that country. His article on "Digitising and Archiving Syliphone Recordings in Guinea" provides an example of dedicated and persistent researching that has enabled "the world's first complete catalogue of Syliphone recordings, and [the] digitis[ation] [of] the reel-to-reel recordings of Guinean orchestras held at the sound archive of Radiodiffusion Télévision Guinée". Counsel's research was supported by a grant from the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme, and from the Guinean government he was awarded the prestigious 'Palme Académique en Or' for his work on these music archives. Counsel's research also reminds us

that there are dedicated scholars in Australia who are researching Africa, and providing important analysis, knowledge, information and indeed preservation of culture.

In this 29th year of Zimbabwe's independence, the Zimbabwean dollar is near worthless, with one hundred trillion buying only AUD\$4. There is evidence that state sanctioned violence and killings continue in the country despite the progress of the new government of national unity, and Mugabe's calls for 'national healing.' Australia has only slightly downgraded its travel warning to the country while 254 Zimbabweans remain subjected to 'travel and financial sanctions' in Australia. The Australian government website on Zimbabwe has yet to update its list of Heads of Government for Zimbabwe to include Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister (www.dfat.gov.au/geo/zimbabwe/index.html), while Mugabe is still saluted as "Your Excellency". When he was Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kevin Rudd once criticised the Howard government for achieving no gains in the Zimbabwean crisis. Now as Prime Minister, will Rudd be able to put Africa and indeed Zimbabwe onto Australia's agenda. This edition of ARAS will I hope inspire discussion and debate about Zimbabwe's future both locally and globally.