

Review

Henning Melber (ed) (2002) *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002: evidence, lessons and implications*. Discussion Paper 14, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet

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At first glance it seems very impressive to have what is almost a book (an 88 page 'discussion paper') out within weeks of the event with which it is concerned. *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002* is noteworthy on that score and more – even if many of the nasty things one could say about the crooked victory the book marks could have been said (and often were) about the June 2000 parliamentary elections, and even if the structural context of both elections was substantially the same (see Bond and Manyanya 2002, for a view taking structural adjustment and debt as the relevant fundamental constraints, or even causes). Indeed, the book could almost be entitled 'Zimbabwe's Long Election'. The Zimbabwean African National Union-Patriotic Front (not 'popular' front: Ian Taylor makes a double slip with that one) was shocked into more repressive action than usual by its defeat at the February 2000 constitutional referendum. It had been pushed into holding that contest in order to meet a challenge mounted by the National Constitutional Assembly, but that provocation also signalled a contest with the September 11, 1999-born Movement for Democratic Change. From then on ZANU-PF and its ageing but cagey leader used every trick in the book to maintain power in the midst of economic meltdown – and invented a few new ones, learning as the 'long election' moved along through the June 2000 parliamentary election to its final stage in March 2002. Perhaps the most intriguing new wile was the 'land invasions', apparently led by the war veterans association (with lots of help from the army).

To get to the root of that phenomenon would entail examining yet another power struggle, going back at least to the southern spring of 1997 when a

group of 'war vets' confronted the president to make demands that would destroy Zimbabwe's fiscus and catalyse the latent powder-keg of land redistribution for many years. When one looks to that moment and its consequences,¹ one is forced to ask another 'election' oriented question: will Zimbabwe's next era be ruled by *any* 'party' in the sense of which orthodox political scientists are familiar, or will it be ruled by 'warlords'? Melber's team does not quite grapple with that question, or the antecedent of just what *is* the nature of the relationship between the 'veterans' and the ruling party, although there is lots of evidence in the book to force one to ask it, especially if one has been reading Norma Kriger (2001 and forthcoming) or Joanne Macgregor (2001) in the context of writers such as William Reno (1998) and Mark Duffield (2001) on the nature of war-torn Africa (Moore 2002).

There is enough evidence in *Zimbabwe's Presidential Elections 2002* to contemplate seriously the probability of Zimbabwe slipping down into the vacuum of shadowy states and networked wars. Kenneth Good's 'Dealing with Despotism,' at 23 pages the longest essay in the book, admirably rounds up Zimbabwe's most recent events with a comprehensive historical scan. Reminding us of the Matabeleland massacres in the mid-1980s, and Zimbabwe's involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's war, his words bring in both domestic and international aspects of President Mugabe's penchant for solving problems with force and leaves plenty of room for contemplating 'warlords' gaining accumulative power abroad and at home. Tandeka Nkiwane's observations on the motley crew of election observers and Ian Taylor's prognosis on Zimbabwe's effect on NEPAD's hopes for peer reviewed good democratic governance illustrate how well ZANU-PF's foreign policy makers can manipulate global 'democracy' promoters and their closer peers' alacrity to rally around perceived threats to their 'sovereignty': thus it looks like Zimbabwe's near and far neighbours will leave it to its fate. Amin Kamete persuades us to ask just when the urban 'rebellion' will become more violent: what will happen, for example, if MDC-run Harare demands that ZANU-PF (note well: that is the *party* alone!) pay its Z\$300 million of debt to the city, or if Bulawayo tries to collect the Z\$102 million owed to it by central government (38-39)? Scholar-activist Brian Raftopoulos's few words – from the trenches, as it were – predict ZANU-PF's increasing reliance on 'surveillance, threat and arrest' in the light of its 'rapidly depleted political and moral authority' (49). It does not look like there is going to be an armed opposition arising from civil society, so the nascent warlords will have free play.

Melber's own chapter invokes Fanon's 'pitfalls of national consciousness' to place Robert Mugabe and his coterie in the company they deserve, and thus also serves to position Zimbabwe on a trajectory to national purgatory. Stefan Mair's 'German view' predicts that, amidst generalised economic and political deterioration, 'war veterans and youth militia will increasingly use their repression and control apparatus for self-enrichment and the plundering of rural areas' (86). In the meantime, his awareness that European Union and G8 policies find it easy to look at the less than democratic, but geostrategically interesting, Ugandas and Rwandas of the world with less jaundiced eyes than Zimbabwe, suggests that the African forces of light will not get much help from global headquarters. Patrick Molutsi lists the reasons for failure of (all) Zimbabwean politicians, African leaders and Europe, the USA and the international financial institutions to create anything other than a Cambodian style election, achieving 'nothing but misery for ordinary people' (78), but also situates the Zimbabwean debacle within the larger framework of the country's post-1990 economic slide. He takes the reader out of the confines of Zimbabwe for a moment, reiterating that the democratisation literature suggests 'democracy without sustainable economic development is very fragile', and that an active state must ensure that the two critical requirements of democracy – 'political liberation and associated freedoms and security on the one hand and social welfare of the majority of the impoverished population on the other' (81) – are met. In Zimbabwe, the combination of a decade of structural adjustment and two of Mugabe's misrule has led to the state's crumbling around an empty edifice of 'presidentialism'.

One might expand Molutsi's start at an analysis to examine the relationship between Zimbabwe's faltering state and the fits and starts of democracy in and around it, to the country's emerging class structures (and their relationship to race). Where is Zimbabwe's 'bourgeoisie' in all of this, if there is a 'real' one? What are its state and party politics? Is there a landlord class (not just the white commercial farmers) emerging in a feudalistic sort of way from state actions? How do these class forms relate to the working class (Stephens and Huber 1999) and other components of 'civil society'? How do they affect the land question – that is, the issue of the transformation of communal tenure relations, under which more than half the Zimbabwean population lives, to capitalist ones – which is also an issue not investigated in the collection? How did the era of structural adjustment affect these class relations and accumulation strategies?

These issues, however, are not within the book's remit. Its focus on, and barely constrained anger about, the Zimbabwean elections forces even the usually class conscious Ian Taylor to pin hope upon an otherwise unspecified 'clear-headed African leadership [to] create the right conditions for a constructive process contributing to the rebuilding of Africa' (73). Can this be the same 'leadership' he had been criticising for the rest of the chapter? This sort of voluntarism, and its resultant despair, pervades the volume. It is as if the beginning and the end of such stories rest with 'leadership', but this vague political category is in a social vacuum.

Nevertheless, at a political rather than political economy level, the book(let) is a worthy addition to Zimbabwean studies. It is a shame that it does not have a snappy title, a good distributor and a fancy cover, so that it could be positioned in South African bookstores alongside the invariably British published reporters' books (Blair 2002, Meredith 2002), the slightly too economicistic *Zimbabwe's Plunge* (Bond and Manyanya 2002) the 'tears for Zimbabwe' genre (Buckle, 2001; Hunter et al 2001) and the cynical output of Peter Stiff (2000).

Note

1. As Zimbabwe watchers will know, the August 1997 agreement – quite probably made at gunpoint during a meeting resulting from an 'invasion' of ZANU-PF headquarters – between the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association and Mugabe meant that nearly Z\$4.5 billion (then over £260 million) was committed to Z\$50,000 (£3,000) in once-off payment and Z\$2,000 (£125) per month for approximately 50,000 'war vets' although fewer than 30,000 were registered in 1979 at the end of the war of liberation (Blair 2002:39; Good in Melber: 14, claims 50-70,000). When the deal was formally implemented in November the Zimbabwean dollar lost seventy-five per cent of its value. Promises to hasten land reform were also made at that meeting, following which came a hasty slew of donor conferences and their plans alongside government acquisition edicts, none of which bore much fruit. Thus was another reason, aside from the elections, for the March 2000 land invasions (Moyo 2002).

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