



BOOK REVIEW

David B. Moore. *Mugabe's Legacy: Coups, Conspiracies and the Conceits of Power in Zimbabwe*. London, Hurst Publishers, 2022.

Mugabe and Zimbabwe's moment in history may be long past, the re-election of Emerson Mnangagwa as the country's president, for example, being barely noticed. Nevertheless, the ongoing tragedy of Zimbabwe, as well as rounds of coups and conspiracies on the continent, give Moore's engaging study a relevance beyond its immediate subject. Antonio Gramsci's notion of interregna and Karl Marx's concept of primitive accumulation weave through Moore's conceptualisation of the coups and conspiracies associated with the former president's political ascendancy, negation and physical demise.

The emergence and subsequent suppression of the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) is key to Moore's narrative of Mugabe's relationship with power. 1974 was a chaotic year for the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). The liberation struggle stalled as problems associated with frontline logistics, imprisonment and negotiations took their toll on unity. Mutiny, executions, murders and assassinations followed in the wake of the factional strife. Young guerrillas such as Wilfred Mhanda, motivated by ideas of unity and democracy, dodged the disarray and, at the initial behest of the Frontline States, stepped into the military and political vacuum.

The reinspired combatants resumed armed incursions into Rhodesia in early 1975 and soon shattered the white minorities' delusions of a 1,000-year rule. Attempting to forestall the inevitable, later in 1975 the Rhodesians agreed to talks in Geneva. This conference presented Mugabe with an international stage on which he staked his claim to be the political leader of ZANU – the party's founder, Nadinbigni Sithole, had earlier been deposed in a dubious prison coup – and, somewhat more questionably, to also lead the guerrillas. Mugabe's pretence became reality when, after negotiations stalled, his old guard allies, Josiah Tongogara and Solomon Mujuru, rushed back from Geneva to establish their control over the camps in Mozambique, and to suppress ZIPA. Mhanda and 50 key ZIPA leaders were arrested and incarcerated for the duration of the war.

Bringing down the axe was the ZANU euphemism for the purge of perceived oppositionists within the camps. This reinforced an ongoing pattern of ruthlessly suppressing real or imagined opponents and conspiracies.

When independence arrived in 1980, this cabal were well situated to insert themselves into influential military, political and economic positions. ZANU leaders and functionaries with ambition, contacts and the wherewithal started to position themselves to replace and/or share power and wealth with the existing dominant class. Rivals were excluded; for example, supporters of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union in Matabeleland and Midlands were murdered and politically marginalised by a genocidal military unit during Operation Gukurahundi in 1982-1987. Many of Mugabe's former opponents in Zimbabwe and Western diplomats stayed quiet about the Gukurahundi massacres, a time when the current President was Minister for state security.

This illustrates the morbidity associated with the interregna, the period between reigns or regimes as an emerging ruling group/ruling class establishes itself over the influence of the *ancien regime* (by suppression or compromise). The process of class formation that occurs during a complicated interregnum, such as in Zimbabwe, can last for generations. Another morbid symptom was the way in which popular demands for democracy and economic redistribution were ignored. Pre-liberation pledges of land and economic justice made by ZANU during the war were forestalled, while many of the economic policies and laws of the former colonial regime were retained.

Consequently, after independence, the capital accumulated through the ongoing dispossession and exploitation of the Shona, Ndebele and other peoples, who in the main laboured on the farms and in industry, remained locked in private hands. Using his liberation credentials to establish a general consent to rule, Mugabe was also adept at switching between being a progressive and a pragmatist, depending on the audience. This is consistent with the support he received from both East and West. Archival evidence reveals that he conversed with US delegations, and to shelter and support his wife while he was in jail, he depended on the former colonial masters in England. As Moore notes, Mugabe would 'forever spout radical rhetoric ranging from Marxist-Leninist Maoism to the "third Chimurenga" and Africanist sovereignty, while for as long as possible easing into the global and regional strictures militating against them'.

Mugabe's rule became even more morbid when the state periodically unleashed repressive 'operations' such as Murambatsvina (Winnowing the chaff) in 2005 and Makavhoterapapi (Account for your vote) in 2008. Realpolitik meant that the ZANU's actual economic project was to integrate Zimbabwe into the global economy, take advantage of opportunities for primitive accumulation, and expropriate as much of that capital as possible. Party connections created economic advantage where it involved access to State resources and revenues. For those well connected to the military high command, the attraction was access to plunder, of the Democratic Republic of the Congo resources, the diamond mines in Eastern Zimbabwe and, when it proved expedient, the farms during the land invasions. Such undertakings generated significant accumulations of capital and, consequently, political and business rivalries between the wealthy individuals and their associated factions. Owners of capital like political and social conditions that favour business opportunities to continue without disruption.

Scenarios where political conceits, particularly those associated with a head of state, interfere with business opportunities and capital accumulation create fertile ground for conspiracies. As Mugabe lost his ability to play off the different centres of power, the ability of his entourage to dissemble the truth about his rule dissolved and the conspiracies became actual as the social consent that underlies political hegemony crumbled. Moore fleshes out the veracity of the various rumours about coups that have swirled around Mugabe. The 2017 'Military Assisted Transition' of 2017 was thus, in one sense, another in a long line of conspiracies and coups. Moore completes the circle when he notes that the justification of the 2017 coup references, albeit inaccurately, previous coup attempts, including the suppression of ZIPA.

In a broader sense this work contextualises a question I often find asked. How did the ideals of the likes of Thomas Sankara, Patrice Lumumba, Amical Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Steve Biko, Chris Hani, Wilfred Mhanda and the many unnamed female fighter become something very different at independence? Africa continuing to be the poorest continent on the planet would not have been in any post liberation future they imagined.

As for Zimbabwe, the interregnum continues, with Mugabe's legacy continuing to be a State founded on alternate realities, conceits, conspiracies and coups.

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