

de pessoas comuns desiludidas com o Moçambique pós-revolucionário (204).

Os Isaacmans prometem “levantar novas questões” sobre Samora e seu legado (36) Embora a maior parte do que eles dizem sobre ele não seja nova, entrelaçar a vida pessoal e pública do presidente é interessante. O livro traz novas leituras da história moderna de Moçambique e do legado de Samora, incluindo críticas às “tendências patriarcais” de Samora e à ausência de mulheres no governo (144). Eles também abordam as tensões, dissidências e lutas pelo poder dentro do regime, temas raramente discutidos na historiografia local. Existem, no entanto, algumas passagens infundadas no livro. Por exemplo, a afirmação de uma “manobra cínica do ex-rival de Samora [Armando Guebuza] para aumentar a sua popularidade e reforçar a sua legitimidade como líder nacionalista” (201). Infelizmente, o livro carece também de uma introspeção crítica sobre

a cumplicidade e consentimento espontâneo dos intelectuais da universidade às políticas socialistas fracasadas, e ao governo autocrático de Samora. Estudiosos como os Isaacmans *estiveram lá*, auxiliando na construção da utopia socialista *made in Mozambique*. Nesse sentido, eles ajudaram intelectualmente a cimentar e legitimar o projeto hegemônico da FRELIMO.

Não obstante estas pequenas advertências, este é um livro abrangente que cobre os principais eventos da história moderna de Moçambique. Recomendo a todos os estudiosos de Moçambique, mas especialmente aos estudantes universitários que estão entrando na área. Irá permitir-lhes ter uma visão geral da história moderna de Moçambique através da vida social e política de Samora, um personagem inconfundível na história de Moçambique e da África Austral.

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SUE ONSLOW and MARTIN PLAUT. *Robert Mugabe*. (Ohio Short Histories of Africa.) Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018. Pp. 208. Paper \$14.95.

Robert Gabriel Mugabe, longtime leader of the southern African nation of Zimbabwe, died on September 6, 2019, at the age of ninety-five, a year after being deposed from power. He left no autobiography or authorized biography. After an initial collected volume of speeches and interviews was published in 1983—soon after he had come to power—no additional compilations of his letters, essays, or policy reflections were produced. In contrast, a virtual industry promulgates sources on the political evolution of Nelson Mandela, Mugabe’s contemporary to the south; there are published letters about Mandela’s published letters. But Mugabe went to his grave maintaining virtual radio silence about his life. Other than a fair number of journalistic political interviews collected on YouTube, Mugabe’s views on the trajectories of his own personal, political, and professional conduct were never expressed.

While there is little by Mugabe, there is a cacophony of sources about him. Many are breathlessly outraged condemnations of the state violence that was unleashed on a comparatively small number of white farmers after 2000, often accompanied by photos of violent African mobs threatening white women behind locked farm gates, babes in arms and plucky Jack Russell terriers at their feet—images that played into the worst traditions of Mau Mau—ist hysteria. Mugabe always had fierce critics: Rhodesians decrying his early socialism, Britons criticizing his intransigence, Zimbabweans angered at his intolerance of real and perceived political opposition and quick abandonment of a genuinely long-term redistributive economic strategy. After a decade of silence there was finally exposure and condemnation of

the Mugabe government’s massacres of villagers in the southern province of Matabeleland in the 1980s. On the other hand, Mugabe also attracted supporters elsewhere on the African continent who welcomed his anti-colonial rhetoric, which paradoxically grew more defiant and strident even as formal colonialism itself receded into the pages of history.

Into this fray comes Sue Onslow and Martin Plaut’s biography in the Ohio Short Histories of Africa series. The book was published a year after Mugabe was deposed from power and a year before he died. As with the other books in this series, this is a “brief but lively” and affordable introduction to an aspect of African history where there is a fair amount of both popular interest and academic production. Onslow and Plaut, fixtures in the British academic and journalist ranks on southern Africa, have achieved a readable volume that tries very hard to come to grips with three things about Mugabe: controversy, complexity, and contradiction.

Controversy is inevitable in transitions from colonial to postcolonial rule. Who benefits? Who decides? Who suffers as power is passed from one community to another? Onslow and Plaut’s first chapter tries to set the scene of the competing views about Mugabe: As Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia and then Zimbabwe, had Mugabe always been a gangster-like figure, or had he merely evolved into one? Had the hero of the anticolonial liberation struggle ever really been heroic, or was it all simply the periodically seductive performance of yet another “African despot” (13)? They decline to answer this question definitively but do suggest that time was his Achilles heel—the thirty-seven years he spent doggedly

holding on to power in Zimbabwe were simply too many. With Mugabe, one gets the feeling that the authors conclude less would have been much more.

The book ventures into the realm of complexity by suggesting that Mugabe was correct when he equated himself with the state of Zimbabwe itself. They posit that for thirty-seven long years, the two were practically indistinguishable (18). The book therefore goes into a fair amount of Zimbabwean history, rather than only the personal history of Mugabe. This choice means that the weight of the book is on interpretation rather than new empirical data. It contains no new revelations about Mugabe's upbringing, education, family, or political career.

Although the authors attempt to steer a middle course between adulation and condemnation, their British backgrounds and perspectives come through strongly. For whom, for example, had Mugabe's accomplishments "long since faded from public consciousness" by the time he was deposed? Perhaps for the British or other Westerners, but certainly not for the Zimbabwean public. For whom can a redistributive strategy be dubbed "Afro-radicalism"? Land redistribution was a basic strategy of the masses in Zimbabwe; for them it was not radical.

One of the odd things about the book is the way that basic demand for land redistribution, stemming from the large-scale forced dispossession of African communities from 1896 through the middle of the twentieth century, is not presented chronologically. It is not until page 84 in chapter 3 that we receive a description of the massive scale of this dispossession. This creates, in earlier chapters, the impression that the course of the struggle against Rhodesian colonialism was perhaps a bit flighty, idiosyncratic, or had no real motivation. The authors' choice to wait until two full chapters have gone by to reveal that "vast tracts of land" were seized by the British South Africa Company in the early years of colonialism (84), one-sixth of the land mass was alienated soon thereafter, and by 1980 only six thousand white farmers owned 42 percent of the land (85) is a curious one. It means that chapters that cover Mugabe's life from birth through education, prison, guerrilla leader, and his rebirth as the elected leader of his nation, do not mention the primary locus of African discontent. Instead, these descriptions are located in the chapter that then goes on to chronicle how Zimbabweans dealt with the land issue after 1980. But by then a reader who is new to Zimbabwean studies may have formed the impression that Africans were just a somewhat fussy lot with overblown grievances, while white farmers' capitalization and "modern farming techniques" (85) were some kind of natural attribute rather than the result of systematic state privileging of their needs.

There are notable lacunae in the coverage of Zimbabwe's national history, such as the major advances

in education and health achieved in the early independence years and the devastating effects of the neocolonial structural adjustment program. There is no mention of the dynamics of the fight for, and suppression of, women's activism for equal rights. Zimbabwe's many civil society organizations receive short shrift. Another glaring omission is any mention of apartheid, South Africa's active and violent destabilization campaign of the 1980s, which successfully (from the South African perspective) put the new Zimbabwean economy in danger and the national psyche on edge.

These weaknesses aside, the book does a fair job of trying to explain Mugabe's steady stream of decisions to concentrate power in his own hands. There is a detailed description of the behind-the-scenes maneuvering at the 1979 Lancaster House conference, which Plaut covered as a journalist at the time. It is also good to be reminded in some detail of the interplay between the disastrous Zimbabwean military foray into the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and how Mugabe deftly silenced any resulting army discontent with proceeds of the timely massive discovery of diamond deposits on Zimbabwe's eastern border.

The most useful part of the book narrates the events and dynamics leading up to the "soft coup" that deposed Mugabe in 2017. These developments were difficult to discern from afar at the time, and the authors convincingly show that the intraparty squabbling, backbiting, and scheming that Mugabe had fostered eventually led to his downfall, especially given the ambitious overreaching and self-enrichment of his second wife, Grace. The machine that Mugabe built finally devoured him without fundamentally shifting its own *modus operandi*. Thus Emmerson Mnangagwa, the long-standing party insider who replaced "the old man," has shown himself to be incapable of bringing any fundamentally new approaches to address the terrible woes of Zimbabwe, which for the foreseeable future will remain the sick man of southern Africa.

Readers new to Zimbabwean studies will find this a useful introduction to the fundamental, inherently contradictory question that will forever be posed by Mugabe's life and work. Was the bespectacled, headmasterly intellectual who threw himself into the maelstrom of his people's armed struggles for freedom always just a thug? Readers better versed in Zimbabwe's history may be irritated by somewhat patchy explications of postcolonial developments, but they will also find novel nuggets relating to the Lancaster House negotiations and the 2017 coup. One wonders, however, what more might have been possible had Mugabe shared his own perspectives with the world.

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