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ZIMBABWE: The combined and contradictory inheritance of the struggle against colonialism

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(This paper was commissioned as a chapter as part of a set of essays which Colin Stoneman is editing for publication in early 1988. These essays ('*Zimbabwe's Prospects*') will update his earlier collection ('*Zimbabwe's Inheritance*'). I agreed to write such a paper for several reasons.

Over the past couple of years, in the course of repeated visits to Zimbabwe, I had become interested in what the local press intriguingly described as the 'peasant miracle' - in other words, the huge crop surplus produced by Zimbabwe's peasantry in most years since independence. I asked an obvious question of this phenomenon - were all peasants in every region participating in this wonderful success story? And it quickly became apparent that they were not. Evidence contained in Agricultural Rural Development Authority reports, among other sources, pointed to only some 15-20% of the peasantry (and mainly in northern and eastern Mashonaland) being responsible for most of the marketed output. This category of producers were also the ones benefiting from the state's agricultural advice and rural credit programmes. And, of course, I wanted to know how they had come to occupy this position whereby they could realise their class aspirations.

I also decided to investigate this subject because it had long been apparent that ZANU's (not to mention ZAPU's) relationship to the peasantry during the war creid out for critical attention. I was not persuaded by the 'idealism' or 'voluntarism' of those authors who argued that the Party had been radicalised by armed struggle but had then betrayed the peasantry and socialism after the war for opportunistic reasons, largely dictated by external, imperialist forces. In particular, I thought Terry Ranger's account of *Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War* was debatable in a number of areas. For example, Ranger incorrectly sees middle and rich peasants more or less disappearing in the 1950s and 1960s. They actually withstood the onslaught of the Land Husbandry Act with remarkable success. From this, it follows that there are problems with Ranger's assumption that these same class elements were not represented inside ZANU. There is at least some evidence that they were. My paper attempts to touch on each of these issues. It tries to locate and identify the class forces in the countryside which imparted a very particular trajectory to the Second Chimurenga. And it was those same class forces who stood poised to assert their interests after April 1980.)

The legacy of the Zimbabwean liberation war during its decisive phase between December 1972 and December 1979 was profoundly ambiguous. On the one hand, armed struggle opened up the prospect of a revolutionary transformation of the land and woman questions. Yet it also accommodated conservative and patriarchal class forces. Although agreeing that it is 'perhaps premature for a comprehensive analysis of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle' (Mandaza, 1986:28) nonetheless one can still attempt to pull together a number of recent studies which explore different aspects of the Zimbabwean experience. But in doing so, the argument presented here suggests that the trajectory of struggle is best followed by paying close attention to the class composition of the countryside. The alliance of rural class forces underpinning the guerrilla struggle which eventually overthrew Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front regime was united in opposition to colonialism but little else. There was no shared vision of the future beyond the recovery of land lost to the whites.

I

The burden of white survival in the countryside after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in November was carried by black peasants. Following the imposition of sanctions, white farmers were encouraged by the state to diversify production away from tobacco into maize, cattle and cotton. Helped by annual subsidies and loans which were running at an estimated $8000 per settler farmer compared to 60 cents each for black cultivators in the early 1970s white commercial agriculture increased its share of domestic food production from 30 percent at the start of the 1960s to 75 percent by 1979 (Phillips, 1984:70).

> Thus the previous division of labour was radically changed, with settler production now becoming the competitor (aided by the huge investments of the state) of the African peasantry. The result upon the African peasantry was disastrous. Over the period 1965-70 production for consumption by African rural households did not increase per capita but remained at $17.9 in constant prices, while the income from sales fell, in current prices, from $3.30 a head to $2.82. The share of sales of total African production was 18.4 percent on average for the 1966-70 period, compared with 32 percent for the 1955-60 period. Furthermore, while in 1960 the distribution of cattle was 1,552,999 head on settler farms and 2,359,000 head owned by peasants, in 1975 this proportion became 2,500,000 head for each group (Centre of African Studies, 1977:18).

The consequences of the illegal regime's determination to make blacks foot the bill for sanctions were far-reaching. They severely affected poor peasants, whose level of absolute poverty was greatly exacerbated, and cramped the growth of a kulak class of middle peasants and Purchase Area farmers (Phillips, 1984:71). Thousands of poor peasants abandoned efforts to scratch a living from their few miserable acres. Some found wage employment but most of them swelled the ranks of the landless unemployed. Such evidence as there is indicates that the proportion of people without land in the so-called reserves expanded from approximately 30 percent in the late 1950s to slightly under 50 percent by 1978. Young people under 30 were particularly hard hit (Floyd, 1959:120; Riddell, 1978:50; also Weinrich, 1975:60, 298).

By contrast, middle peasants and African farmers survived comparatively unscathed until the last few years of the war. A significant number even managed to increase the acreage under their control as poor peasants surrendered their land holdings. Cattle ownership also became more unequal (Riddell, 1978:48). But while this redivision of rural resources undoubtedly slowed the deterioration of the kulak economic base, it failed to stop the process of impoverishment initiated by the settler state. Employment of black labourers on African farms fell from 56 000 in 1960 to 17 000 in 1969. Sales of cash crops and livestock declined during much the same period (Phillips, 1984:71).

Mounting rural economic grievances and the escalation of the war were closely interlinked. Many of the landless unemployed 'joined the stream of guerrilla volunteers leaving Rhodesia ... /while/ the sharp fall in the African share of the agricultural market ... persuaded peasant cultivators to shelter these young guerrillas and sustain their attack on the regime' (Birmingham and Ranger, 1983:375). And the indiscriminately repressive measures employed more and more drastically by the state 'especially after the guerrilla war started in earnest, further generated widespread opposition - from peasants whose families were caught in the "cross-fire", or who were subject to collective punishments, and also from the middle classes whose shops, businesses and bus services were closed down' (Cliffe, 1981:21). Poor peasants and kulaks alike joined in bitter opposition to settler colonialism. Despite quite different material interests, they made common cause in throwing their weight behind the national liberation struggle (Astrow, 1983:65).

State officials were shunned and collaborators and spies were denounced by one and all to the guerrillas. White farmers who were particularly obnoxious neighbours or bad employers were identified by peasants and labourers as specific targets for guerrilla vengeance. Individual settlers

who were captured by ZANLA encountered open hostility in semi-liberated zones. 'I was taken into each of the huts in turn to be shown off', recalled one prisoner. 'Each hut was crammed with old men, women and children. Some of the men cursed me and some of the women spat at me' (Wigglesworth, 1980:35). Ironically enough, one of the most telling accounts of popular loathing of the white security forces is the colourful testimony of a Selous Scout who masqueraded as a guerrilla prisoner as part of an attempt to uncover ZANLA fighters in what was then called the Victoria district. The captive was first paraded for

> tribal chiefs, headmen and important African businessmen to see. Invariably they all gawked and then cross-questioned him with rigour ... clearly in awe that a European should actually be a helpless prisoner. On the fifth day of the deployment, a large meeting of some two hundred tribesmen was convened, so ... /the prisoner/ could be displayed for the entertainment of the people. Individuals pranced and jived forward, vying to outdo one another in their efforts to demean and insult the helpless white prisoner. He was made to crawl on his hands and knees while they laughed and jeered ... they called him a dog ... they called him a pig. They drew comparisons between his bloodless white skin and their beautiful black skin. They commented with increasing hilarity on his awful blue eyes and his ugly complexion. Occasionally, someone's enthusiasm would run away with him and he or she would rush forward and kick him painfully in the ribs or buttocks ... A gathering crescendo of shouts and screams from the midst of the crowd demanded he be put to death.
>
> '*Pasi ne Smith* ... down with Smith', roared the crowd, '*Pambere ne Chimurenga* ... forward with the war' (Reid Daly, 1982:326-27).

II

From roughly 1976 onwards, however strains began to show in the broad anti-colonial alliance of the people. While guerrillas continued to be rapturously welcomed in some areas, their appearance elsewhere was less than enthusiastcally received in certain quarters. To some extent this reflected a marked deterioration in guerrilla discipline during 1978 and 1979 as the pace of the war quickened and the period of training given to recruits was foreshortened. Two examples suffice. 'The poorly trained, under-equipped young men that fought in the rural areas from March to July 1978, after several months of being hunted in the bush, were often nervous

wrecks, emerging startled into the tranquility of the mission complex, trigger-happy and needing tranquillisers from the dispensary, or drink, before they could begin to relax', noted one observer. 'Hospital staff began to dread the frequent demand for drugs or drink which made a travesty of the missionaries' hope for genuine liberation. The price of cordial relations might be serious exploitation of the mission, priests commandeered imperiously to drive guerrillas in the mission car, demands for the *best* drink, /and/ good meals cooked by frightened girls while the local population went hungry' (Linden, 1980:272-73).

'The old people like Samuel and my brother John don't like these Zanla "pungwes"', a sympathetic journalist was informed in 1979.

> They are dangerous. Sometimes they are held in the middle of the village, quite close to a road, and the "boys" dance to gramaphone records and get very drunk on gin or brandy. It makes the village people an easy target for the security forces. There has been too little discipline among the "boys" recently. A year ago there was more fighting and less drinking. There is one other thing you should know. All of us support the "boys", they are our only hope, but recently their behaviour with the girls has been very bad. They order the parents to bring their best blankets and then they take their daughters ... sometimes when it rains they turn people out of their houses and take the girls inside ... this upsets the old people very much ... No one dares say anything. But the "boys" lead a hard life. Many of them get killed. It's a pity they listen to so many false rumours, people whisper in their ears, you know, "That man is a sell-out, and that one over there, he has a secret police radio in his house". The "boys" kill these people and afterwards they are sorry, they were misinformed, then they go off and kill the ones who misinformed them. We are all very short of food now, there was very little rain this year. But when the "boys" come everyone must provide a chicken and they won't eat the legs or wings or the insides of the chicken, only relish. One man was beaten to death because he threw a chicken liver into the pot. He was only joking (Caute, 1983:18; Wilkinson, 1980:121).

By the middle of the same year, guerrillas in some districts were known as *mauta cKudga* ('the eating army'), because of their consumption of the peasantry's food and beer. 'It is also increasingly common for guerrillas to levy money taxes which people can ill afford and which often seem to

exceed amounts needed for mere survival', reported *Africa Confidential*. 'Where the army has tried to "starve out" the guerrillas by burning crops and granaries, the guerrillas demand what little is left (*Africa Confidential*, 18.07.79).

Although those observers 'both within and outside the guerrilla move ments' who feared that this crisis of legitimacy might herald a 'wholesale collapse of rural support', undoubtedly 'underestimated peasant determina tion' to see the struggle through (Ranger, 1986:386, 389), the relationship between at least some guerrillas and the rural populace was clearly becoming problematic (Kriger, 1986:28-31; Astrow, 1983:116).

In fact the liberation movement as a whole was increasingly being pulled in opposing directions by different social and political interests. One tendency grew directly from mass opposition to settler colonialism. In several instances, ordinary men and women had not been content merely with providing passive support for guerrillas. Instead they actively advanced the struggle by rustling white-owned cattle and occupying abandoned farms (Ranger, 1984: 171). They participated in new committee structures which in some areas apparently came close to constituting an alternative administration, *hurundwende* (Cilliers, 1985:240-41). Self-help schemes were started, and young people, particularly '*mujibas*, and their female counterparts the *chimbwidos*, ... who were a widespread and critical point of contact between the ZANLA guerrillas and the people', began to throw off the customary strictures of rural society (Cliffe, 1981:30-31; also Cliffe, Mpogu and Munslow, 1980:50-51; Kriger, 1986:21; *Zimbabwe News*, 1978). Women themselves became guerrillas, and voices were raised which 'condemned *lobola* and polygamy, advocated state nurseries and the involvement of men in child care, proposed leadership training for women and the extension of advanced educational training programmes to women' (England, 1982:133).

Taken together, these developments amounted to a challenge by 'the "underdogs" in Shona society to ... its structural inequalities' (Kriger, 1986:21). The involvement of landless young men, of women of all ages, and poor peasants in ways that were not totally passive sharpened contradictions within the broad liberation movement. Hundreds of African Purchase Area farmers who had taken up land in the 1950s after the state had removed peasant cultivators from designated areas, were themselves evicted by poor peasants and guerrillas (Astrow, 1983:65; Ranger, 1985:284). Wealthy homesteads were occasionally attacked, and storekeepers and business people 'fell under guerrilla suspicion' once the Internal Settlement of 1978-9 raised the spectre of black middle class support for Smith's political solution to the war (Ranger, 1985:263-64, 274).

But for all that the 'Voice of Zimbabwe', broadcasting from Maputo to-

wards the end of 1978, warned that there was 'now a crisis among the Zimbabwean black bourgeoisie ... They now know that the Patriotic Front will soon be ruling Zimbabwe and are wondering what may be in store for them' (Frederikse, 1982:278), the language and practice of class war remained very largely subordinate to the discourse and interests of radical nationalism. This second tendency was unquestionably the dominant one. Although ZANU and ZAPU had by the late 1970s 'transcended in some respects the earlier strategy and tactics of the 1960s which saw violence as merely the means to pressure Britain into an intervention that would bring independence sooner rather than later', armed struggle was still 'at best, viewed as a means to dismantle the white settler colonial system and replace it with an African government and, at worst, as a pronounced way of pressurising the imperialists into convening a conference that would bring aoout an African government in Zimbabwe'. It hardly encompassed within it 'even the idea of a socialist revolution' (Mandaza, 1986:29).

The guerrillas themselves were motivated far more by 'adherence to traditional and supernatural beliefs' than by Marxist ideological fervour (Mandaza, 1986:31), and despite occasional revolutionary flourishes orchestrated by exiled black intellectuals (Mandaza, 1986:4-5), both wings of the liberation movement remained firmly committed to 'one man one vote elections, majority rule and independence' (Martin and Johnson, 1981:319). Armed struggle was an instrument for 'speeding up *political* not *social* change'. ZANU and ZAPU intended to 'democratize the existing political structure in order to eliminate racial discrimination. Such a democratization process was not a challenge to capitalism, but a challenge only to the privileges enjoyed by the settler community' (Astrow, 1983:136, 137). It involved land redistribution but not the expropriation of the expropriators.

This programme was increasingly at variance with the aspirations and actions of a significant number of guerrillas and poor people. But it accurately reflected the interests of rich peasants and farmers, business people and the educated petty-bougeoisie, everyone in fact who stood to gain most from policies which 'opened up' the state and capital accumulation to black advancement. Always heavily represented within both ZANU and ZAPU, kulaks and other 'respectable' members of the community registered significant gains even before the war ended. In many cases they were the ones elected to the new 'people's' committees (Cliffe, Mpofu and Munslow, 1980:51). Their influence also helped to ensure that gender issues were mostly contained within 'traditional' norms. Female guerrillas, for example, never comprised more than five percent of the total number of insurgents, while *chimbwidos* tended to be mobilised through rather than against

patriarchal structures (England, 1982:133-37). Even when tension between black entrepreneurs and radicalised guerrillas was at its height during the last 24 months of the war, the majority of them soon established working arangements with the 'boys': 'if they were prepared to cooperate with the guerrillas, indeed, they were regarded as invaluable allies' (Ranger, 1985:272). And it was these 'invaluable allies' who were determined to ensure that their class interests prevailed within the liberation movement and in the new Zimbabwe.

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