

Intervention: The Zimbabwe Question and the Two Lefts

Abstract

This article identifies the two currents that have divided the Left over the Zimbabwe question. It argues that in the course of the radicalisation of the Zimbabwean state, 'Two Lefts' emerged, the so-called 'internationalist' and the 'nationalist', to take up opposite positions over a series of political questions, most notably the agrarian question and the national question. The article defends the nationalist Left and offers a critique of the 'internationalist' Left through a discussion of contemporary imperialism, the neocolonial state, and civil society.

Introduction

The debate surrounding the land reform in Zimbabwe has developed into an exchange of positions on a wide variety of issues that, by their nature, are of universal relevance.¹ At the crux of the Zimbabwe question are two historical questions, the national and the agrarian, which have focused the minds and actions of the Left internationally for well over a century. Both questions were conceived before modern imperialism – gradually taking shape in the aftermath of the French and Haitian revolutions, through the European revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871 – but they were globalised in form and altered in substance from the 1870s onwards, with the onset of the new imperialism. Henceforth, the resolution of both questions became contingent on the defeat of imperialism itself. Yet, in the century that followed, imperialism remained in full force, surviving two world wars, two world economic crises, several social revolutions, and countless more national-liberation struggles.

What is more, with the crisis of the 1970s and the defeat of the anti-imperialist struggle worldwide, the two historic questions were demobilised and sent into neoliberal 'hibernation'.

Alongside structural adjustment, a process of intellectual adjustment took place, whereby both questions were pronounced 'resolved'. A two-fold claim was made: first, that the transition to capitalism in agriculture need no longer be articulated with comprehensive industrialisation in the periphery, or, in other words, with the creation of a national economy to consummate political independence; and second, that, in any case, decolonisation was being buttressed in the 1970s by a new round of capital export, such that the coveted 'convergence' between former coloniser and colonised would be realised in an evolutionary manner. The claim was doomed, of course, and in time the ice would thaw – or shatter. In Latin America, the symbolic reawakening came with the Zapatista uprising in 1994; in Africa, it came in 2000, with a radical-nationalist land occupation movement.

Posing the contemporary problematic in terms of these two historic questions remains a matter of difficulty. Thus far, not all participants in the debate accept these terms without hesitation, or without confusion about their meaning. This is reflected in recent critiques of our own position, which we review in this essay. The difficulty in facing up to these questions, we argue, springs from two contradictions: the Eurocentric assumptions which imbue our critics and, in most cases, their persistent refusal to submit class relations to rigorous analysis. The first contradiction has to do with the age-old infiltration of the Left by the ideology of imperialism; the second is simply a case of populism.

In previous articles, we distinguished between two Lefts in Zimbabwe, one associated with urban working-class politics, conventional trade unionism, and civil-society organisations, the other inclining to the countryside, focusing on less organised forms of working-class politics, and urging trade unionism to take note.² These two Lefts co-existed in Zimbabwe without major contest between them and without full cognisance of the depth of their differences; for, as Hegel would say, 'the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk'. The moment of truth was the political crisis of the late 1990s, when 'Two Lefts' faced off on opposite sides of the land question. Although neither Left claimed ideological purity in a crisis situation, they did spring from two distinct ideological roots: a so-called 'internationalist' Left and a 'nationalist' Left. These two Lefts have a longer historical dispute in which the 'internationalist' tendency has predominated, and continues to do so today in the context of the World Social Forum (WSF) – what we might call the 'Fifth International'. It is interesting to note that the debate over the 'Two Lefts' has now spread to Latin America as well, following the radicalisation of nationalism in Venezuela since 2004 and Bolivia in 2006, thereby amplifying the new wave of contradictions and possibly laying the ground for a more generalised split among the movements and intellectuals that in recent years have converged around the WSF.³

We do not intend in this article to delve into the history of nationalism and internationalism in socialist politics. Instead, we refer the reader to two important works by Samir Amin, *Class and Nation* and *Delinking*, written in the late 1970s and early 1980s,⁴ just as the national question was entering its winter slumber, and to our own recent critique of the dominant tendencies within the World Social Forum.⁵ Suffice it to note that, following Amin, we dispute the universalist claims of the so-called 'internationalist' Left. This 'universalism' is the expression of a particular Marxism which has analytically obscured the centre-periphery structure of imperialism, politically submerged the national question under a formal 'equality' of nations and proletariats, failed to recognise the validity of

political questions that are specific to the periphery (especially the agrarian question), and, in its dominant social-democratic expression, has actively sought to disorganise progressive working-class politics in the periphery, not least through international trade unionism.

We also reject the suggestion that the 'nationalist' Left, to which we belong, is deficient in universalism. On the contrary, we maintain that our own Marxism consists of a more committed internationalism, which insists on the substantive, not cosmetic, dissolution of hierarchies among nations and proletariats in the struggle against capital.

We preface this discussion with a schematic description of these two Lefts in Zimbabwe, as well as the general analytical and political posture which the 'internationalists' have assumed in the course of Zimbabwe's radicalisation. The nationalist Left is characterised by its advocacy of delinking from the world economy, that is, the progressive 'nationalisation' of the law of value. As such, it recognises that nationalism is a necessary, but not sufficient, ideological force in the periphery; that the deep social transformation entailed in delinking cannot be brought to fruition from within civil society, which is embedded in existing structures; and that rural movements in the periphery, where the agrarian question remains unresolved, remain crucial to any meaningful social transformation. This Left remains critical of the populism of such nationalist forces, whenever necessary, but also remains in constructive engagement with them, for they are the bearers of unique revolutionary potential.

The internationalist Left, on the other hand, shuns nationalism, even (or especially) in the periphery, and defends competitive insertion in the world economy – including against other peripheral states – as a means of growth and redistribution. It also commits itself to the institutions and procedures of bourgeois democracy, to civil society organisations with external patronage, and especially to urban movements, at the neglect of their rural counterparts.

This Left continues to employ the concepts and methods of historical materialism and recognises the bourgeois nature of its platform, but resorts to a political 'pragmatism', typically justified by reference to 'adverse' objective conditions internationally, which it exaggerates. In this sense, it is also the case of reformist opportunism.

We might even identify a 'third' Left, though only tentatively, given that it is organically marginal and instinctively converges with the second Left in critical junctures. This 'internationalism' is characterised by its rhetorical refusal to take sides in the polarisation for not being sufficiently 'democratic' or 'socialist' on either side. Nonetheless, like the second Left, it vehemently shuns peripheral nationalism, underestimates rural movements and land reform, and privileges civil-society organisations, especially the urban. Moreover, it places its hopes on an advanced form of 'international solidarity', especially North-South, whose contradictions it fails to interrogate. It is, in fact, the case of ultra-leftism, which exaggerates the subjective conditions of sociopolitical forces, especially in the imperialist centres, and lacks any viable tactical/strategic footing of its own; hence its instinctive convergence with reformist opportunism.⁶

In the course of Zimbabwe's crisis, the politics of the internationalist Left as a whole have congealed in a concrete political position. First, it has celebrated bourgeois political institutions, whereby civil society, the rule of law, corporate media, and parliamentary democracy have been extolled. Second, it has propagated a human-rights moralism, by which human rights have been routinely detached from their social context and suspended in mid-air, above social rights and the right of national self-determination. Third, it has woven a discourse of 'crisis, chaos, and tyranny', by which the need for urgent external interference is evoked, in the interest of 'régime change'. And, fourth, it has explicitly supported, denied the existence of, or remained silent about, imperialist sanctions. And, here, the chosen political strategy is not to mobilise and capacitate the working class for sustained ideological and political struggle against the state and capital. It is to rely on externally imposed sanctions as a means of undermining the land reform, the economic recovery, and thereby the 'tyrant'. Economic recovery is their worst enemy.

This Left in Zimbabwe has found ready allies among the European Left. This was generally to be expected, given the historic (post-1920, post-1968) degeneration of political organisation and consciousness on the continent.⁷ But what was not expected was that its posture would gain allies even among segments that have generally remained astute in their analysis of International affairs. Yet, in relation to the Zimbabwe question, they abandoned the land occupations early, absorbing international media reports uncritically, and allowing themselves to be swept away by liberal critique and banal prejudice against black nationalism. They remain silent on imperialist sanctions. Our response to our critics is organised around two themes: imperialism, including the instrument of sanctions; and the neocolonial state.⁸

Imperialism

The theory of imperialism has enjoyed a revival in the last decade, and, of late, it has come to focus on Africa. However, the debate has lacked the analytical rigour necessary for an effective anti-imperialist politics: economic questions are routinely divorced from political questions, in the familiar economism charged by Lenin.⁹ More specifically, current analyses abstract the fundamental contradiction of the capital-labour relation from the principal contradiction of the centre-periphery relation, in which the fundamental contradiction manifests itself concretely.¹⁰ As such, current analyses lose sight of the key political questions that pertain to the neocolonial situation.

Obscuring imperialism

Two authors in particular, Patrick Bond and Henry Bernstein, have sought to understand the political economy of Africa from a ‘world-historical’ perspective, one that, purportedly, takes into account the location of the continent in the world economy and its transformation over time. They are eminent scholars, ‘internationalists’ and prime examples of ultra-leftism.

Bond has written extensively on Zimbabwe and South Africa.¹¹ His basic argument, which draws from classical-Marxist thought, is that financial power is the essence of imperialism. As such, it is the source of domination of centre over periphery, and the source of recurrent authoritarianism in the latter. However, financial power also has vulnerabilities, which inevitably lead capitalism to crisis. Bond argues that resistance to imperialism must develop tactics to ‘trip up’, as it were, the financial circuit. But, according to Bond, resistance cannot come from nationalism in the periphery, which is either comprador (as in contemporary South Africa) or exhausted-comprador (contemporary Zimbabwe), and which typically ‘talks left and walks right’. Resistance must come from ‘mass-based social movements and radical NGOs’ and their global allies, not least in the North, who are involved in the struggle against debt, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and corporate malfeasance.¹² Nonetheless, Bond tells us, social movements must also focus their energies on the nation-state in the interest of scaling back financial power at the national level.¹³

What is wrong with this formulation? At the heart of the problem is the failure to recognise the depth of the principal contradiction. Despite his prolific writing on financial power, Bond neglects that imperialism is built on working-class alliances within imperialist states, historic alliances founded on chauvinist/racial ideology; he also neglects the real conflicts between financial power and nationalist movements in the periphery.

We must recognise, first, that the Western labour aristocracy – that stratum of the working class, identified by Lenin a century ago, that is both powerful in the international working-class movement and co-opted by imperialist bourgeoisies – is today structurally incorporated into the financial circuit by means of its savings, as Peter Gowan has shown, such that the pension funds to which they subscribe have an objective interest in global and deregulated financial markets.¹⁴ In Bond’s analysis, such an objective contradiction among the workers of the world does not seem to be worthy of analysis. He seems to suggest the contrary: that this contradiction may be overcome by ‘ethical’ arguments, such as by the campaign against World-Bank bonds, which has led to the withdrawal of a major pension fund from the Bank (but not from the global financial circuit).¹⁵ While transnational alliances such as this are surely needed, such campaigns and victories cannot be taken out of their context, or exaggerated in the interest of ‘internationalism’. Second, we must also recognise that nationalism is not comprador by ‘nature’. Pace Bond, previous nationalist movements have not had negligible impact on the financial circuit. Arrighi has convincingly shown that the crisis of the 1970s, and the end of the Bretton-Woods system, was owed to a number of factors, including economic competition among imperialist states and revived class struggle in the centre, but, above all, the national-liberation struggle in Vietnam.¹⁶

There is, in Bond’s analysis, a recurring underestimation of certain forces in the periphery (the nationalist) and overestimation of forces based in imperialist countries (the ‘internationalist’), compounded with an inability to identify the racialised hierarchy between the working classes from which they spring. Of course, it is true that capital exploits workers everywhere, in the centre and the periphery, but, in fact, it exploits workers in the periphery more brutally, in alliance with Northern labour. This is a political-historical fact. The same problem of racialised hierarchy is also not taken seriously within the states to which Bond devotes so much attention, treating race merely as a ‘deviation’ from class politics, not a constitutive feature of class politics. This explains Bond’s disdain for nationalism generally – which, we should add, is by no means compensated for by his repeated, and highly problematic, references to Frantz Fanon.

It is no surprise that Bond has instinctively attached himself to Zimbabwe’s political ‘opposition’, clamouring for ‘régime change’. Of course, to his credit, he has pointed out the bourgeois nature of the MDC, even its dependence on white agrarian and industrial capital and foreign donors. But, ultimately, the political solution to Zimbabwe’s crisis, according to Bond, ‘will necessarily require a change of ruling party’, on the presumption that a bourgeois MDC would be ‘more tolerant of dissent and diversity’.¹⁷ Somehow, Bond has continued to put his faith on class and race reversals within the MDC, given its alliance with ‘mass social movements and radical NGOs’. But nowhere has Bond ever undertaken a serious class analysis of civil society in Zimbabwe, whose severe limitations include its membership (largely urban, in a largely agrarian country), its leadership (largely middle-class professionals), its autonomy (heavy donor dependence, even among trade unions), and ideology (petty-bourgeois, bourgeois, neocolonial). It is not clear to us why Bond has failed so stunningly in this task.

It is perhaps easier to explain why Bond has failed to analyse rigorously the ruling party, the war veterans’ association, and the land-occupation movement, given that they all have espoused black nationalism. Indeed, the land-occupation movement has appeared as a conspiracy (more on this later), the war veterans as mere ‘shock troops’, and ZANU-PF as an intrinsically violent political phenomenon, almost atavistically so. Indeed, in Bond’s hands, ‘authoritarianism’ in Zimbabwe becomes detached from its political-economic

substance, such that Zimbabweans can be compared generically to 'other oppressed people' in the world, such as in Palestine, Burma, and apartheid South Africa!¹⁸ Thus, not only is the distinction between colonialism and neocolonialism obliterated, but also an anti-imperialist nationalism is equated to Zionism.

So blinding is Bond's disdain for black nationalism that he fails to give the radicalised ZANU-PF government any credit for standing so courageously – and often single-handedly in Africa – for nearly all the progressive foreign-policy causes that Bond holds so dear: Zimbabwe effectively defaulted on foreign debt and has imposed heavy controls on its capital account and banks; Zimbabwe has been a leading player in the global alliances that stalled WTO negotiations in Seattle, spoke truth to power at Doha, and rejected opportunistic reform of the United Nations; and Zimbabwe has single-handedly undermined NEPAD and repeatedly confronted South-African sub-imperialism and US imperialism, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), at great cost to itself. So blinding is Bond's disdain for black nationalism that he cannot even see a substantive class difference between comprador/subimperialist nationalism in South Africa and radical/anti-imperialist nationalism in Zimbabwe.

Bond, finally, calls for a particular 'internationalism', one which is in vogue among reformist, single-issue NGOs with a human-rights ideology; its strategic priority, he tells us, should be on external, stateless enemies, namely the Bretton-Woods institutions.¹⁹ To this, Bond adds a complementary national project focused on capital controls, and his formula thus becomes 'internationalism plus the nation state'.²⁰ But algebraic equations of this kind do not add up in politics. And its contradictions are clearly evident in Zimbabwe, where Bond has suggested the imposition of imperialist sanctions in the interest of 'political' but not 'economic' liberalisation, without explaining to us how a neoliberal civil society and political opposition, once in power, would confront economic liberalisation.²¹

A second critic of left nationalism has been Henry Bernstein, who for three decades has devoted his work to the agrarian question – and has also had significant influence on our own understanding of agrarian change. Moreover, unlike most of the recent critics, he has never abandoned class analysis and has even shown some sympathy for the nationalist position. However, this has been ambivalent, for in Bernstein's work there is no systematic theory of centre-periphery relations and no systematic link between the agrarian and national questions.

In recent years, Bernstein has published several articles of historical and theoretical import.²² His main arguments may be summarised as follows. The agrarian question 'ended' in the 1970s without having been 'resolved'; this means that agriculture completed its historic transition to capitalism worldwide but without a comprehensive transition to industrial society in the periphery. What has ended, therefore, has been the agrarian question 'of capital', industrial capital specifically, while what remains is an unspecified agrarian question 'of labour'. At the same time, redistributive agrarian reform has also 'ended' due to the dismantling of the 'developmental' state, and has been followed by a new period of market based land reforms whose objectives are unrelated to the classical agrarian question. He goes further to claim that whatever redistributive land reforms may take place in the current period (as in Zimbabwe), they are exceptional and are not part of a wider phenomenon. Meanwhile, the agrarian question 'of labour' may not have yet expressed itself in clear

political terms, but it does have a common social basis, which is the post-1970s fragmentation of labour and the deepening crisis of social reproduction under structural adjustment; its specific expression, Bernstein tells us, will depend on 'local features' within the 'complex variations in time and place' which characterise African politics.²³ With respect to the land question in Zimbabwe specifically, he has taken the ambivalent position that land reform has contained progressive potential, given that the national-democratic revolution has been compromised in the transition to black majority rule, as in South Africa, but he has lamented the dismantling of 'well-established and successful capitalist farms', and has complained there have been too many losers, especially among farmworkers, and too many winners among the 'state class and (black) bourgeois elements'.²⁴

Bernstein has maintained his silence on imperialist sanctions and their effects on agrarian change,²⁵ while his ambivalence over black nationalism seems to have hardened over time to assume a clear oppositional stance. More recently, the Journal of Agrarian Change (which Bernstein co-edits) has published a critique of our work by Ben Cousins, which was more vigilant in its defence of white agrarian capital on similar 'productivity' grounds.²⁶ Ostensibly, both analysts prefer nationalised or socialised agriculture on a large-scale basis, but their 'dialectical' understanding of social change permits of only one ('productive' and 'non-racial') path to rural social transformation, which rules out nationalist mobilisation, the re-division of land, and new forms of co-operativism/collectivism among smallholders (i.e. the attainment of new economies of scale). And so, when the reality of mass land occupations and radical nationalism clashed with their economic blueprints, these internationalists closed ranks with reaction and sanctions.

The classical agrarian question has not been resolved, but it is also unjustifiable to declare it dead. Bernstein's conclusion derives from two assessments regarding, first, the relationship between the state and rural social movements, and second, an atrophic link between the agrarian and national questions. With respect to the first, Bernstein argues that postwar redistributive reforms derived from the historical coincidence of 'the developmental state'; and

'local tensions', of which the former has now been 'rolled back', while the latter have remained diverse and undefined. We have argued against this position elsewhere:²⁷ postwar land reforms, while deriving from local contradictions in the first instance, were contingent upon the larger international contradictions and class balances of the Cold War. In this context, the state was not 'developmental' but fulfilled a specifically neocolonial function, streamlining or suppressing demands for land reform. In this light, credit for land reforms is due to the political agency of rural movements against the neocolonial state, while the ebb in land reforms under structural adjustment has been a function of the strengthening of the neocolonial state against progressive social forces. It follows then that the resurgence of rural movements under neoliberalism is neither exceptional nor a dead letter.

Second, the new agrarian question 'of labour' to which Bernstein refers may indeed lack political definition on the part of the new rural movements. However, it is the purpose of social theory to provide such definition. We must ask, therefore, what is the purpose of an agrarian reform 'of labour'? Is it not the resolution of the national question? Is it not the defeat of imperialism? These remain burning political questions and are essential to the formulation of anti-imperialist politics. And what exactly is the international context of the 'complex variations' from which local contradictions spring? Is it not the centre-periphery structure of the international system? Is it not the world economic crisis and the imperialist methods of crisis management? Again, anti-imperialist Marxism cannot fail to connect the local and the global, or obscure it under so-called 'complex variations'.

Imperialist sanctions and silences

Beyond the above two authors, there has been another attempt in a Review of African Political Economy article by Ian Phimister and Brian Raftopoulos to interpret, not the world-historical nature of the Zimbabwe question as such, but its current international politics.²⁸ And, in this case, we find the classic reduction of democratisation to a 'human-rights' question, over and beyond the agrarian and national questions, typical of reformist opportunism.²⁹ We also find not so much a silence on sanctions, but innocuous mention of them. It amounts to a calculated silence on the strategy and impact of imperialist sanctions.

In their article, Phimister and Raftopoulos seek to understand the 'politics of anti-imperialism' in Southern Africa, and specifically the form that this politics has taken in the alliance between the two presidents, or ruling parties, in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Their argument is that President Mugabe has manipulated the 'liberal imperialism' of the West, and especially of the United Kingdom, in order to bolster his own 'authoritarian' rule. For its part, the ANC in South Africa has provided cover for ZANU-PF for three reasons: fear of the 'unsettling precedent' that an MDC victory in Zimbabwe would have in South Africa; the popular appeal of President Mugabe in South Africa; and a 'liberation solidarity', broadly understood. This anti-imperialist politics, they argue, constitutes a 'misplaced sense of Pan-Africanist solidarity', which follows a long tradition in African politics to the effect of legitimating internal oppression. They conclude that Southern African states have yet to embrace a pan-Africanism that rejects both external dependence and internal authoritarianism, the two being unconnected.

Despite suggestions as to a more progressive pan-Africanism, however, we are led to believe that a 'human-rights' politics is sufficient for the task. In practice, this 'pan-Africanism' is none other than the 'liberal imperialism' from which they pretend to distance themselves. Indeed, they offer no tangible critique of liberal imperialism, while they devote the whole of their energy to a critique of populist anti-imperialism from a human-rights perspective. This liberal politics is supported by a bourgeois 'discourse analysis', based largely on press reports, by which they strip imperialism of its material basis. Thus, if the anti-imperialism of the ruling party in Zimbabwe is a mere manipulation of liberal imperialism, as they argue, theirs becomes a manipulation of populist anti-imperialism for imperialist ends.

The absence of class analysis is a serious handicap. Nowhere do we find a systematic inquiry into the class dynamics of neocolonialism in Zimbabwe, save for the ritual charge of 'corruption' against the black bourgeoisie (but not the white). Instead, we are presented with a simplistic contest between 'authoritarianism' and 'human rights'. Nor is the 'opposition' questioned in terms of its social basis, its reactionary ideology and strategy, its direct financial relations with imperialist forces, and its own corruption. The authors tell us that 'the regime [meaning ZANU-PF] has been able to represent the fundamental human and civic rights questions placed on the Zimbabwean political agenda since the 1990s as marginal, élite-focused issues, driven by western interests, and having little relation to urgent problems of economic redistribution'.³⁰ But they do not tell us why the government is wrong in its assessment of the opposition.

The authors also tell us that the South-African leadership is constrained by the popular appeal of President Mugabe, but they do not inquire into the sources of this appeal. Could it be the bankruptcy of bourgeois democracy in South Africa? Could it be the absence of land reform? Could it be the perseverance of extreme class and race divisions? Our authors do not wish to get to the heart of the matter. We are also told that the 'quiet diplomacy' of the ANC is

simply acting out the sub-imperialist role of South Africa – that is, doing the bidding of the US government; they state that “when push came to shove, neither Bush nor Powell were actually prepared to go beyond the limits preferred by Pretoria”.³¹ The fuel and electricity subsidies extended by South Africa to Zimbabwe and its defence of the latter in international fora now appear as a mere imperialist ploy. In the same way that they do not identify the contradictions of neocolonialism, they also do not see the contradictions of sub-imperialism.

But most of all, they maintain a deafening silence on the strategy and impact of sanctions – sanctions that go far beyond the “preferred limits by Pretoria”. Any analysis of the Zimbabwe question, and especially one that claims to deal with its international dimension, could not fail to provide an analysis of sanctions. They are, after all, the concrete policy of “liberal imperialism”, and the central strategy of the domestic “opposition”. Their mention of sanctions is brief and concerns only the “targeted” sanctions against government officials and the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

A closer look would reveal a much more robust sanctions policy, one which is both formal and informal. Any sanctions policy requires a normative framework for its implementation. Since the 1990s, the framework has been that of “good governance” – the “liberal imperialism” to which our authors refer – which comprises of both economic and political criteria of proper international behaviour and which constitute the basis of lending by the IFIs (the IMF and the World Bank) to indebted peripheral states. The majority of peripheral states, outside “emerging markets”, have depended almost exclusively on the IFIs for credit, given that they have been shut out of private capital markets ever since the onset of the debt crisis of the early 1980s. What is more, private capital today tends to follow the credit ratings of the IFIs and a handful of credit-rating agencies for their own lending decisions, such that the global management of good governance becomes highly centralised. And, given that the IFIs are dominated by the imperialist states, they are subject to their geopolitical interests, while simultaneously the same states employ the IFIs as a “multilateral” cover for their aggression against indebted peripheral states; that is, imperialist states need not necessarily impose “formal” sanctions of their own against transgressors.

But even beyond the IFIs, imperialist states, together with their corporate media allies, can punish a target state informally by increasing the level of economic and political “risk” associated with it; this is done by propagating a discourse of “roguery”, whereby capital responds spontaneously by fleeing.

In this context, good governance has come to include not only economic conditionalities but also the political conditionalities of multi-party elections, respect for the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In theory, these conditionalities apply to all transgressors; in practice, they are selectively demanded of certain states whose “roguery” threatens world order, and suspended for others that demonstrate commitment either to macroeconomic reforms or to the geo-strategic plans of the transatlantic alliance.

In the case of Zimbabwe, as long as the state (under ZANU-PF) was implementing IFI-led macroeconomic reforms in the early 1990s, there was no need to sanction its repression against social forces. It was only after 1997 that relations with the IFIs and the West soured, resulting from the political economic turn-around in Zimbabwe that entailed the suspension of structural adjustment, the beginning of active state intervention in the land question, intervention in the DRC, and debt default. At that point, all the economic and political conditionalities began to be invoked, beginning with the suspension of balance of payments support by the World Bank, and followed by a broad range of formal and informal sanctions, including a sustained propaganda campaign against Zimbabwe to the point of comparing “Mugabe” to “Milošević”.

From 1998 onwards, formal sanctions consisted of an embargo on the sale of military equipment by the UK (hitherto a key supplier), due to Zimbabwe’s entry into the DRC conflict against US-backed rebels; and, less formally, of the UK’s renunciation of its historic obligations in the funding of land reform after the international donors’ conference of the same year. Then, in 1999, relations with the IMF deteriorated, leading to the suspension of lending.³² Thereafter, the confrontation escalated rapidly, such that, in 2000, with the onset of fast-track land reform, the door was shut by the whole of the donor community. It is estimated that overall development assistance contracted from a peak of US\$562 million in 1994 to US\$190 million by 2000, which was thereafter limited largely to “humanitarian aid”.³³ These sanctions have been “informal”;

In addition to these, from 2002 onwards, the UK, EU, and US governments began to formally freeze the assets of state officials, impose travel bans, and authorise funding for NGOs in opposition to the government; in the same year, the Commonwealth suspended Zimbabwe – which retaliated in late 2003 with its complete withdrawal from the organisation.³⁴ The confrontation escalated especially with the US government, which in the initial stages had taken a back seat to the UK. In late 2001, the US Congress passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, which consisted of a formal injunction to US officials in the IFIs to oppose any lending and debt cancellation for Zimbabwe, and also granted the White House authority to fund “independent” media organisations in the country.³⁵ Thereafter, attempts were made to refer Zimbabwe to the UN Security Council, culminating in the labelling of Zimbabwe as an “outpost of tyranny”; in 2004. In the meantime, the UK government appointed High Commissioner Brian Donnelly to Zimbabwe, previously the British ambassador to Yugoslavia, most likely due to “the experience he gained in undermining the Yugoslav government”.³⁶

This set of events was accompanied by several other more surreptitious acts of aggression. US travel warnings were issued against Zimbabwe, which impacted directly on the tourism industry. Food aid was blocked, while the land reform was failing to recover domestic production, and then unblocked and used as a political and economic tool. Assistance to the country's HIV/ AIDS programme was also blocked due to 'technical problems'; this resumed in 2005, but remains by far the least funded national programme by the Global Fund, despite attending to the fourth highest infection rate in the world.³⁷ The domestic NGOs that did not conform to the 'opposition' line saw their own aid blocked; while pro-opposition NGOs were systematically financed by the US and UK governments via such agencies as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the Zimbabwe Democracy Trust, the Southern African Media Development Fund, and USAID, including its Office of Transition Initiatives.³⁸

The economic siege, political destabilisation, and propaganda war has stopped short of military aggression, and for this, the regional and Larger geopolitical context has played a role. Undoubtedly, South Africa has provided a buffer against the militarisation of sanctions, in sharp contrast to the proxy role that it had played during apartheid and the Cold War via the policy of destabilisation. Yet, the content of its 'quiet diplomacy' has vacillated, generally providing diplomatic and some material cover to Zimbabwe, but in a deeply contradictory context, characterised by South Africa's larger continental subimperialist policy and Zimbabwe's confrontation with both imperialism and sub-imperialism. In 2005, South Africa went on to enlist in an IMF-led attempt to bring Zimbabwe back into international policy-based lending – as South Africa had done before for the DRC.³⁹ We might say that South-African sub-imperialism – post-apartheid and post-Cold War – has made the transition from a policy of destabilisation to one of 'stabilisation'. Meanwhile, the other SADC states have defended Zimbabwe at great cost to themselves; indeed, they have been subject to repeated threats of financial punishment, especially Malawi and Mozambique, unless they condemned Zimbabwe.⁴⁰ The larger geopolitical context is also important. After 9/11, the sights of the US-UK alliance shifted decisively to Central Asia and the Middle East, culminating in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. We do not know how the sanctions might have escalated in the absence of such a geopolitical diversion. But we do know that the effects of economic and political sanctions alone, both formal and informal, have been grave.

It is estimated that the economy has shrunk by over thirty per cent since 2000, with drastic contractions in all sectors of the economy, while press reports routinely remind us that 'Zimbabwe is the fastest shrinking economy in the world'. Inflation now runs above 4,000 per cent; foreign exchange is scarce; fuel queues are endless; and speculation and profiteering are endemic. It is, of course, true that the land reform has disrupted – as any land reform would – the existing production and distribution systems in agriculture, as well as the wider economic and financial linkages in the economy. This is especially true of the tobacco industry, which was previously concentrated in large-scale farming and was the principal source of foreign exchange. But it is also true that other commodities grown by smallholders, especially maize and cotton, were not affected directly by the land reform. These were hard hit by prolonged draught and poor rainfall distribution (2001–5), the worst in the post-independence period.⁴¹ They have also been hard hit by the economic siege. It is very likely that, in less hostile circumstances, recovery would have made reasonable progress, and this despite the drought (which a decade earlier had been dealt with effectively), despite the lack of initial infrastructural support, and despite corrupt practices by elements within the ruling party.

Indeed, because of the land reform, the potential for agricultural growth in resettlement areas is now far greater, given that the new farmers (small and middle capitalists) find themselves in more favourable agro-ecological conditions, and also may crop more extensively on land which previously had been greatly underutilised (as much as forty per cent of the white large-scale sector). However, the economic siege has gravely undermined the procurement of inputs (seeds, fertiliser, tillage) and, no less importantly, has had deleterious effects on the national health system and, consequently, the HIV/AIDS pandemic – a crucial factor in smallholder productivity.⁴² This economic siege has been accompanied by 'humanitarian aid'. That is, instead of providing financial and technical aid, donors have opted for 'food aid', which accounts for eighty per cent of total aid, and which further undermines local food production and recovery; the same donors have explicitly opposed any aid to resettlement areas.⁴³

Imperialist sanctions and silences are accompanied by other 'explanations' of economic decline.⁴⁴ The land reform has pride of place in these explanations. We are routinely told that the land reform 'disrupted' an erstwhile 'productive' agricultural sector; that the new black farmers are incapable of farming productively; or that they are not compelled to do so, because they received the land at zero cost; or that property rights are insecure and cannot mobilise financial resources. To these are added the macroeconomic 'mismanagement' of the government, which continues to reject neoliberal orthodoxy, as well as its 'incompetence' and 'corruption'.

A proper explanation of economic decline must be capable of combining the external contradictions of Zimbabwe – the international context of sanctions – with its internal contradictions, the two being dialectically related. It would thus become clear that the land reform in Zimbabwe has taken place against an array of hostile forces whose objective has been either to co-opt and streamline its transformative potential, or to reverse the land reform altogether and subvert radical nationalism itself. That our internationalist critics remain silent

on the issue of sanctions is not merely a failure of analysis but a case of political bankruptcy.

Neocolonialism

The political crisis that culminated in radical land reform in Zimbabwe has brought about a new round of inquiry regarding the nature of state-society relations. There are several critics of left nationalism that have focused their analyses on this issue. However, as we will see, they have operated without a coherent theory of the state and civil society. The result is that the neocolonial situation is obscured, and the national and agrarian questions are replaced by a formalistic defence of civil society and procedural democracy. Historical-materialist analyses of the state and civil society in Africa went into long decline with the onset of structural adjustment. During this time, liberal theories led the way, in support of 'getting the prices rights', while a new breed of Weberian approaches trailed closely behind. In the 1990s, these streams of theorising converged towards the new objective of 'getting the politics right'. It is clear that these approaches have weighed heavily on debates in Zimbabwe, infiltrating and emptying out historical-materialist approaches, to the ultimate effect of converging programmatically on the issue of 'régime change'.

Historical-materialist exceptions

For our purposes, it is important to preface our discussion with two exceptions that punctuated the decline of state theory on the continent: that of Ibbo Mandaza on the neocolonial state in Zimbabwe, and that of Mahmood Mamdani on the 'bifurcated' state in Africa. It is worth taking a closer look. Mandaza drew on a longer, indigenous debate on neocolonialism in Africa, whose most eloquent exponents have been Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral.⁴⁵ Neocolonialism commonly refers to the type of state and society that succeeded formal colonialism and that has been characterised, in the first instance, by the transfer of the state apparatus to an indigenous conservative petty bourgeoisie, and, thereafter, by the dual process of indigenous capitalist class formation and compradorisation. Mandaza argued that, despite a decade of armed struggle in colonial Zimbabwe, a negotiated settlement had bequeathed precisely a neocolonial state, but one which was 'non-conventional' insofar as formal political power had not been ceded to an African petty bourgeoisie alone but jointly to a 'constitutionally safeguarded' white settler-bourgeoisie.⁴⁶

This produced a special sub-type of neocolonial politics. The 'post-white settler colonial state' was characterised, first, by the persisting obstruction of an African 'national' bourgeoisie by the settler presence, which in turn offered prospects of advancement only to a section of the petty bourgeoisie; and second, by the petty bourgeoisie's own use of the settler presence as an excuse for developmental delays and as a means of extracting concessions for itself, while in the long run nurturing a class alliance with it, against peasants and workers. In this process of embourgeoisement of the liberation movement lay also the roots of state repression against the disenfranchised. Alongside these observations, Mandaza made the case for the centrality of African nationalism, but also its contradictions: 'African nationalism is the indispensable force in the movement of national liberation', he argued; 'and yet is the basis for neocolonialism by which the masses were betrayed'.⁴⁷ Mandaza thus captured the contingency of neocolonialism, its fate being subject to the power struggle between the masses and imperialism over the political orientation of the petty bourgeoisie. Mandaza concluded that the neocolonial state was also a 'schizophrenic state', one that pursued developmental objectives in response to popular aspirations, at the same time as it employed the state apparatus in the suppression of popular demands; the ideology of this schizophrenia was none other than a populist myth of national homogeneity, which the leadership defended fiercely.

The importance of Mandaza's interpretation, apart from its intrinsic contribution, is that it continued to link the national question – including its authoritarian manifestations – to the neocolonial situation, at a time when state theory was deep in structural adjustment. Yet, the weak point of Mandaza's thesis was his élitist treatment of social contradictions. By focusing solely on the petty bourgeoisie occupying the state apparatus and its relations with white capital, Mandaza confined himself to a view of the national question 'from above', making references to 'the masses' casually, and shedding no light on the politics of peasant-workers and the strategies of the state to control them.

A decade later, Mamdani engaged more directly with the strategies of control by deploying the concept of 'civil society', which by then had gained wide currency.⁴⁸ In his landmark book, *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani proposed that the institutional 'bifurcation' of African states between 'tribal' and 'civil' domains had constituted a 'mode of rule' peculiar to Africa. If in other parts of the world peasants had historically been tied by obligations to feudal overlords, or bonded as slaves to landlords, in late-colonial Africa peasants came to be subjected to a 'decentralised despotism' of chiefs and customary law with authority over peasant land and labour; civil law, by contrast, was reserved for urbanites (colons and later Africans). This system of 'indirect rule' on the part of colonial administrations evolved in various ways after decolonisation, but its essence of control over peasants by central government via local government, and especially by control over peasant land, has remained.

The political implication of Mamdani's thesis is that the expansion of the civil law to local government – in

replacement of chiefs, customary law or other postcolonial mutations of indirect rule – would have gone a long way to strengthen internal resistance to external forces, especially the imposition of structural adjustment.

The theory of the ‘bifurcated’ state has raised an important issue peculiar to Africa. However, we wish to diverge on three points. First, it is our view that late-colonial and neocolonial rule in Africa has been more ‘direct’ than Mamdani has posited. As we have argued elsewhere,⁴⁹ the labour question (the organisation of the production process) and the blunt coercion associated with it, especially against ‘uncivil’ (non-conformist) working-class organisations, has been underestimated in the equation. Second, the specificity of settler capitalism has not been fully reflected in the theory of bifurcation. On the one hand, the historic concentration of capital in the hands of a white minority and the resulting class-race dynamics captured by Mandaza above, are not easily grasped by the theory. On the other hand, Southern-African forms of ‘direct’ landlordism in the countryside, deriving from the same particularities above, have also been left out.

Third, Mamdani seems to gravitate to a formal concept of civil society when he suggests that indirect rule is separable from (i.e. not intrinsic to) the neocolonial situation, such that it can be overcome by enlightened bourgeois policy – while all else would remain equal in terms of the fundamental (capital/labour) and principal (centre-periphery) contradictions. Our premise is that civil society is the basic mode of rule of capitalist society, across centre and periphery. Thus, it is civil society that defines the various cultural-institutional exclusions, on behalf of capital, deploying coercion against them, backed by the state, and devising means to control them. The fact that in Africa the uncivil domain continues in large part to be institutionalised on the basis of ‘tribe’ is a particularly severe application of the logic of civil society itself. It is part and parcel of the neocolonial situation, and this cannot be undone by reforms led by the capitalist class. This is a point on which we elaborate below.

Coercion, hegemony and civil society

Mamdani’s contribution has been fundamental in reshaping the debate in Africa. More generally, however, the debate has suffered from the assimilation of historical materialism to the terms of the liberal mainstream, not least via the misuse of Gramsci. In the case of Zimbabwe specifically, Gramscian concepts have provided our internationalist critics with an exit strategy from proper class analysis. Before responding directly, it is necessary to clarify our reading of Gramsci.

Gramsci’s particular contribution to historical materialism has been his analysis of the superstructure of the capitalist system.⁵⁰ In Gramsci’s view, which we broadly share, the superstructure is determined by the economic base of society, but it is not determined directly. This means that there exists a specifically political domain under capitalism, with constraints and opportunities, struggles and indeterminacies, victories and defeats. However, this does not mean that the possibilities in the political domain are infinite, for the constraints and opportunities presented at any given moment derive from the objective economic conditions: men and women make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. To understand this political domain, Gramsci advanced a series of concepts, including hegemony, civil society, Caesarism, position, and movement.

What are hegemony and civil society? Gramsci believed that capitalist transformation entailed a cultural transformation of society, but also that capitalism presented functional problems when culture was not coherently organised around the productive system. The aim of the state, he argued, ‘is always that of creating new and higher types of civilisation; of adapting the ‘civilisation’ and the morality of the broadest popular masses to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production’.⁵¹ The problem, therefore, was how to create ‘consent’, or ‘hegemony’. And here, for Gramsci, the state played the crucial role, through education (‘positively’) and through the repression of the law (‘negatively’); the objective of both was precisely the ‘civilisation’ of society, or the creation of a ‘free’ civil society in which the state would no longer be called upon to intervene. On the other hand, where hegemony was not, or could not, be realised, the state simply ruled by coercion. For Gramsci, a political order based on naked coercion was the antithesis of a civilised, hegemonic order.⁵² Gramsci went on to distinguish between two types of political systems, those of the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, by which he meant advanced bourgeois democracies and czarist Russia, respectively.⁵³ In other words, the objective economic conditions in the West and in the East gave rise to different superstructures, hegemonic and coercive respectively, with different constraints and opportunities, and ultimately different types of struggles. He went further to define the revolutionary strategy appropriate to each case. In the West, the ‘war of movement increasingly becomes war of position’; in other words, frontal attack on the state (in the manner of the Bolsheviks), gives precedence to the pursuit of political leadership within civil society, until the ripe moment for frontal attack on the state. In the East, where civil society was irrelevant, war of movement was the only relevant strategy.⁵⁴

There is in fact a significant amount of dissonance in the use of the concept of civil society, even among Marxists, for the

concept has been employed in different ways. Marx himself, and especially in his early writings, located civil society not so much in the superstructure as in the base of society; for Marx, civil society was primarily a mode of economic behaviour (as opposed to political behaviour) deriving from the capitalist mode of production.⁵⁵ Specifically, civil society was the domain of market transactions within a generalised system of commodity production and in which the state did not meddle directly – in contrast to feudalism. In this sense, we might say that the ‘mode of rule’ of civil society is the ‘dull compulsion of the market’.

And, in this light, we might also say that if civil society for Gramsci referred primarily to *homo civicus*, for Marx it referred to *homo economicus*. Yet, even in their own work, the two were not irreconcilable and, indeed, they are inseparable: we cannot understand class politics without considering the underlying movement of capital, and we cannot understand the movement of capital without considering class politics.

Now, what precisely is the nature of hegemony and civil society in the periphery? Is contemporary neocolonialism closer to the ‘democratic West’ or to the ‘czarist East’? And what exactly is the relationship of civil society to hegemony? For Gramsci, civil society was the condition of hegemony, and incivility the condition of coercion. Is ‘indirect rule’ in Africa a case in which hegemony, in lieu of coercion, governs the uncivil? Is indirect rule a distinct and complementary site of hegemony?

Neocolonialism is a halfway house between bourgeois dictatorship and bourgeois democracy. Hegemony and civil society (in the Gramscian sense) have either been absent or, when they have existed, they have been weak and unstable; direct coercion has been an ever-present factor in the reproduction of neocolonialism. It is useful to approach the problem in world-historical terms and distinguish between two recent periods. In the early postwar period, coercion took two principal forms: the periodic suspension of formal democratic procedures, when progressive social forces matured to threaten the reproduction of capital; or the implementation of formal democratic procedures but together with the corporatisation of peasants’ and workers’ organisations. The latter case has had variations, such as in the cases where trade unions escaped the patronage of states and attained a measure of civil status under the patronage of international trade unionism, itself in alliance with imperialist bourgeoisies. Both of these cases (dictatorial and corporatist) have been highly coercive: naked violence was systematically deployed against non-conformist, anti-imperialist forces, typically of mass nationalist or socialist orientation, seeking agrarian reforms and the nationalisation of the economy. Both cases, however, also exhibited a degree of ‘schizophrenia’, within a populist ideological framework, pursuing developmental objectives on the one hand and suppressing popular demands on the other; such instances of schizophrenia are not to be seen as instances of secure hegemony. As a whole, the early postwar period constituted a long process of civilisation of society, in which transnational society was not trustworthy enough to be set ‘free’.

In the last quarter-century, the periphery has made a transition to a specifically neocolonial hegemony and civil society, but also one in which society has again not been entirely trustworthy so as to be spared of violence. Thus, hegemony and civil society have been weak and unstable. This is the period of neoliberalism, in which the following processes have been underway: domestic capital, and particularly industrial capital, has abandoned whatever introverted ambitions it may have entertained and has adopted extroversion as its preferred strategy of accumulation, under the wing of international capital; statist planning has lost legitimacy worldwide, consequent upon the defeat of the Soviet Union; international trade unionism has been restructured, such that Western-based, market friendly labour internationalism has become the single and dominant labour internationalism; serial ‘régime transitions’ have taken place in the periphery, where formal democratic procedures within a multi-party framework have been implemented/restored; political space has formally reopened but substantively restricted to neoliberal macro-economics; and civic organisations have proliferated, with highly ‘civilised’ traits, such as donor dependence, narrowness or absence of social base, and welfarist and ‘human rights’ moralisms. The neocolonial hegemony that has resulted has been historically significant, but it has dovetailed with economic crisis and stagnation, as well as the opening of a political vacuum in national politics, given that the mass of the urban and rural population has remained in an unorganised state. For this reason, neocolonial hegemony has also been unstable and has relied on the recurrent coercion and co-optation of nonconformist social forces. We may conclude that civil society under neoliberalism has obtained significant ‘freedom’ (in the Gramscian sense), but one which remains highly conditional.

If hegemony and civil society in the periphery exhibit the general tendencies outlined above, the relationship between the two in Africa requires special attention. For here we are presented with a rural domain in which *homo economicus* operates not only with the institutional formalities that pertain to *homo civicus* but also with institutionalised tribalism. This does not mean that the latter is not an extension of the former – it is. The institutionalisation of tribe was devised by colonial authorities as a means to exert moral and political control over petty-commodity producers and the (mainly male) labour force in towns, mines, and farms, as well as to expel the costs of social reproduction ‘outside’ the circuit of capital – the family farm, mainly female-operated, and incorporated into the system of generalised commodity production. Bestowing civil rights upon peasants and workers may have been deemed counterproductive (literally), but so was the constant use of force over the totality of the population which was characteristic of the early colonial period and associated with chartered companies. Thus, in late-colonial Africa, the institutionalisation of tribe was both the logical and perverse extension of civil society. Yet, it was neither self-contained nor sufficient to organise the

labour process; direct coercion was a necessary feature of 'indirect rule';

In the contemporary neocolonial context, the co-existence of homo civicus and institutionalised tribalism continue to be intrinsically related, but their institutional exclusivity has come undone; the two are highly interpenetrated, partly functional, but generally contradictory. Today, the semi-proletarianised peasant under customary law has formal rights of movement and association; thus she may migrate to seek work, join community associations, farmers' unions, and trade unions, and vote for local councillors, members of parliament, and presidential candidates. The peasant-worker today is formally subject to the rules, culture, and coercion pertaining to civil society, as well as to customary law.

This situation, finally, is by no means contrary to the interests of the capitalist class, given that the latter, as a comprador, extroverted class, does not view the working class as a source of purchasing power for its products, but as labour-power for the production of goods consumed externally. Thus, there is no structural compulsion for the capitalist class to create a stable, industrial working class, subject to the logic of a 'free' civil society. The contrary in fact holds: semi-proletarianisation continues to offload the costs of social reproduction to the family farm and continues to lower wages below the cost of reproduction, while civil society and customary law continue to provide (ever-weaker) moral institutional props. In this context, it is a mistake to see this semi-proletariat as an eternal prisoner of either civil or tribal logic – or even of an economic 'agrarian question of labour'. This class, and this class alone, carries the historic burden of resolving both the agrarian and national questions; and, with the definitive failure of neoliberalism, the opportunities are there to be grasped. Events in Zimbabwe clearly show that the peasantworker is fully capable of challenging both civil and tribal order, by enlisting him/herself in radical political movements.

Coercion and hegemony in Zimbabwe

We return finally to Zimbabwe and its radicalisation. In the sterile intellectual context of the neoliberal 1990s, it was to be expected that most of social science would fail to grasp its revolutionary meaning or explain its contradictory movement. The 'internationalists' sought to recover Marxian concepts, mainly from Gramscian political theory, but once again they demonstrated their confusion, populism and Eurocentrism. We will briefly reconstruct their arguments, before we provide some further definition to the case of Zimbabwe.

Raftopoulos and Phimister's thesis in their HM article is that nationalism in Zimbabwe consistently enjoyed 'consensus' or 'hegemony', until its 'breakdown' in 1996.⁵⁶ This hegemony was contested at times and its critics marginalised, but it 'nonetheless represented a unifying ideological vision that promised a broad vision of liberation and development'; even the Matabeleland conflict in 1982–7 between the two liberation armies, which resulted in the death of thousands of civilians by state security forces, did not, according to the authors, 'immediately disturb' the nationalist hegemony.⁵⁷ From 1996 onwards, this hegemony began to unravel, they tell us, consequent upon economic decline, increasing corruption, and political mobilisation led by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). Furthermore, the establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 was a 'watershed', 'as issues of democracy and civic rights, once part of the liberation agenda but subsequently sidelined, were returned to the centre of political debate'.⁵⁸ These events, according to the authors, coincided with an intra-ZANU-PF struggle, led by veterans of the liberation war who rebelled against their 'neglected status and welfare'; they were then compensated by the state, re-co-opted into the ruling party, and deployed violently against the opponents of the party. This further coincided with the assertion of black business organisations which demanded state intervention, in the form of cheap credit and access to land, to redress their own exclusion from the white-dominated private sector. This series of coincidences culminated in a 'politically driven' land reform and the systematic use of security and paramilitary forces by the ruling party, along with a series of repressive pieces of legislation, to contain dissent. At the climax of the land reform, over one hundred people lost their lives. The argument closes with the accusation that Moyo and Yeros 'have little to say about the internal reconfiguration of Zimbabwean state politics'; that we offer 'a casual treatment of the various forms of violence that have become the Zimbabwean state's favoured form of dealing with its citizenry'; and that, in our hands, 'classes are reduced to ahistorical, economic figures', with 'little attention to how politics is actively constructed'.⁵⁹

A similar rendition is offered by Moore. In his article, Moore identifies two 'clusters of intellectuals' in Zimbabwe, one essentially 'ZANU', the other 'MDC', who differ on 'the rights they articulate'.⁶⁰ The 'ZANU' Intellectuals are best described as 'patriotic agrarianists', who advocate 'a series of rights contingent on the construction and consolidation of domestically-based ruling classes'. They are in 'objective alliance' with these classes, which in turn 'rely on a lot of state force' to bolster 'sovereignty', and which is celebrated 'with great pomp and ceremony'; these are not 'democratic Marxists', and some people even consider them 'scoundrels'. The other camp, by contrast, consists of 'critical cosmopolitans', who emphasise 'liberties' and procedural democracy, who perhaps have emphasised these a bit too much, but who in any case also place 'very strong emphasis on democratic participation in processes of material production'; 'they are closer to socialists'.⁶¹ According to Moore, the two intellectual-political camps

are vying over a 'destroyed' working class in a 'politics of stalemated classes'; and 'exhausted accumulation strategies'.⁶² While these are rooted in 'the stalled processes of primary accumulation' characteristic of all African states, it is in Zimbabwe that the correlation of forces began to change. In this case, however, the social forces were weak, and the state intervened in a 'Bonapartist' fashion — a historically reactionary form of Caesarism. More generally, Moore suggests that the political economy of Africa is characterised by 'the uneven articulation of many modes of production'; which all of us, Right and Left, have failed 'to take into account'.⁶³ This, finally, presents a problem for theories of the state, including our own theory of the 'schizophrenic state'; in particular, we fail to see that the land reform was 'rooted in the state' and not in society. He concludes that, in such cases of crisis, Marxists should avoid 'authoritarian closure' and support 'deliberative debate' based on 'simple principles and light theory'.⁶⁴ To begin with Raftopoulos and Phimister, the claim that hegemony existed in Zimbabwe until 1996 is flawed. First, it imputes consent to neocolonialism, effacing the systematic violence which has sustained the embourgeoisement of national liberation. The most cynical of claims is that the deadly violence in Matabeleland in the early 1980s was negligible: for our critics, this was an instance of secure hegemony, while the much lesser violence, by a vast margin, of fast-track land reform in 2000 has been the only notable instance of coercion and, hence, collapse of hegemony. Second, the argument erroneously disconnects hegemony from civil society, which, for Gramsci, are identical: civil society is hegemony.

A more careful assessment would point out that, in the first half of the 1980s, society was under a systematic process of civilisation to capital by means of blunt violence, on the one hand, and the corporatisation of town and country, on the other; the latter was pursued by the installation of ZANUPF cadres in the leadership of the new-born ZCTU, the co-optation of farmers' unions, and the restoration of the authority of chiefs. During this time, social resistance was expressed largely outside formal channels, by illegal strike action in towns and what we have called 'low-profile, high-intensity' land occupations in the countryside. The only sections of society civilised enough to be allowed to operate freely were the main local agencies of imperialism, the organisations of white farmers and industrialists, the CFU and CZI, respectively. Moreover, the weakness of the new petty-bourgeois leadership was all too apparent in its ethnicised scramble for power, which resulted in the violent crackdown in Matabeleland. We must conclude that, in this period, the nationalism of the ruling party was not hegemonic, and society was not sufficiently civilised.

Then, in the second half of the 1980s, coercion is also prominent. This period was marked by the disentanglement of the labour centre from the state and the assertion of an independent politics. However, this partial prying open of political space by the labour centre did not herald the birth of a 'free' civil society, and hence hegemony, for the labour centre used the political space to confront the state and capital — the state had not civilised society enough. It is no coincidence that, at this time, the ruling party attempted to establish a one-party state — in effect, a bourgeois dictatorship. The ZCTU, along with other civic organisations, mobilised and obtained a crucial victory against the one-party state. But, soon after, the state and labour locked horns again over structural adjustment. The ZCTU used the political space to lead a mass campaign against economic liberalisation, but this time without success. Importantly, on both fronts — the one-party state and ESAP (Economic Structural Adjustment Programme) — the ZCTU was in constant confrontation with the security forces of the state. Meanwhile, in the countryside, land occupations entered a period of 'normal low intensity' activity, while the state began to withdraw from its land reform agenda and to implement a 'squatter control' policy in its place. This was marked by rural evictions, colonial style. Thus, if, in the first half of the 1980s, hegemony and civil society were virtually absent, in the second half, hegemony and civil society were fragile; coercion carried the day throughout the 1980s.

In the 1990s, the tables began to turn. This is the period in which a proper neocolonial civil society emerged, alongside the embourgeoisement of the liberation movement. For Raftopoulos and Phimister, this period remains one of 'nationalist hegemony', and indeed we might finally call it that, but only tentatively, and as long as we understand its new class structure. On the one hand, capitals across all sectors — agrarian, industrial, commercial and financial — and across both races, accepted the basic logic of structural adjustment; for its part, aspiring black capital adapted it to the discourse of 'national liberation'. On the other hand, the labour centre was eventually cajoled by the state and co-opted by international trade unionism into a policy of 'social dialogue' over structural adjustment. Thus, by the mid-1990s, there had emerged a more generalised neocolonial civil society and neocolonial hegemony; we must add, however, that both of these remained fragile, given that strike action over declining living standards and repression by the state persisted. In the countryside, the squatter control apparatus remained in full swing, but without being able to stem the flow of land occupations; these were on a growth trajectory, on account of job and wage losses brought about by structural adjustment.

The final period, from 1997 onwards, is the rare case in which society remained civilised on a neocolonial basis, even adopting the language of 'good governance' against the state, while the state became radicalised against neocolonialism, in a revolutionary situation. And, here, the hegemony of the state did vanish — neocolonial hegemony specifically. This is the period in which land occupations gained a militant character, outside and against civil society; they gained also a militant leadership in the form of the war veterans' association. At this time, the state both adopted and streamlined the demands of the land-occupation movement and resorted to a new wave of violence

against the opposition, as contradictions escalated.⁶⁵ But, again, it would be a failure of analysis if we did not identify the class structure of this violence. In contrast to the violence of structural adjustment (bourgeois), as well as the ethnicised violence in Matabeleland (petty-bourgeois), this time violence was deployed against reaction and in defence of land reform, whose main social base was the rural semi-proletariat. This does not mean that violence did not serve other "political" ends as well, such as the retention of power by the ruling party. Nor does it mean that the semi-proletariat gained control of the means of violence, which in fact remained in the immediate control of the black bourgeoisie, albeit insecurely, especially in 2000–2, until it regained full control in Operation Murambatsvina.⁶⁶

We have provided considerable analysis of the nature of this violence elsewhere, and specifically the violence against farm workers; we can only invite our readers to have a closer look.⁶⁷ Suffice it to conclude that the basic argument made by our critics – that hegemony gave way to coercion in 1996, that in our own work we evade the question of violence, and that we downplay its "real" nature – is both mis-targeted and flawed. It is our "internationalist" critics that downplay the coercion of neocolonialism and overplay it when it serves their interests, such as against black nationalism; and, here, their preferred mode of "analysis" is simply to list the number of casualties, rather than shed light on the changing class structure of both nationalism and violence.

A similarly blurred view of neocolonialism is provided by Moore in his use of the concepts of "Caesarism" and "articulation of modes of production". Caesarism would be a useful concept if, like hegemony, it were not abused for political ends. Gramsci was conscious of this possibility when he warned that identifying the social structure of the bureaucracy "is indispensable for any really profound analysis of the specific political form usually termed Caesarism or Bonapartism".⁶⁸ Central to his own analysis was the identification of the "fundamental classes" which underlie the Caesarist phenomenon. Nowhere in Moore’s analysis do we get a clear picture of what the fundamental classes are; the only classes that seem to matter are the "corrupt" black bourgeoisie and the "destroyed" working class.

Elsewhere, we have delved a great deal into the changing class dynamics of neocolonialism in Zimbabwe.⁶⁹ Our premise has been that there are two axes by which to understand the politics of capitalist society, the inter-class axis and the intra-class axis, which are dialectically related and in no way coincidental. We have gone on to show that relations within the capitalist class changed remarkably in the twenty years of independence. Their initial conflict was over the pattern of accumulation – introverted versus extroverted – pitting industrial capital against financial, commercial and agrarian capital, both domestic and foreign. By the end of the 1980s, industrial capital had been co-opted, mainly via the World Bank’s "export-revolving fund", into an extroverted position, thus setting the stage for consensus among big capitals on the issue of liberalisation. Meanwhile, the aspiring black bourgeoisie had reconciled its ethnicised divisions by the Unity Accord of 1987, and by this time, it had either been compradorised in the financial sector, or, having been shut out of the white private sector, had resorted to accumulation via the state ("corruption").

The aspiring black bourgeoisie jumped on the liberalisation bandwagon as well, but it also began to make vocal demands for "affirmative action" by the state, for access to land and credit, in favour of black capital. Ultimately, this set the stage for the main intercapitalist conflict of the 1990s. With full consensus over extroversion and with liberalisation underway, intercapitalist conflict became a straightforward racial competition over the spoils of structural adjustment. This, in turn, set the stage for a cross-class black nationalist alliance on the land question, resulting eventually in the fast-trackland reform process.

The dynamics within the working class and across the classes is something we have also discussed in detail, and we need not go on at length here. The main point to stress is that the semi-proletariat remained politically divided throughout the period of independence. The small- and medium-scale farmers’ union remained under bourgeois control, while the ZCTU never established a foothold in the countryside; only in the commercial farming sector did it unionise, and here it espoused a weak workerist agenda. By the 1990s, when a neocolonial civil society emerged, no organisation could claim to represent a peasant-worker agenda. This political vacuum, combined with the adverse socio-economic effects of liberalisation, was to be filled by a radical landoccupation movement, led by the war veterans. At the end of the 1990s, the war veterans and their radical land reform agenda received the endorsement of the aspiring black bourgeoisie. Thus, two blocs clashed: on one side, the black bourgeoisie and the rural landless organised by the war veterans, under a ZANU-PF banner; on the other side, international capital, all sectors of the white bourgeoisie, a small section of the unaccommodated black bourgeoisie, and workers organised by the ZCTU, with the help of imperialist forces, under an MDC banner. A cross-class nationalist alliance versus a cross-class international "post-national" alliance.

These are the fundamental classes which Moore blurs. It is no surprise that, in his hands, "Caesarism" parachutes on Zimbabwe, to become as conceptually valuable as "bad governance".⁷⁰ Likewise, the state apparatus becomes unproblematic, as much for Moore as for Raftopoulos and Phimister: it is a monolith, with no tensions or contradictions, and undisputedly in the hands of one class, the black bourgeoisie. In turn, the war veterans’ association, which has spanned all strata of Zimbabwean society – from peasant and worker, to petty-bourgeois and bourgeois – and permeates all sections of the state, becomes, in Moore’s hands, free of class contradictions and unworthy of closer analysis. "State" and "society" appear to be on

different planets, in liberal fashion. Thus, Moore is left with no choice but to conclude that the land reform in Zimbabwe was 'rooted in the state' and not in society; furthermore, he has no choice but to explain the radical land-occupation movement as a conspiracy between the war veterans' association and the Central Intelligence Organisation. When class analysis is cast away, conspiracy theory saves the day.

In fact, socially rooted fast-track land reform has transformed both state and society in Zimbabwe. It has broadened the landholding structure (the base) of society, and while this has not been revolutionary, it has also transformed state attitudes in relation to property: agricultural land has been nationalised by constitutional amendment; efforts have been underway to gain majority stake in the mining industry; and the state has intervened heavily in production, distribution, and finance. Second, we cannot miss the fact that, in agriculture itself, Zimbabwe has made a lateral shift to a new agrarian path, from the predominant 'Junker' path of settler colonialism to one which combines strong elements of the 'merchant' and 'peasant' paths; these elements now set the framework for a more broad-based accumulation process — as well as for new class contradictions. Third, Zimbabwe has shed its 'settler' characteristics once and for all, has revitalised the debate in Africa on how to engage the world economy on new terms, and has laid bare the illusion of the so-called 'democratic developmental state', which is currently being invoked on the continent, especially in South Africa: Zimbabwe clearly shows us that. Even with the fundamental classes identified, it is difficult to transport the concept to the present situation. If nineteenth-century France provides the benchmark, having produced the two classic Bonapartisms, we would need to specify which type of Bonapartism it resembles.

Clearly, it does not resemble the second Bonaparte, who was brought to power by a politically uneducated, unorganised and reactionary peasantry. Nor does it resemble the first Bonaparte, who stabilised bourgeois rule, after the left-right swings of the Girondins, Jacobins, and Thermidors. On the other hand, if the suggestion is simply that President Mugabe presides over weakly organised interests, upholding and stabilising bourgeois rule by means of military force, this too is inaccurate. What characterises the present situation is political polarisation, not Bonapartist stability, where the bourgeoisie is split into rather well-organised factions, the nationalist and the 'post-national', the former with immediate control of the military, the latter allied to imperialist states with the capacity to impose sanctions.

Conclusion

The events that have followed the land reform, including the moves towards 'normalisation' from 2003 onwards, and of which the mass urban evictions of 2005 have been a crucial part, cannot be addressed in this article.⁷¹ However, they have de facto brought an end to the revolutionary situation that took hold of Zimbabwe from the 1990s, and have altered significantly the coordinates of political action. The nationalist Left has lost its social agent, in the form of the radical land-occupation movement, but also the stillborn urban social movement that momentarily held out the prospect of radicalising the urban question and re-igniting the revolutionary situation.

The internationalist Left, for its part, has retained its social agent, especially the trade unions, but continues to be mired in an opportunist and fundamentally reactionary course of action. Its objective is not to organise peasant-workers on a proletarian agenda, and on a sustainable basis, but to exploit the economic decline and the widespread dissatisfaction so as to obtain control of the state. It is true that such an eventuality would alter once again the co-ordinates of political action, with a probable stabilisation of the economy on the basis of external support. But it is either naïve or disingenuous to suggest that such a unilateral submission to imperialism and return to IMF tutelage would guarantee political space for social movements or improve the prospects for the resolution of the national question.

It is, indeed, time for a new Left, which would take stock of the successes and failures of the last ten years. This should indeed seek the re-opening of political space, not merely to secure a launching pad for political office, but for a longer-term project of uniting peasants and workers, creating autonomous structures, cultivating proletarian consciousness, and confronting imperialism on a sustainable basis.

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