

From the November coup to Austerity: Can Zimbabwe's Bones Rise Again? **

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Ghosts of the November Days and Political Instabilities

We are back again to where Dambudzo Marechera was screaming, in an Oracle to the Povo, drawing harrowing pictures "Of lean harried squatters", "And fat pompous armed overlords". But we must leave the Vengere anarchist and look far, into the abdomen of Europe in the 1800s so that we have a better grasp of Zimbabwe's doddering political economy over-loaded by a political class failing to rise above its narrow parochial interests to feed itself obese from the 'country's fat'. It was in the upheaval and maelstrom of a Europe grappling with early industrialism and the flares of 'revolution', that a classical political economist said, 'the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living'. This very much sums up the state of deepened stasis in Zimbabwe; the contests of power in the nationalist movement, the maneuvering for positions in the guerilla camps and the competition to get hands on state revenue once the Leadership Code was flushed down the toilet. That in a word is what festers in the corridors of the party-state and by implication the national political economy is caught between these configurations. On one hand the political class has re-produced itself first through the coup and second through an election which some observers have 'refused' to declare as 'free, fair and credible'. On the other hand, the national political economy stares them down in an eternal and very mortal dance. The discourse they shove down the nation's empty stomachs conjures flames that will soon consume any façade to a 'new dispensation'.

**Fig 1.0 Tendai Biti – an intellectual B52?**

Firstly, we take into account the nature of the military-party-state complex that was bequeathed to Zimbabwe birthed by more than a century history of conquests and violence: from Rhodes's British South Africa Company (BSAC) invasion of Matabele 1893/1894, right up to the rolling of tanks and guns in the streets of Harare in November 2017. This history of militarism and violence eloquently historicised and articulated on the 26 of November 2018 by Harare East Parliamentarian, Tendai Biti at the August 1 Killing Commission of Inquiry is testament to the public display of where the real power stays. Secondly, we take into consideration the general election of 2018, and how its unresolved questions weigh down the citizens like the proverbial sailors' dead weight. This is so because the political contests continue to configure the national political economy away from stability, legitimacy and constitutionality and towards almost an emerging 'electoral autocracy' that welds together the military, party and state into a garrison for the political elites.

Thirdly, we put into this picture the recent budget, *Austerity to Prosperity*, by Professor Mthuli Ncube because this a statement of policy that reveals the direction plotted by the current political elites, a class that engineered and benefited from the coup of the November days. Taken together the factors highlighted above point, not to a 'new dispensation' but to the brutal reality of a state that is now firmly under the barrel of a gun and the jackboot of the soldiers. Lest the citizens

forget, before the November Days the current Vice President used to parade his official vehicle as '2IC', meaning the 'second in charge', and we at Gravitas warned that state power had long passed over to the barracks and with it the constitutional democracy was being strangled to its death. But let us briefly look at the party-state and the electoral mess it authored.

Unresolved Electoral Disputes and Post-Coup Party State

If the class of Mgagao that engineered the coup, wanted July 30 to resolve the legitimacy questions, then that failed dismally, and more questions have come up even after they 'won' the election. So, the very 'thin' victory, squeezed painfully out of the citizen, via a very elaborate Spiderweb Entrapment (*Dandamutande*) strategy of buying votes, subtle coercion, technical manipulation of the electoral cycle and using traditional leaders, has not settled, for good, the legitimacy question which stared down Zimbabwe during the Mugabe years. The appointment of the Commission of Inquiry headed by former President Motlanthe seems to be a well calibrated attempt to cover the mess of the ruling political elites. But to understand this strategy do not look at the goings on at the commission but to what the Deputy Secretary to the President, George Charamba said recently.

In an interview, with the Herald, he charged that the commission's work is 'a very serious matter' and that 'if anyone thinks this is a ritual by a Government which has too much foreign currency to give to commissioners, they are mistaken'. He did not stop there and singled the MDC Alliance leader, saying that 'prosecutorial action will be taken because we have lost lives'. This reveals that the party state has gone back into its default mode of exclusion and violence, sharpened by the class of Mgagao during the Mugabe years tutelage. And Tendai Biti, vociferously and eloquently, laid bare the threads of how the party-state has been hiding the military elites to continue to shore up a hegemony that they long lost. The history lesson before the Commissioners, and publicly to the citizen, was a loud statement and intelligently contextualized indictment of what is wrong with trampling the liberal constitutional edifice and replacing it with guns and gun powder.

Mthuli's Austerity: Securing the Comfort of Political Elites

The budget statement delivered by Professor Mthuli Ncube has to be read with one eye looking at the broader questions highlighted above, that is to say how Zimbabwe's political economy is now sandwiched between a post-coup leadership bent on consuming itself and secondly the unresolved questions of the elections. Importantly, we have argued previously, that at the centre of the budgetary crisis that Zimbabwe faces is a dysfunctional public financial management system. The pre-budgetary policy paper made by the Treasury and secondly the Budget statement by the Minister of Finance admits that 'the primary objective' is to 'target the "twin deficits" of fiscal and current account'. National debt is mounting (closer to US\$20b). The government is printing money chalking up to US\$6.2billion in 'bonds' and 'treasury bills', of this US\$2billion has been minted and dolled out in the eight months of 2018 alone. This is scandalous. That there are laws to restrain this drunk sailor spending behavior does not matter to this 'class of Mgagao'. The country's coffers are being emptied pretty quickly but the question is: if the national treasury is borrowing so much where is the money going? And we say follow the money into the leafy areas of Northern Harare!

When some tenderpreneurs access state resources (like Intratek) the money ended up in a minister's daughter's foreign account; when fuel is imported with foreign currency and sold at almost US\$0.30- when one considers the real market value- it ends up with those close to power; when over 40% of state's salary budget goes to the allowances of the 'chefs'; when the Auditor General laments the melt down in public finance accountability; when debts from elite individuals, via RBZ and parastatals, are assumed by the citizen - then we must know

that the Minister's statements of intent, in the Budget, are all hot air and nothing more.



Fig 2.0 Mthuli Ncube: fiddling with numbers too much?

Ultimately, the budget by Professor Mthuli Ncube will fall, not on the words of the ministry, but on the poisonous culture that has made mincemeat out of the public finance management system. This budget has done only one thing: securing the comfort of the party and its state-securocrats linked elites. And we know that Professor Mthuli does have a penchant of fiddling with numbers a lot – he has already claimed GDP has gone up to US\$24.6 billion and (a shocker) that GDP per capita (meaning how 'rich' every citizen is) has gone up to a whopping US\$1,508.00. But here is a wild one from the Oxford man trained in 'Quantitative Finance' : projecting that in 2019 nominal GDP is expected to jump from US\$24.6b to a US\$31.6 billion (do the maths!). When the Prof was Chief Economist at the African Development Bank (ADB), he was so courageous, such that in a whole monograph (*The Emerging Middle Class of Africa*, 2014), to push this idea that Africa has a growing middle class earning between '\$2 and \$20' and that this will grow 'from 355 million (34 percent of Africa's population) to 1.1 billion (42 percent of the population) in 2060'. There you have it folks that those who earn at least \$2 will be part of a middle class in Africa.

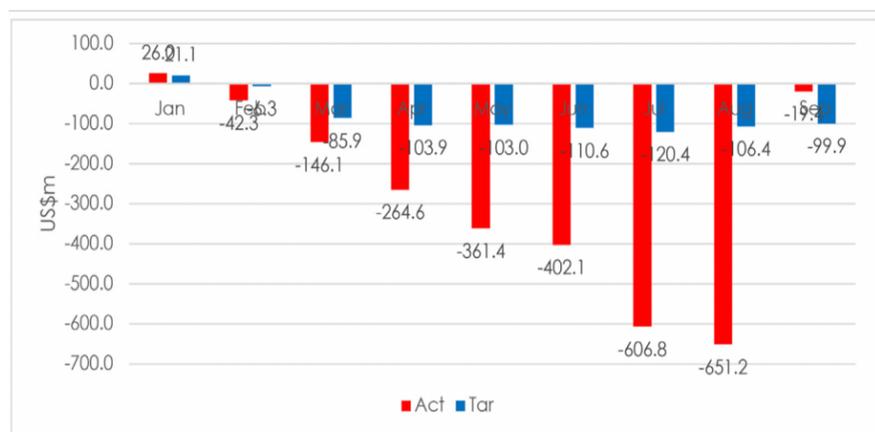


Figure 3. Projected Budget Deficit will top US\$2.8billion

But make no mistake the failure of Zimbabwe's national political economy to become advanced is also because 'our' business class have learnt that they can live poshy and first world lives without making anything. We have argued before and have the evidence to show that the political class and the parasitic so-called business class has been robbing us blind. Let us take the so called 'business class' in Zimbabwe which wants to be capitalist without actually becoming capitalist. The key word there is 'becoming' and if we take the Western capitalist class it went through the process, very protracted, of becoming capitalist meaning that the capitalist class accumulated capital through making things – meaning it was an industrial class. One only has to visit Manchester, Liverpool, Lancashire, Detroit, South East Asia and more recently Guangzhou in China and India to see capital accumulation in progress. For us, we lack an industrial class that can structurally transform the economy and create sustainable national aggregate demand. Unlike in the developed and newly industrialised countries, where the business class has come in and technology also deployed to address the production questions; our business class and technology

have come in at the consumption question. In the case of Zimbabwe, and much of Africa, there has been a false triumphalism of technology. The 'success' of Eco-cash and Econet or MPESA, SAFARICOM and Equity Bank in Kenya must not blind us from the reality of Africa's political economic structures. These companies are purely service companies and they do not make anything. In fact, they are 'service' companies and platforms that facilitate exchange and so on but barely make meaningful contribution to permanently shifting our economies to make and export stuff. Without making things, Africa and Zimbabwe's political economy, will remain feudal-agrarian with access to things and technology made in advanced countries – a sort of nicely sugar-coated dumping ground.

We began this piece with the insights of an international political economist, on the 'dead weight of history', but we must end with a reading closer to home especially about how 'our history' and its contestations must be liberated from the confines of the November days script of an almost privatized national memory. To have a feel of that deep trauma and histories, everyone must grab Panashe Chigumadzi's *My Bones Will Rise Again* (Indigo Press, 2018). The title of the book, *My Bones Will Rise Again*, reverberates the legendary voice of Mbuya Nehanda's voice during her hanging by British Imperialists: '*Mapfupa angu achamuka*' (My bones will surely rise). This voice that came after the temporary halt of the First Chimurenga (War of Liberation) in 1898, later became a clarion call to liberation that led to independence in 1980. However, as early as 1983 Andre Astrow noted that Zimbabwe's Revolution had lost its way. Almost a decade later, in 2003, Hammer, Raftopoulos and Jensen reminded the nation of Zimbabwe's 'unfinished business' of liberation and independence.

But the big question is whether Zimbabwe's *Bones Will Rise Again* amidst this current military coated 'turmoil and tenacity'. Only Panashe aggregates the contents of her book well when she said she wanted to understand history and nation beyond and outside the 'clash of big men and guns'. But we cannot depart without saying whatever you do, we recommend you read Panashe Chigumadzi's, award winning, *Rights of Conquest Rights of Desire* (<https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com>). It is a towering intelligent reconnoitering of the nation, state, race and all things gender in the post-colony (in the Achille Mbembe sense of things!). The big question remains: can Zimbabwe begin to understand (and make?) history and nation beyond and outside the 'clash of big men and guns'?

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**by way of Panashe Chigumadzi (2018), *My Bones Will Rise Again*, Indigo Press.