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Dan Hodgkinson, "Politics on Liberation's Frontiers: Student Activist Refugees, International Solidarity, and the Struggle for Zimbabwe, 1965-79." *The Journal of African History* 62, no. 1 (March 2021): 99–123. doi:10.1017/S0021853721000268

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Dan Hodgkinson's article is based on his doctoral dissertation project on Zimbabwean student activism, on which he has published other articles, and is publishing a monograph.¹ This article focuses on geography. With the concept of frontier, Hodgkinson explores the political mobilization of refugee students in different countries.

Hodgkinson provides a useful overview of literature on student activism in Africa in particular, and describes its specific context of the struggle for liberation.² This includes the programs for refugee students like the Commonwealth Special Programme for the training of African university students from Rhodesia, which represented the "gradualist approach to independence for Africans in Rhodesia" promoted by the UK and Nigeria (100). As a result, most of the Rhodesian African students at that time got their education abroad. According to one estimate, their number at the end of 1970s reached 4,000.³

For this study, Hodgkinson uses his interviews with 23 activists, among them well-known figures in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, politics and academia. And indeed, it was time to document the oral history and memories of the events of half a century ago. The testimonies of political studenthood that Hodgkinson discusses include experiences at the London School of Economics, the universities of Leeds and York, the School of Oriental and African Studies in the UK; Makerere in Uganda; the Universities of Lagos, Ife, Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello in Nigeria; and Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. While treating these as three distinguished campus frontiers: the UK, Uganda and West Africa, Hodgkinson examines the opportunities and constraints they provided for the young refugee students' aspirations to serve the liberation struggle of

¹ *Zimbabwe's Student Activists: An Oral History from Colonial Rule to the Coup* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2023). The thesis is entitled "Marked Out: An Oral History of Zimbabwean Student Activism, 1958 to 2013," Oxford University, 2017.

² These include Sara Pugach, 'Agents of Dissent: African Student Organisations in the German Democratic Republic,' *Africa*, 89:S1 (2019): 90–108; Eric. Burton, 'Navigating Global Socialism: Tanzanian Students in and beyond East Germany,' *Cold War History* 19:1 (2018): 63–83; Daniel Branch, "Political Traffic: Kenyan Students in Eastern and Central Europe, 1958–69," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 53:4 (2018): 811–31; Constantin Katsakioris, "Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960–74: Anticolonialism, Education, and the Socialist Alliance," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 56:1 (2021): 142–65.

³ The figure is from Fay Chung: *Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe* (Uppsala; Harare: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet; Weaver Press, 2006), 219.

their home country. What was the role of the refugee students in the struggle and the subsequent transition to majority rule? While these campus frontiers were important for the support networks of the liberation struggle, they were distant from its actual organization. The fact that the liberation movement was split into two organizations, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), and that they both had to operate partly in exile after being banned by the Rhodesian government, made the setting even more complex. The Frontline States Zambia, Tanzania, and Mozambique, which hosted the movements, became pivotal for the diplomatic solidarity for the struggle but got also involved in their internal leadership struggles.

Furthermore, as Hodgkinson has argued elsewhere, political studenthood itself, as “a ‘modern’ process of elite formation”⁴ was an important element in the independence struggle. Student activism was a recognised route to political leadership.⁵ That studying in the UK frontier opened up routes to political careers and influence in public policy in the emerging developmentalist Zimbabwean state is not surprising. This in fact is concomitant to the earlier experience of the first generation of African nationalist leaders, many of whom were educated in the West. What was peculiar in Southern Rhodesia/Zimbabwe was that this nationalist struggle was prolonged. In the 1970s the leadership positions in the liberation movement were already occupied, which meant that the students of that time had to find other ways to play a role in the movement.

Hodgkinson documents how the UK frontier students established their own branch structures, lobbied, published, and organised events with remarkable autonomy from the leadership of these movements. This gave them visibility and eventually access to the political elite. With degrees from prestigious universities, they were able to make a major contribution to the early developments of independent Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's early technocratic approach in education, labour, and economic policies was largely a result of the influence of these UK graduates. Hodgkinson quotes scholar and activist Brian Raftopoulos, according to whom this was a time “where the logic of arguments held sway” (122).

Hodgkinson's discussion on the frustration that the Rhodesian African students had when tackling with the Uganda and West Africa frontiers, and on the ways how that affected their choices, is interesting. Without independent opportunities to organise politically in their host countries, some of these students simply left and joined the “the more ‘authentic’ military structures of liberation” (113), the Zimbabwean liberation armies in Zambia and Mozambique, while others concentrated on their studies and academic careers, leaving their political activity completely aside. In Makerere, this frustration resulted from the visits of Dar es Salaam-based high-level ZANU figures and their attempts to mobilise students behind certain leaders against others, which reflected the intensive internal competition in ZANU. In Ahmadu Bello University, the refugee students, in turn, felt that they were too few in numbers and therefore irrelevant for the leaderships of their liberation movements.

Hodgkinson, however, does not give any systematic overview of the factors that can explain these different experiences in different frontiers, and that can be generalised to other contexts. To that end, it would be useful to have a more heterogeneous sample of interviewees and frontiers. Accounts of refugee student

⁴ Dan Hodgkinson, "Nationalists with No Nation: Oral History, ZANU(PF) and the Meanings of Rhodesian Student Activism in Zimbabwe," *Africa* 89, no. S1 (January 2019): 540–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972018000906>.

⁵ Hodgkinson, "Remaking Political Studenthood: Zimbabwean Student Activism during the 2000s 'Crisis'," 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198805472.013.2>.

experiences in the Frontline states, Tanzania for example, in European countries other than the ex-coloniser, like Sweden, and from other liberation struggles, in Namibia or South Africa, would be most valuable for such a comparative research design.

The article makes a valuable contribution to research on the role of students and diaspora leaders in post-colonial Africa and on the impact of education and transnational life on political competence and the political developments of nations. The liberation struggles and the character of liberation movements are often seen as key to the form and content of post-colonial states in Southern Africa. Henning Melber, for instance, has explained authoritarianism of the governments by the priority given to self-determination over democratic reform.⁶ The role of scientific knowledge via the contribution of students and academics in these developments needs to be studied more in detail. A good example of the emerging literature, which Hodgkinson refers to, is Elleni Centime Zeleke's recent study of the impact of the student movement and social science theories on the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and the country's government policies since then.⁷

Hodgkinson notes the gradual disappearance of technocratic expertise in the ZANU leadership and programme. According to one of the UK graduates, Ibbo Mandaza, by the mid-1990s most of them "were shunted aside" (123). Hodgkinson's work is thus most relevant for the analysis of academic and student activism during the contemporary economic and political crisis as well.⁸

Liisa Laakso is a senior researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute. She has acted in different national and international positions of trust including the Finnish Government's Research and Innovation Council. Currently she is member of the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Finnish Academies. Before joining the Nordic Africa Institute she served as the Rector of the University of Tampere and before that as the Dean at the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Social Science. She was nominated to professorship at the University of Jyväskylä in 2004, in the field of Development and International Cooperation. Her research interests cover Africa, world politics, democratisation, international development policies and crisis management policies of the European Union. Her research project at the Nordic Africa Institute focuses on the profile of political science discipline in African universities and its impact on African politics.

⁶ Henning Melber, "From Liberation Movements to Governments: On Political Culture in Southern Africa," *African Sociological Review* 6, no. 1 (2002): 161–72, <https://doi.org/10.4314/asr.v6i1.23208>.

⁷ Elleni Centime Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964-2016*, Book, Whole (Boston: Brill, 2019).

⁸ Illustrative of that research is Alois Mlambo's article on Zimbabwean student protests and fight for democracy between 2000 and 2010 despite divisions within the movement and state oppression. A. S. Mlambo, "Student Activism in a Time of Crisis - Zimbabwe 2000-2010 : A Tentative Exploration," *Journal for Contemporary History* 38, no. 1 (June 2013): 184–204.