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## BOOK REVIEW

**Southern Africa: Old treacheries and new deceits**, by Stephen Chan. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. 320 pp. £20.00 (paperback). ISBN 978 0 30015 405 4.

Stephen Chan's vivid, polygonal description of the interconnectedness of Southern Africa chronicles the relationship between national and regional politicians and policies. In this region, nothing is as it seems: Mandela is not a saint; Mugabe not a tyrant; Mbeki was not blind to Mugabe's violent oppression; and Zuma is not merely a vulgar populist. Chan's account seeks to humanize the region by revealing these often misrepresented African caricatures as complicated diplomats. His descriptive account of politicians and diplomacy provides a backdrop for the local narratives of these pre- and post-colonial countries. Beginning chronologically with the post-colonial unrest in Southern Africa, the book generally focuses on the concurrent politics and politicians in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Former colonial ties between Rhodesia and South Africa have been further entrenched by the presidential personalities guiding their future. Chan views Zimbabwe's parochial challenges through a wider international relations and political science lens in which these local incidents are reflective of greater regional influences. Such an unbiased and informative account is rare but Chan's 'Southern Africa' manages to weave a colourful and intellectually honest tapestry of detailed descriptions and analysis.

Perhaps uniquely to this account, Chan portrays the intellectual capacity of several Southern African leaders, including Thabo Mbeki and Robert Mugabe. His presentation of Mugabe as a 'book worm' and a 'wise politician' in contrast to his political rival, Morgan Tsvangirai's impatience and political naiveté may explain how Mugabe has maintained authority in spite of international sanctions and internal unrest. Chan defends Mugabe's dream of complete nationalization and his regional appeal in contrast with Tsvangirai, who is uneducated, fatuous, and generally disliked by most African leaders. Chan's extensive analysis of political rivalry between Mugabe's ZANU-PF and Tsvangirai's MDC party unravels the elephant in the room: what happened to Robert Mugabe and what propelled Zimbabwe's cascade from the breadbasket of Africa to internal food shortages in merely a decade. These complexities and contradictions are detailed in an unbiased breakdown of complicated Zimbabwean politics.

Instead of the usual emphasis on the political instability in Southern Africa, portraying Mugabe's Zimbabwe as repressive in contrast to its egalitarian neighbour, Chan's account focuses on similarities between the adjacent politicians and promises. Long before Mbeki's African Renaissance and the South African Development Community, an apartheid South Africa sought to unify the region to protect its minority-ruling position by financing and fighting against majority rule in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and of course Zimbabwe. Chan presents Zimbabwe as the original rainbow nation, touching on the subtle rivalry between

South Africa and Zimbabwe by comparing the biographies and governing styles of Presidents Mandela, Mbeki, Mugabe, and Zuma. Chan describes a 1980s Mugabe as the embodiment of reconciliation as he led Zimbabwe past racial and colonial barriers. Such a description is reminiscent of South Africa's Nelson Mandela. The interconnectedness between South Africa and Zimbabwe evolves through delicate diplomacy. Mugabe stalled his 1992 land acquisition policies to support South Africa's political negotiations, and by avoiding the issue of land procurement ensured Mandela's victory; a decade later, Mugabe expected similar support from Mbeki when he pushed on with the farm grabs in spite of global opposition. While Mbeki remained outwardly uncritical of Mugabe, Zimbabwe's untimely descent into political turmoil ruined Mbeki's quest to show the world a united, lucrative, and stable Africa. Such clever comparisons between South Africa and Zimbabwe touch on the regional links that ultimately empower the African Renaissance.

The book focuses on the last decade of concurrent political experiences in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Through this period, South Africa's political ease has served as a counterweight to Zimbabwe's unrest; just as the weights shifted towards resolution in Zimbabwe, South Africa faced its toughest political climate since the end of apartheid. Unlike classical portraits of the African tyrant, Mugabe is not a solitary figure but merely the public face of the iceberg. Kenya's Raila Odinga, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, and Botswana's Ian Khama, as well as South Africa's Mbeki, are critical political influences on both Mugabe and Tsvangirai. These interrelated forces each play a critical role in Zimbabwe; Kenya's power-sharing agreement boasts success highlighting Zimbabwe's failures, while Mbeki struggles to remain relevant after being ousted by his own party. Chan's sympathetic portrayal finds congruence between these divergent leaders, describing Mbeki, Mugabe, and Tsvangirai as unable to manage their own people and all equally eager to solve the endless political unrest in Zimbabwe. Such interpretations redefine the complexities of Southern African politics, exposing political collaborations beneath the contestations.

Chan's account of politics in Southern Africa provides a refreshing divergence from the typical news reports linking clashing agendas with rival politicians across the post-colonial landscape. This eloquent and well-written account of Southern Africa depicts South Africa and Zimbabwe as 'close siblings' rather than 'Siamese twins', and while Chan remains uncertain of either country's political future, like the roads built by Cecil Rhodes, they will remain indissolubly linked.

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