PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH IN A POST-COLONIAL STATE:

THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE

by

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INTRODUCTION

The scope of this paper will cover what can loosely be described as social science research taking place within Zimbabwe.

It will not cover the equally important area of research in the natural sciences in Zimbabwe, an area whose history would expose important aspects of the relationship between scientific research and the development of the state in a former settler colony.

In covering this topic, the paper will focus mainly on the major theoretical and ideological perspectives underlying research in government, and more broadly the political context in which research is being undertaken in Zimbabwe. It will seek to outline some of the assumptions about research methodology in the post-colonial period, which we ought to be questioning; assumptions that are liberally peddled in the press, and upon which government policies are often premised. Within the context of this discussion, the paper will also attempt to outline the research in government, within the broader context of the role of intellectuals in our society.

For purposes of presentation, the paper will be divided as follows:

      Part I   : Brief Historical Background of Research in Zimbabwe.

      Part II : Problems of Theory and Research in Practice.

      Part III: The Role of Researchers as Intellectuals.

PART I : BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH IN ZIMBABWE

In the past, most of the research undertaken at the local University could be categorised in the following ways:

(a)   That which sought, in various ways, to justify the system of white settler rule;

(b)   Liberal research, generally working through structuralist functionalist paradigms, with a characteristic paternalist attitude to the oppressed. This liberal research paradigm was developed by the founding fathers of the Departments of Sociology at the then University of 'Rhodesia' namely Professor Clyde Mitchell, formerly the Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, and an Anthropologist by training, and J. Van Velsen, also an Anthropologist. As a report on "The Social Sciences and Development in Africa" noted on the University of 'Rhodesia':

> "The founding fathers of the new University
> College, moreover, saw social science research
> as an important component of social science
> teaching, as well as a problem-solving
> enterprise which required close co-operation
> with government ministries".1

In addition, the report continues:

> "What is fairly clear from the list of
> research topics is that social sciences
> research was conceived of eventually as
> applied research to eliminate   if not
> to solve specific problems. It also
> suggests that a substantial amount of
> research was being undertaken by a number
> of government departments, no doubt as
> much to facilitate social control and

white rule as to advance knowledge."[2]

Thus, it is clear from the early 1960's that this structuralist functionalist paradigm was clearly being developed within the framework of settler colonialism, in so far as the paradigm sought not to question the assumptions of settler rule, but to seek ways of adaption to such rule. As Shopo has noted about anthropological theories which sought to legitimate the incorporation of Africans into the capitalist system in 'Southern Rhodesia':

> "These theories had crystalised into an ideology
> by the end of the 1920's - and until today (1977)
> have provided the main resource of legitimation
> for government policies relating to rural Africans.
> During the 1930's a complementary set of theoretical
> assumptions drawn from social anthropology about
> urban Africans, sought to justify low wage structures,
> the absence of social services and poor housing
> conditions. These also crystalised into an ideology
> after World War II and were to become the
> 'conventional' sociological wisdom about African
> urbanisation."[3]

(c)   An Africanist school of thought which sought, often uncritically, to assert the active agency of Africans themselves in the making of African history. The most important figure of this school was Professor Terence Ranger, who was subsequently deported from 'S. Rhodesia' in 1963.

(d)   Finally, there developed in the late 1960's and 70's, a more radical school of research, utilising selected tools of Marxism. The main figures during this phase were Arrighi, Clarke, Phimister, Van Onselen, Harris and a few others. Their

work centered on the process of proletarianisation and labour supply in the colony, and sought to challenge the dualist assumptions of writers such as Lewis and Barber.[4] The body of work produced was impressive and left an important basis for future radical research.

However, a significant feature of this research 'tradition' is that most of it was carried out by researchers, who for the most part were not integrally linked to the major force for change in the country, the Nationalist Movement.

Most research by blacks was carried out in foreign universities, because of the Zimbabwean diaspora during the colonial period. Writing about this predicament of research during the colonial period, A. Rukobo has written that:

> "While research in the country generally
> supported or ignored the undemocratic,
> racist and capitalist political order
> existing then, the research by those in
> exile sought to challenge the existing
> order. However, since most research by
> exiles was largely done individually
> within the environment of foreign
> universities, not the most propitious
> circumstances at any rate, no visible
> Zimbabwean academic and research tradition
> could develop. Whatever research was
> carried out lacked a linking thread of
> common intellectual concerns — because
> there was no formal interaction among
> these scholars". [5]

Thus, most black Zimbabwean intellectuals were scattered across the globe. While many were organisationally linked, in one way or another, with the Nationalist Movement, the development of a national research

tradition under these conditions remained extremely problematic.

Attempts to bring Zimbabwean researchers together during the latter years of the war, took place under the aegis of international organisations such as U.N.C.T.A.D. and I.U.E.F. The two sets of documents produced (The Zimbabwe Manpower Survey, 3 Volumes, 1977; and Zimbabwe - Towards a New Order, 1980) resulted in extremely disparate and eclectic sets of papers, thematically and methodologically linked largely by their anti-colonial position.

It needs to be mentioned also that both wings of the Patriotic Front and research units, whose major concern logically at the time, was carrying out work related to the struggle.

Thus, at independence, Zimbabwe inherited a relatively large number of intellectuals, with varied theoretical/ideological dispositions and certainly not knitted into any coherent national tradition of co-ordinated research.

It is important to keep in mind that by 1980, most of the Zimbabwean intellectuals returning home had been trained in universities in Western Europe and the U.S. This is important, not because of any simplistic causal relationship between Western Education and a slavish adherence to paradigms of analysis developed in the West. Rather, it is important because exposure to dominant social science theories in the West has, in important ways, proscribed the manner in which Africans have examined their own conditions. Often African social scientists have come under the influence of Modernisation Theory which plotted a linear path of growth for all social formations, irrespective of the relationship of one social

formation to another, and notwithstanding the specificity of the

position of a particular social formation within the World Economy.

Given this dominant theoretical tendency, the task of social research was

then to examine the trajectory and form of growth in the developed

capitalist countries, and then to analyse the obstacles to such growth

that existed in our societies.[6] Moreover, insofar as planning was

concerned, this theoretical perspective led to the:

> "systematic and vigorous expulsion from its
> focal concern of anything that smacked of
> history. This encouraged a purely technocratic
> view of planning. Questions as to the class
> character of the state, or the class context
> of government policy were scorned upon."[7]

The aggression of such conventional social science positions has been

slightly tempered by the critique of the Dependency Theorists.

As will be seen in Part II of this paper, many of the above characteristics

of conventional social science have been displayed by research in the

government of Zimbabwe. However, it is also important to mention that a

radicalisation of theory had taken place during the liberation struggle,

with evidence of elements of a Marxist critique entering the discourse

of the liberation movements. It must nevertheless, be added that this

radicalisation was, and remains in the present phase, uncomfortably

related to the dominant nationalist tradition. As one recent commentator

has noted:

> "the national movement of Zimbabwe reflects,
> in its development and expression, the features
> of a society paternalised by Western imperialism
> and, therefore, disinclined towards socialism."[8]

Continuing his analysis, the commentator observed that:

> "Even among the gurrillas themselves,
> there is evidence, less of Marxist
> ideological fervour than of adherence
> to traditional and supernatural beliefs."[c]

The relationship between Marxism and Nationalism in Zimbabwe is in need of more serious in-depth analysis, before we can reach a more comprehensive understanding, not only of the liberation struggle, but the post-colonial period as well.

At independence, most exiled intellectuals and researchers returned to Zimbabwe, and many entered the state, while some went to the University. Many academics terminated their careers as academics and took up senior positions in the state machinery. The top echelon of the civil service represents an impressive array of academic qualifications.

There were three major reasons for intellectuals moving into the state. Firstly, the belief, particularly amongst progressives that they would effect policy changes most by entering the state. There was, in retrospect, on often overoptimistic perception of the effect that radical intellectuals would have on state policy. Yet, as in an Ibsenite structure of feeling, the nobility of the initial commitment was not negated by the relative failure of the project. Secondly, the comparatively higher salaries being offered in the state. Thirdly, the sometimes hostile environment created by conservative white intellectuals who dominated many departments of the University of Zimbabwe (U.Z.)

As a result of the movement of many academics and researchers into bureaucratic posts, and the fact that many academics at U.Z. have had

little time for extensive research because of the challenge of student
expansion, there has already been a tendency for a good deal of research
to be carried out by the foreign consultants. This is a dangerous trend
because it can undermine the national research base within the country.
It also leads to policy makers being influenced by consultant reports
that are often insensitive to national conditions, and reflects more on
the dispositions of foreign consultants and their agencies, than the needs
of Zimbabwe.

One is not advocating intellectual autarchy for Zimbabwean researchers,
nor indeed is one advocating a kind of theoretical delinking, to use
an analogy from dependency theory, for Zimbabwean intellectuals. However,
we should be extremely wary that dialogue between national and
international researchers should take place on the basis of national
requirements, rather than on requirements defined by others. The pitfalls
of liberal and left paternalism are treacherous. It is disturbing that
even at this stage state bureaucrats respond more generously, at times
even obsequiously, to foreign consultants, than to national researchers.
Moreover, such consultants utilise the skills and accumulated work of
local researchers, often without acknowledgement. The result is the
continued diffuseness of Zimbabwe research, and the definition of such
research more in terms of the requirements of international aid agencies,
than by local socio-economic realities.

PART II : PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

It is probably fair to say that many people who carry out any form of research in government do so in the form of gathering a multitude of "facts" in a largely empiricist fashion. By empiricist, I mean the assumption that facts, in some stubborn fashion speak for themselves. The obsession with facts takes on an almost Dickensian caricature, with the picture of Mr Gradgrind of Hard Times, pummeling in "Hard Facts", strong in our minds. Moreover, this empiricism pretends towards a non-theoretical position, i.e. the assumption that the facts stand on their own without the luxury of theoretical embroidery. However, this pretence of a non-theoretical position is itself a theoretical position, only based on uncritically accepted assumptions.

Empiricism has a very long pedigree in the social sciences, and its presence is particularly felt among policy makers and policy researchers, who are operating under the immense pressure of immediate policy problems. Under such conditions, the tendency is often to gather an array of data to justify one dominant assumption or another, often uncritically accepted.

Commenting on the empiricism of studies on African agriculture, Mkandawire has written:

> "The ignorance about the multi-faceted nature of
> African agriculture is to say the least
> stupendous. However, this should not be viewed
> as a licence for the mindless empiricism that
> seems to dominate much of the work on Africa.
>
> One feature of the practice of agricultural
> economics in Africa is its descriptive character.
> Detailed studies of supply elasticities of
> particular crops, elaborations of 'Cobweb' cyclical

> patterns of supply and demand, etc.,
> constitute the standard fair. The view
> seems to be that an accretion of 'facts'
> will somehow alter the perceptions of policy
> makers towards agriculture whose past sins
> must have been based on ignorance."10

Accompanying this empiricism is a totally inadequate grasp of the
dynamics underlying the historical development of particular phenomena
in our society: What one might call the lack of an "historical
imagination." As was noted earlier, some of the major features of
conventional social science research include an ahistorical approach,
and a static functionalist view of social structures.[11] Let me
proceed by giving a few examples of the ways in which this lack of an
understanding of historical dynamics, has operated in terms of certain
perceptions of policy issues in Zimbabwe.

(a)   The Problem of Hunger

Work recently carried out at the Zimbabwe Institute of Development
Studies (ZIDS) has begun to look into the historical roots of
hunger and malnutrition in Zimbabwe. In an attempt to establish,
firstly, that Zimbabwe has a "major hunger problem" Shopo in
an excellent paper entitled, "The Political Economy of Hunger
in Zimbabwe", has successfully questioned assumptions that
hunger can be attributed to such immediate causes as drought.
Thus Shopo writes that:

> "Long-term changes in cropping systems have
> largely determined the amounts and kinds of
> foods produced. The reasons for calorie –
> protein deficiencies obviously differ among
> the different groups, primary reasons likely
> to be low household incomes, insufficient
> food intakes and high food prices. Changes
> in any of these factors have influenced food
> consumption."12

In another study on this problem, reported in The Herald in October, 1985, another researcher at ZIDS, Sam Moyo, commented on the misconceptions of hunger by government bureaucrats. As the Herald reports noted:

> "Despite reels of overwhelming evidence indicating
> that Zimbabwe has a malnutrition problem, there
> has been a reluctance from some government officials
> to acknowledge this.
>
> For instance, in Chikwakwa, it was the opinion of
> a salaried bureaucrat at district level, that there
> was no hunger in the area; as a result the inhabitants
> were not given drought relief.
>
> But an investigation into the perceptions of the
> population of Chikwakwa on their hunger status
> revealed that there was a real problem of malnutrition.
> And contrary to the opinion of officials it was not
> due to laziness or failure to heed extension advice
> (showing poverty in the level of understanding of
> bureaucrats), but the hunger problem was grounded in
> objectively concrete material conditions ..."[13]

The point of these studies is that policy makers and the media often seek the causes of major problems in what is immediately apparent, (e.g. drought), yet the causes of hunger are to be found beneath the surface in the fundamental social organisation of production and consumption, that has developed since the colonial period.

(b) Labour

During discussions on the Labour Bill in January, 1985, there was much debate and comment in Parliament and the business press about the pro-labour nature of the Bill and the lack of protection for employers. In the midst of the debate, an editorial in The Sunday Mail appeared, attempting to 'balance' the discussion. The content and tone of the editorial was interesting.

It read in part:

> "It is wrong to assume that workers are angels
> and all of them are imbued with a sense of
> responsibility. Experience shows many of them
> to be hypochondriac malingerers, chronic
> absentees or lazy and undisciplined drones.
>
> Therefore, while it is necessary to protect
> workers from unscrupulous employers, it is
> equally necessary to protect industry from
> irresponsible workers. The law must seek to
> balance the interests of the three essential
> factors - employers, industry and workers."[14]

The language and tone is reminiscent of many a settler employer

in this country. The imagery of idleness is typical of capital.

The attempt is made to pose as an arbiter between labour and

capital, in a situation in which, because of the historical

relations between the two, the conflict is a very unequal one

favouring the former rather than the latter. The implication

of such conceptions is that the real relations of exploitation

between labour and capital are not investigated. Instead we

are treated to pious pronouncements about "undisciplined drones".

The result of such a lack of understanding is that genuine forms

of collective action by workers are then treated as unpatriotic

and denounced in the name of "production" and the "national

interest". One does not have to become messianic about the

proletariat to understand that to analyse the action of workers,

one has to penetrate the social relations of capital. Even

such concepts as "lazy and undisciplined drones" must surely

be seen within the context of the "discipline" of capital and

worker responses to it. This, in turn, must be understood in

terms of the specific migrant nature of the Zimoabwean

working class. While it is often politically tempting in

the heart of industrial crises to send in the troops, the

compulsion of an historical understanding of events often

forces its way back to the surface.

(c)   School Leavers

In early September, 1985, an announcement was made, and

subsequently corrected that children entering secondary school

the following year were henceforth to be screened. Once again,

the media reaction was interesting. The Sunday Mail, once

again, reported:

> "Given the often reported pupils' indiscipline
> in schools and the disturbingly high failure
> rate, Cde Mutumbuka's decision represents the
> triumph of enlightened pragmatism over dogmatic
> inflexibility.
>
> While government policy firmly states that
> education is a right for all our children, it
> does not say public funds should be wasted
> forcing education into an unable and unwilling
> head." 15

The solution according to the editorial was to provide practical

skills training, with a bias towards agriculture for the

"academically dull pupils".

There are a number of erroneous assumptions behind the editorial:

1.   The blame for the failure rate is placed squarely on the

     shoulders of the children. No attention is paid to the

     shortage of teachers, the lack of facilities and other

     material problems related to the rapid expansion of enrolment.

     Moreover, the problem of the poor social and economic

conditions in which children have to go to school is not addressed at all. It is not uncommon that children in the rural areas have to leave school at certain times to engage in work on the land. Such objective conditions have to be analysed to understand the current effects of the expansion in education. Recourse to voluntarist explanations of pupil indiscipline are totally inadequate.

2. The call for more practical training in agriculture for the less able is, in turn, loaded with problematic assumptions. It fails to understand the manner in which technical/practical and academic education have been divided in line with existing divisions of labour under capitalism. The division thus has a class basis, and is based on assumptions of unequal acoess of different classes to different forms of education. Invariably, the limited vocational type education will fall to the poorest classes whose ability is affected by the disadvantageous conditions under which they have to learn.

Moreover, the call for such practical training to be largely agricultural, is based on neo-populist conceptions of self-sufficiency for individuals on the land. Little account is taken of the historical changes that have taken place in land utilisation, and the dynamics of labour reproduction. The idea is also part of a larger policy disease in this country, known as "one sector chauvinism." This refers to:

"An aggressive or even fanatical support to
one sector of the economy. Such a position
is often sustained by the all too common
tendency to research for the "ONE" constraint
to economic development."[16]

Such a view fails to analyse the historical links between
agriculture and industry and the manner in which the mechanisms
of accumulation in one sector have affected developments in
the other. It is in effect a version of the dualist theories
that used to be peddled by liberal economists in the 1950's,
and to which Giovanni Arrighi's critique addressed itself so
effectively.

(d) The First T.N.D.P.

The First T.N.D.P. is probably one of the best examples of a
failure to understand historical trends in the economy. The
first two years of independence brought with them a brief
period of boom in the economy. This boom was directly
related to a number of factors:

- The end of the war;

- The opening up of rural areas to normal economic activity;

- Two minimum wage increases;

- The fact that local manufacturing could take up the
  expansion in demand without new capital investment
  because it was in 1980 operating at less than 60%
  capacity;

- The short-term 'benefits' of international reconstruction
  aid.

On the basis of such an expansion and other problematic indicators,

the Plan estimated a five-year plan period premised on 8% annum

growth rates. The question, however, was, what was the nature of

this new demand in 1980/81 and was it sufficient to sustain the

kind of growth patterns expected? Moreover, in terms of the

international economy, was the nature of the international economic

crisis conducive to such growth rates?

As it turned out, the nature of the demand in 1980/81 did not

detract much from the structural deficiencies of the demand pattern

established during the colonial period. As to the nature of the

international economic crisis of capital, there was little

understanding of its historical causes or the level of its severity.

In the years after 1981, when the 'Plan' turned out to be no plan

at all, the reasons for the failure were not focussed on the internal

social relations of our society, but centred almost solely on the

drought, i.e. the external and natural factors. In response to this

type of analysis of our economic ills, the Annual Review of Manpower,

1983 commented:

> " ... a problem with some of our analyses of
> Zimbabwe's current economic problems is that
> it has concentrated its attention on factors
> exogenous to the domestic economy. While it
> is true that such external factors as the
> recession and natural phenomena as the drought,
> have had a major effect on the economy, what has
> received less attention is the manner in which the
> internal dynamics of the Zimbabwean economy have
> allowed such exogenous factors to have such a
> devastating effect. In this sense, even 'such'
> natural factors as drought affect countries to a
> large extent, in so far as they have attempted
> to plan for the effects of such calamities.
> Thus, the explanatory basis of the drought/
> recession litany would be greatly enhanced by
> greater analytical attentiveness to the internal
> factors of the Zimbabwean economy and the inter-
> relations of such factors with external developments."[17]

These examples of policy perceptions have, we hope, emphasized the point about the need for an acute historical comprehension of policy issues.

For policy-oriented researchers in government, history, when it is not ignored, is utilised in an uncritical manner and often based on what are considered "common sense" notions of our past.

These notions are usually a product of conventional social science perceptions, which still operate at an ideological level in the perceptions of many state activities. An historical imagination rarely seems relevant to careerists in the bureaucracy.

In the words of one writer:

> "It is easier for an official than for a policy intellectual to have a successful career while remaining ignorant about any aspect of history except the institutional memory required for personal survival in a particular bureaucracy."[18]

PART III : THE ROLE OF RESEARCHERS AS INTELLECTUALS

A. **THE ZIMBABWEAN CONTEXT**

Thus far, we have discussed the historical background of research in Zimbabwe as well as some of the major methodological and ideological problems that have been inherited by the young research 'tradition' in Zimbabwe.

We need, now, to examine more broadly the structural constraints that have faced researchers in the country, attempting to place radical alternatives on the agenda. To assess this situation, we will need to examine the actual role of researchers in both the government and academia since 1980, within the context of the broad structural constraints that have proscribed their efforts. In addition, however, we will examine the new initiatives that have arisen in the field of research, not only in the state, but in the broader arena of civil society. Finally, a summary statement will be made on the problems of Intellectuals in Africa.

Since 1980, the government of Zimbabwe has definitely taken steps to provide a more serious place for research in the policy making machinery of government. A small number of research units have been established in the Ministries of Labour, Manpower Planning and Development, Community Development and Women's Affairs and Co-operatives and the Public Service Commission. Most significantly, the government established the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies, whose major focus has been to produce

research for government that will highlight some of the major

problems and obstacles in moving beyond a dependent settler

colonial economy.

In the field of social work, as Brand has pointed out,

> "social work Diploma graduates have been
> widely involved in carrying out research
> projects over the course of the last few
> years, whether they were employed by
> central or local government, voluntary or
> private organisations. Still, others had
> been involved in a subsidiary capacity."[19]

Moreover, in this brief post-independence period, several

national research reports have been produced within the country.

These include: The Riddel Commission on Prices and Incomes;

the National Manpower Survey; the Agricultural Commission of

Inquiry (The Chavunduka Report); the Population Census; the

National Disability Survey; the Housing Demand Survey; the

National Trade Union Survey.

The quality of these reports has ranged in theoretical perspective

from what one might call the Basic Needs Approach of the Riddell

Report, to the more statistical position of the C.S.O. reports,

and finally to the more radical perspectives of the National

Manpower Survey and the National Trade Union Survey. The

Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies also produced a number

of consultancies, as well as some path-breaking research in the

field of the Political Economy of Hunger.[20] Once again, the

theoretical perspectives of the ZIDS research has varied from

the plainly empiricist approach to a more serious application of

Marxist political economy.

At the University, it must be said that, many academics have spent a great deal of their efforts carrying out consultancy work. In part, this reflects the financial requirements of academics not only in Zimbabwe, but throughout the Third World. Moreover, however, this trend is related to a broader issue in many African countries in which, "there is an evident funding bias against research projects or proposals which are not demonstrably policy oriented."[21]   Policy oriented in such cases means, more often than not, ways of finding means for incremental changes within the limits of structural dependency in African countries. As Jinadu has observed:

> "An effect of this concentration on so-called
> applied research has been the neglect of
> theoretical and speculative research into
> problems of development and of research into
> theoretic - methodological issues in the
> social sciences."[22]

Directly related to this instrumentalist conception of the social sciences is a heavy reliance and undue respect attached to foreign consultancies. Most researchers in Zimbabwe will have confronted a state bureaucrat who, while displaying a reticense about giving information to indigenous researchers, will readily volunteer information to foreign consultants, especially those attached to the World Bank and I.M.F. This situation is not peculiar to Zimbabwe as the following observation from India illustrates. Thus Ghosh writes:

> "One could understand the reluctance or reticence
> of government officials to discuss policy

> alternatives with civilians. Unless,
> given the cue, they dare not discuss matters
> of future policy with non-officials. But
> the same government officials have no
> hesitation in sharing their thoughts with
> foreign institutions. This is the tragic
> aspect of the story."[23]

A major result of these trends has been what one might term a
schizophrenic attitude within the state process towares
intellectuals. On the one hand, there is a recognition of
the need for basic information and research and the role of
intellectuals in carrying out this function. On the other
hand, there is a dismissive attitude towards what is perceived as
the less practical and more utopic ideas of intellectuals in the
state. Needless to say, some of these ideas lack a practical
application, but there are many that are critical and that
demand critical attention. Following from this schizophrenia
and ambivalence, intellectuals in the state have become more
hesitant and at times, even subservient. The need to relate
research and advice to policy implementation has sometimes led
researchers to see themselves as the providers of information
and advice, but with less concern with the policy implementation
that ensues. There is also a tendency for some researchers to
proffer advice to their superiors, that they know such superiors
would want to hear. Uncomfortable information is not always
conducive to job security, promotion prospects, and organisational
consensus.

This ambivalence and indeed mistrust of intellectuals can also
be seen in the attitude of the state towards academics at the
University of Zimbabwe: In Jinadu's words:

"The situation is thus, one which, although
the government emphasises again and again,
the important transformation role of the
University, it has generally tended to keep
academic social scientists at arms' length
partly because it is not sure of their
ideological commitment. To this must be
added the antipathy between social scientists
in government and social scientists at the
University." 24

At this stage, it is necessary to ask why is there this

schizophrenic attitude to intellectuals and research in both

the state and in academia? A major part of the answer to this

question must examine the nature of the state itself in

Zimbabwe, which has recently been characterised as the

"Post-White-Settler Colonial State".

In the words of the author of this conception:

"The post-white-settler state acquires a
special meaning precisely because of the
historical legacy of white settler colonialism;
the inherited economic and social structures
that are associated with it; and its persistent
and pervasive role within both the state itself
and the society at large, as a viable conduit
through which the imperialist forces of
international finance capital can compromise
and control the new state. But is is a state
which, in the circumstances of post-independence
Zimbabwe, provides a framework within which the
leading sections of the African petit-bourgeoisie
can also find fulfilment of their class operations
as they enter the arena that was hitherto
restricted and confined largely to the white
classes." 25

In addition to the state providing an important mechanism for

accumulation for sections of the petty-bourgeoisie, this state

has also been forced to respond to the popular demands of the

electorate. This contradiction within the state has itself

resulted in a series of contradictory policies in which a sensitivity
to popular needs has often been countered by policy measures that have
effectively undermined the condition of the working people in Zimbabwe.
It is no surprise that such contradictory positions have led Tandon to
refer to the post-colonial state in general as a "schizophrenic state".[26]

Within this context, it is easier to understand the ambiguous role that
intellectuals have played in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, their role as
providers and organisers of information, has been valued; on the other
hand, value has been accorded to such information and advice, for the most
part, only insofar as such information was directly "policy" related, which
in practice has meant adapting to the imperatives of capital.

It needs to be said also that this ambivalence towards intellectuals
in the state dates back to the days of the liberation stuggle, when
the relationship of the Old Guard Nationalists and the younger generation
of intellectuals became problematic. This situation was not helped by
the peripheral involvement of many intellectuals during the struggle,
and the limited participation by intellectuals in party as distinct
from state structures during the post colonial period. This area of
discussion needs much more research and would take us beyond the scope of
this paper.

A final point must be made about research in Zimbabwe. Research has
been marginalised partly as a result of the absence of organised planning
structures in the state. Under such conditions, research has often
remained dispersed and diffuse. It is hoped that the new

Planning Agency will begin to correct this problem.

B. INTELLECTUALS IN AFRICA

It is important to note that this weakness of a research tradition
is not peculiar to Zimbabwe. Mafeje has said of intellectual
communities that they:

> "take very long to form and are usually a result
> of particular traditions that have persisted over
> time. In the social sciences Africa has neither
> the time span nor a particular tradition. Instead,
> it has been a victim of divergent colonial traditions --
> British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, German and
> Italian."[27]

This weakness of the African social science tradition has resulted,
in many cases in the domination of conventional social science
theory in many African countries. Many factors have facilitated
the reproduction of such conventional development theories in
Africa. These include:[28]

   i. The overseas training of social scientists and bureaucrats
       due to the lack of adequate training facilities in Africa.

   ii. The domination of journals and publishing by the
       Metropolitan educational and research institutions.

   iii. The ambiguous position of researchers and intellectuals in
        Africa in which, while their role is accorded importance,
        their ability to carry out critical research is seriously
        proscribed. Shivji has recently written about the weak
        status of African intellectuals, that given the basic
        social and political weakness of the petty-bourgeoisie in
        Africa, the latter,

> "can ill-afford to leave enough space for intellectual
> activity and freedom which is a condition precedent
> even for ruling class intellectuals to work in. So
> political space is closed in two interrelated respects:

extreme control of the civil society and,
therefore, constriction of any oppositional
civilian politics and absorption of the
intellectuals in the state apparatus, and
restriction of academic freedom resulting
in the constriction of space for academics/
intellectuals to play their traditional role
of the creators and disseminators of ideas."[29]

iv. The external and internal brain drain, the latter case being
a situation whereby "the researcher is physically in his
own country, yet he is professionally employed by foreign
institutions".[30]

Notwithstanding these strong structural pressures for conformity,
there developed between 1960 and 1970 a "rapid intellectual
awakening" in Africa,[31] at a time when the Western Europe,
Marxism was being increasingly restricted to the often esoteric
world of academia.[32] The work of "dependencia theory" popularised
in Africa by people like Samir Amin, stimulated a good deal of
interest in Marxist theory among African social scientists.
Such an interest coincided with the broader national struggles
taking place in the Third World during this period.

Yet even as African social scientists responded to this radical
challenge, their radicalism remained, in many ways, "essentially
an out-growth of Radical Western scholarship."[33] Paradigms of
radical analysis were often mechanically transposed without taking
account of the peculiarities of the African context. John Saul,
who in his own work displayed this problematic,[34] correctly
criticised the application of "Frozen Marxism", which he defined
in the following way:

"Generalised into a philosophy of nature and
raised to the highest level of abstraction,

> this variant tends to degenerate into a
> catechism rather than providing a tool of
> analysis. To take an example close to
> home, it seems evident that many of the
> earliest attempts to develop the teaching
> of 'dialectical and historical materialism'
> in Mozambique paid the price of uncritical
> adoption of this kind of approach. In
> Frelimo, itself, criticism of such a
> 'Marxism-Leninism' has not been that students/
> cadres in party schools hesitated to learn
> it, but that they learned it too well. So
> abstract is this 'science' that it has given
> even those cadres who most assiduously
> memorised its formulae, very few tools with
> which to deal in practice in concrete
> situations."[35]

This "frozen Marxism" has not been without its adherents in

Zimbabwe, where there has sometimes been a tendency for

individuals on the left to vacate valuable political space

because of the vacuity of their mechanical structures and

sloganeering. In the course of such interventions these

individuals have chosen to secrete a steady flow of mechanical

logic in an equally turgid prose, digestible only to those with

a palate for such fare. The effect has often been a shying

away or dismissal of vigorous technical work, as well as a

failure to appreciate the complexity and problems of policy

formulation and implementation. Into such a void intellectuals

and technocrats on the Right have usually been ready to step

in with their technical, seemingly apolitical, models.

CONCLUSION

It is important for researchers and intellectuals in Zimbabwe to come to understand their role in relation to (i) the state and its relationship to imperialism, and (ii) the working people of this country. We need to locate our relationship to a state machine that is subject to contradictory determinations in terms of the fundamental contradictions of capital in Zimbabwe. As researchers, it is our duty to understand the contradictions of our state and to point out those trends that are detrimental to our socialist project. This means, first of all, understanding where we are at the moment; that is, the nature of the concrete conditions in Zimbabwe at present.

To carry out such analyses successfully, we need to avoid two dangerous trends, that are apparent in our research community. On the one hand, an empiricism that fails to understand trends and ends up in a continual justification of present necessities. Such a position can either lead to permanent reformism or in some cases, an openly reactionary position towards progressive forces. On the other hand, there is the danger of a static, mechanical ultra-leftism, that sets up an abstract paradigm of what socialism should be and then dismisses everything that fails to reach these dizzy heights. The danger of this position is that it fails to provide a strategy for change because it lacks the discourse to understand the potential in given situations. Policy potential is thus dismissed unless it is presented in purist terms. The dialectic of every situation, and every policy statement is glossed over and the impetus for political intervention is lost. Often the result of such a theoretical position is a lofty cynicism that results in political paralysis and ideological fatalism.

As researchers, our radical critique must be based on a concrete
political practice, with the subjects of that practice clearly
delineated. We must clearly identify the forces for change and
develop an organic relationship and interaction with those forces,
through the democratic dissemination of our information and the
acceptance of responsibility for our policy advice. As researchers,
we are both the object of given political determinations on our
organisational structures, and the subjects of a political praxis.
The extent to which we are successful as intellectual workmen will
depend on our ability to understand the junction between those
determinations and the space for political interventions. That
junction is where we must intervene, and we must intervene with an
historical materialist analysis that is able to comprehend the dialectic
between structural determination and historical process.

Antonio Gramsci wrote about the need for a new kind of intellectual in the
the following terms:

> "The mode of being of the new intellectual
> can no longer consist in eloquence, which
> is an exterior and momentary mover of
> feelings and passions, but in active
> participation in practical life, as
> constructor, organiser, 'permanent
> persuader' ... "36

"Permanent persuaders" - We could do a great deal worse than to use that
term as the leitmotif for our work.

FOOTNOTES

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19. V. Brand: Social Work Research In Relation to Social
     Development in Zimbabwe. Journal of Social Development in
     Africa, 1986, Vol. 1, No. 1. p. 71.

20. Note Appendix 1 for a list of ZIDS publications.

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22. Ibid, p. 17.

23. Arun Ghosh: For Official Use Only: Economic and Political
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24. L. Adele Jinadu, op.cit p. 66

25. Introduction: I. Mandaza, 1986 op. cit, p. 5

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     and Development, No. 8, 1984.

27. A. Mafeje - The Development of the Africal Social Science
     Community and the State of the Arts. African Association
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28. S. Amin et al, op cit, pp. 30-31.

29. I. Shivji - Reflections on Intellectuals in Africa - Southern
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