

BOOK REVIEW

Kirk Helliker, Sandra Bhatasara, and Manase Kudzai Chiweshe, editors. *Everyday Crisis-Living in Contemporary Zimbabwe*. London: Routledge, 2021. xii + 195 pp. Index. \$160. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0367863104.

Everyday Crisis-Living in Contemporary Zimbabwe is a collection of thirteen contributions that examine what it means for “ordinary Zimbabweans” to live “crisis” in local and situated terms. Often marked as beginning with the implementation of the Fast-Track Land Reform Program, there has been a growing literature on the so-called Zimbabwean “crisis” over the past two decades. Volume editors Kirk Helliker, Sandra Bhatasara, and Manase Kudzai Chiweshe, along with Gift Mwonzora, shift the focus of the conversation from the national and historical scale to theorize “everyday crisis-living” in a way that brings the “chronic” and persistent nature of the crisis into view (1). Drawing on Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre, they outline an approach attentive to “tactics” as “navigating and negotiating within and through the existing dominant order” (3). They thus treat “national crisis” not as the dominating frame against which everyday life emerges, but view “crises-structures” and “everyday lives” as caught together, being “co-constituted and co-conditioned” (7).

The chapters bear this point out particularly well, showing how the dynamic exchanges between national and local governance and neighborhood relations (Delta Sivalo in Chapter 2; Tafadzwa Sachikonye in Chapter 3), and transnational agricultural companies, climate change, and small-scale farms play out between one another (Elinah Nciizah in Chapter 4; Kudakwashe Rejoice Chingono in Chapter 5). Structure and daily action are both kept in view. It is in everyday choices made by migrant traders in South Africa (Tariro Henrietta Musiyandaka in Chapter 14), men undergoing voluntary medical circumcision and then navigating a new HIV risk landscape (Paidashe Chamuka in Chapter 8) or the families of those receiving HIV treatments within their communities (Tendai Wapinduka in Chapter 9) that the crisis is lived out, and which in turn configure the crisis itself. Crisis-living shapes intimate relations and raises questions of trust for members of the diaspora contributing to “development” in Zimbabwe (Felix Tombindo and Simbarashe Gukurume in Chapter 12),

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or Zimbabwean students maneuvering among institutional spaces and strategies of assimilation in a South African University (Andile Daki in Chapter 13).

Treating crisis in these terms highlights the forms of agency mobilized in mundane activities, while attending to the variety of power relations at play: class, gender, ethnicity, location, and age all shape the negotiations across the chapters. As Joshua Matanzima writes about cross-border traders: “Though trapped within the macro-economic crisis in Zimbabwe, the [traders at] Kariba somehow rise above it, even finding and opening up gaps within the system of border control to their advantage” (153). Neither does the persistent nature of patriarchy in party politics (Rufaro C.A. Manzira in Chapter 7) and in the intimate family (Patience Sibanda in Chapter 10) undermine other kinds of agency. Rather, it complicates the power “trade-offs” women make in the public and domestic spheres in order to secure care for their children (139), or it may include the “tactical handling” of marriage choice by women married as girls (Shamiso C. Madzivire and Wiseman Masunda in Chapter 6[87]).

Following the Introduction, the chapters are divided into three parts, grouped as “Urban and Rural Lives,” “Men, Women and HIV,” and “Along and Beyond the Border.” The strength of the contributions lies in their empirical groundings and the care taken in conclusions drawn on the basis of the methods used. The studies have the capacity to speak effectively to one another, sharing as they do concerns with agency, gender, social difference, power, location, and change. While each chapter achieves what the introduction argues is the aim of the volume, the useful theoretical tools introduced by the editors are not taken up by any of the chapters explicitly. These tools, an afterword, or some explicit connections made by authors between the chapters might have effectively achieved these links and would only have strengthened the contributions being made by the volume as a whole.

Everyday Crisis-Living fills a vital role by examining in empirical terms how everyday agents are themselves shaping the conditions and trajectory of crisis. While there have been critiques of the way that “crisis” has been used as the lens through which to read events, particularly across Africa (see the various essays in *African Futures: Essays on Crisis, Emergence, and Possibility* [Brian Goldstone and Juan Obarrio, The University of Chicago Press, 2016]) the analytic of “crisis-living” is here intended to re-frame crisis in ways alert to everyday agency and uncertainty.

The volume makes an important contribution to empirically grounded explorations of everyday experience in Zimbabwe over the last two decades, bringing to publication timely fieldwork carried out predominantly by emerging scholars. It will be of interest to students not only of Zimbabwe, but also of “crisis,” politics, gender, culture, and post-colonial life across sub-Saharan Africa more broadly.

Leanne Williams Green 

Trinity College, University of Cambridge
Cambridge, UK

lw679@cam.ac.uk

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Suggested reading:

Maurice Taonezvi Vambe. 2000. "Popular Songs and Social Realities in Post-Independence Zimbabwe." *African Studies Review* 43 (2): 73–86. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/524985>.

Dudzile S. Ndlovu. 2020. "Imagining Zimbabwe as Home: Ethnicity, Violence, and Migration." *African Studies Review* 63 (3): 616–39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.65>.

Amanda Hammar. 2017. "Urban Displacement and Resettlement in Zimbabwe: The Paradoxes of Propertied Citizenship," *African Studies Review* 60 (3): 81–104. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.123>.