

# BOOK REVIEW

**Julia Gallagher. *Zimbabwe's International Relations: Fantasy, Reality and the Making of the State*.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xiv + 184 pp. Online ISBN: 9781316869529

Julia Gallagher's *Zimbabwe's International Relations: Fantasy, Reality and the Making of the State* will appeal to a much wider group than just Zimbabweanists, as Gallagher is making much larger claims here about the way people's own views of their national identity, what she calls "self statehood," reflect and shape the nation state itself and its role in international relations (IR). Those who are interested in the transference of negative characteristics from the British to the Chinese in recent years will find this discussion illuminating. The text covers many important topics, such as non-elite Zimbabweans' views on politics, international relations, Robert Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF, and Morgan Tsvangirai and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Gallagher's source material for the book are two hundred interviews carried out between 2011 and 2014 in Harare, Chitungwiza, Bulawayo, and a rural community in Mashonaland Central. The theoretical structure she provides rests on the notion that Africans are often seen as dependent on community for their identity while Europeans are not. Gallagher first combines the concepts of Tswana identity formation (via the work of Jean and John Comaroff) and the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who emphasized the individual's responsibility for social identity in her influential work. Gallagher then brings these concepts into focus with more traditional Freudian psychoanalysis and also Hegelian concepts of the relationship between the individual and the state to provide a new way of examining how Zimbabweans internalize their views of the outside world to define their own sense of self statehood.

Much of the discussion of Zimbabwean views of Britain are in fact cast as a familial relationship. Britain, according to Gallagher's formulation, is seen as a former colonial power that projected many valuable material and cultural qualities onto Zimbabwe but which, given the violence of colonialism, can never be fully embraced. Much like an abusive parent, Britain is portrayed as the foil that encapsulates the good and the bad of what Zimbabwe became under Mugabe's and ZANU-PF's rule. Using Freud's conception of the "uncanny," Gallagher argues that the problematic

relationship between Tony Blair and Robert Mugabe in the 2000s exemplified this relationship, not so much as fantasy, but in the sense of “the denial of internal confusion and disintegration, the projection of it onto another and a refusal even to acknowledge the disturbing qualities of the uncanny other” (47). According to Gallagher, “The theme of evil intent is found in ideas of rape, castration and despoliation. For Mugabe, the colonisers and foreigners are those who spoil and attempt to rape or castrate the country by stealing land, the ‘mother of African being,’ by interfering with elections, ultimately by trying to recolonize” (47).

The Chinese are also portrayed through informants as “uncanny,” along with the North Koreans. Gallagher states, “I think that the uncanniness of the Chinese or the Koreans is seen in the ways in which they are assumed to possess the qualities of the bad states. As Freud points out, something that is truly alien cannot be uncanny: it cannot convey that really frightening sense that is only gained through an encounter with something that is familiar but denied” (72–73). Gallagher then interprets what her informants described as characteristically bad about the Chinese as their own way of recognizing and expressing what is bad about their own government. For the Zimbabweans Gallagher spoke with, this uncanny comparison between the Chinese and British expressed that they were “suspicious” of Mugabe portraying the British as “the aggressive other.” While they viewed the Chinese, whom Mugabe had consistently presented as an alternative friend and ally of Zimbabwe, as embodying “...the uncanny in ways that Mugabe cannot have anticipated” (61).

After extensive discussion of her informants’ views, Gallagher posits that “China’s alienness is...thoroughly uncanny; the Chinese exemplify the hateful, aggressive elements of Zimbabwe itself, particularly its own predatory, selfish and destructive government” (116). Gallagher suggests that “Britain is seen as an ideal Zimbabwe, personification of the good state” (117). Gallagher is not suggesting that such a comparison reflects an objective truth, but rather is more concerned with “the autonomy and separateness” of these characterizations. Here is where the “fantasy” of the title comes in. Similar to the perspective of those in Zimbabwe who may speak of things being better in the past, these views of China and Britain are projections used to define an individual’s relationship with the “real.” In this way, while China is something alien, Britain can be seen as something closer to “an alternative home” (117). Gallagher does provide a caveat to this view, as some of her informants were less glowing than others about their visions of a benevolent Britain. Most importantly, Gallagher argues that the “‘moral claims’ made for recognition are simplistic and overreached.” Instead, Gallagher claims to have moved beyond Hegelian notions of negation to show how a “deeper relationship of recognition, ones that create state selfhood through introjection and projection and recognition, are a feature of IR” (120). Before reaching this conclusion, however, Gallagher provides a very detailed treatment of her respondents’ views of the 2013 elections. These perspectives on what the MDC failed to deliver during the

campaign are quite revealing in terms of expectations of successful political party delivery at the time of elections.

Gallagher's argument is an ambitious one, and at times the author's Britishness makes the reader wonder if a Chinese researcher would have found similar results, or if there were a sort of bias in respondents' views, given the author's own self statehood. Gallagher is up front about this possible bias, so it will be good to see future applications of Gallagher's psychoanalytic IR theory tested by other researchers coming from different perspectives. This is a very important and refreshing book in the IR literature on Southern Africa and African politics more generally, as it offers an alternative to previously unmediated treatments of informant perspectives on their own self statehood and their place within the larger constellations of states.

Timothy Scarnecchia  
Kent State University  
Kent, Ohio  
tscarnec@kent.edu

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#### **For more reading on this subject, see:**

- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. 2012. "Rethinking Chimurenga and Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Critique of Partisan National History." *African Studies Review* 55 (3): 1–26. doi:10.1017/S0002020600007186.
- Reed, William Cyrus. 1993. "International Politics and National Liberation: ZANU and the Politics Of Contested Sovereignty In Zimbabwe." *African Studies Review* 36 (2): 31–59. doi:10.2307/524732.